

CTS Freight and Logistics E-News December 2014

October MFAC meeting focuses on statewide freight and rail plans

Bill Gardner, director of the MnDOT Office of Freight, Rail, & Waterways, began the October meeting of the Minnesota Freight Advisory Committee by reporting that the governor's office has been very engaged with freight issues. This has given MnDOT an opportunity to highlight the importance of freight and rail issues in Minnesota. MnDOT has been focusing on long-term transportation funding solutions, primarily for infrastructure. It wants to ensure it is adequately addressing regulatory issues and freight system operation. MnDOT is trying to capture many of these issues in a new multimodal freight plan.



Erika Witzke from Cambridge Systematics outlined the process for updating the Minnesota Statewide Freight Plan. The last freight plan was created in 2005. The new plan, expected in June 2015, will integrate the numerous regional studies by MnDOT to incorporate ideas from freight stakeholders throughout the state. The goal is for the new plan to address issues faced by both the public and private sectors and to ensure that freight interests are weighed appropriately in all transportation decisions made throughout the state.

The new freight plan will be built on five main building blocks:

- Economic structure will address what drives Minnesota's economy and how competitive Minnesota is with other states. This building block will evaluate how freight-related industries fit into the overall state's economic picture.
- Industry logistics patterns will address Minnesota's key industries, supply chains, and distribution networks.
- Commodity and vehicle traffic flows will examine which commodities—and in what quantities—use the freight system. This building block will highlight the best modes for these movements and will help ensure that Minnesota has the ability to transport its goods to broader national and international locations.
- Freight infrastructure will identify Minnesota's key multimodal freight corridors and examine the condition and performance of these corridors. Witzke noted that in the future, the value of goods will grow much faster than the actual tonnage. There is expected to be a real change in the industry makeup and commodities in Minnesota by 2040.
- Organization and public policy will explore how MnDOT is organized for freight planning and projects, in addition to examining how the private sector is engaged with these items.

Next, Dave Christiansen, MnDOT manager of freight planning and development, provided an overview of the Minnesota Statewide Rail Plan. Christiansen noted that Governor Dayton also is very involved and interested in freight rail, largely because of the high volume of trains passing through the Twin Cities each day carrying crude oil from the Bakken formation in North Dakota. The last rail plan was created in 2010. New updates will comply with updates in state and federal legislation, address new trends, investigate funding methods, continue to promote safety, and update priorities and project lists.

One overarching goal of the updated rail plan will be to develop a balanced multimodal freight system. Some newer issues the rail plan will need to address include increases in traffic, record crop harvests, harsh winter weather, strained capacity, rail system congestion, and the level of critical supplies like coal. In coming months, the rail plan committees will look at passenger-rail tiered projects, which have become a much larger priority in recent years.

The [Minnesota Freight Advisory Committee \(MFAC\)](#) is a partnership between government and business to exchange ideas and recommend policy and actions that promote safe, productive, and sustainable freight transportation in Minnesota. MFAC consists of representatives from Minnesota's shipper and carrier communities as well as a variety of other interested organizations, and provides advice to the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) and the Metropolitan Council regarding freight issues and investments.