Pooling Our Research: The Mississippi Valley Freight Coalition

Why a Pooled Fund Study?
The efficient movement of freight through Minnesota is critical to its economy. Efficient freight operations allow industries to move their products to market at a reasonable cost, which in turn significantly affects the livelihoods of the populations that depend on them. Minnesota is affected not just by the movement of freight within its borders, but by national and international supply chains, most significantly by those in the Mississippi Valley region of which it is a part.

However, growing congestion in this region threatens the efficiency of freight operations. The 2006 Upper Midwest Freight Corridor Study showed that there are major bottlenecks in all modes of the region’s freight transportation system that cause long delays resulting in additional expenditures for shippers, carriers and the public. Delays occur at ports of entry, intermodal freight terminals and yards, and locks and dams. There are more than 60 highway-related bottlenecks, with three near Chicago alone, leading to 38.4 million hours of delay per year for vehicles. With current estimates indicating that by the year 2020 freight volume on the nation’s highways and rails will increase by 62 percent and 44 percent, respectively, it is clear that steps must be taken to improve the efficiency of the freight network.

To address these problems, in 2006 Minnesota and nine other states formed the Mississippi Valley Freight Coalition. The MVFC and the AASHTO Mid-America Association of State Transportation Officials cooperate in the planning, operation, preservation and improvement of transportation infrastructure in the region.

What is the Pooled Fund Study’s Goal?
The MVFC seeks to work closely with the 10 states of the Mississippi Valley region to maximize the operational efficiency of its freight transportation system.

What Have We Learned?
The MVFC is staffed by the National Center for Freight and Infrastructure Research and Education at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and coordinated with the Wisconsin Department of Transportation. Since its inception in 2006, the MVFC has completed eight projects, including:

- Logistics for the Public Sector Training Course, which developed a two-day training session for public agency staff members about logistics concepts important to private sector shippers and carriers.
- Model Freight Planning Approaches, which created a manual of best practices in freight planning.
- Mississippi Valley Freight Coalition Expanded Truck Parking, which provided information necessary for states to evaluate increasing short-term truck parking availability along Interstate highways in the region.
- Assessment of Multimodal Freight Bottlenecks and Alleviation Strategies for Upper Midwest Region, which identified freight bottlenecks on regionally significant routes

continued
“The coalition provides a forum for improving the region’s freight transportation system, bringing together state DOTs to discuss, plan and manage projects benefiting the movement of freight.”

—John Tompkins, Freight Planning Manager, Mn/DOT Office of Freight and Commercial Vehicles Operations

“...extremely beneficial to Minnesota, helping us to educate our own leadership about the importance of freight, identify in detail the freight system needs of our region and develop strategies that look beyond our borders.”

—William Gardner, Director, Mn/DOT Office of Freight and Commercial Vehicles Operations

The intermodal movement of freight containers—in this case, between rail and truck at the Queensgate Yard in Cincinnati—Involves crucial nodes in freight transportation infrastructure whose operation can dramatically affect its efficiency.

and modes including highway, rail and water; developed an inventory of planned projects across the region for addressing these bottlenecks; and recommended additional bottleneck solutions for the region.

What’s Going On Now?
On a continuing basis, the MVFC helps agencies share information so that freight can flow more smoothly through the region; works to identify and remove corridor bottlenecks; and supports technologies, traffic regulations and national transportation policies that promote the reliable movement of freight.

The MVFC’s ongoing projects include:

• MVFC Outreach Materials, which is creating materials to educate the general public and policymakers about the importance of freight to the economy and the fragility of the freight transportation system.

• Transportation Profiles for MVFC Commodities, which is developing information concerning the flow of commodities through the region, including their shipping processes and costs.

• Performance Measures for Evaluating Multi-State Projects, which is developing freight-focused performance measures—such as speed, reliability and safety—for multi-state and interstate corridor projects.

• Critical Sections and Resiliency of Freight Corridors in the Mississippi Valley Region, which is identifying critical transportation nodes, segments and intermodal connectors in the region that are vulnerable to disruption and need to be improved to continue serving as corridors for high volumes of freight and passenger travel.

What’s Next?
The MVFC was recently authorized to continue through 2012. It will proceed under a new name, the Mid-America Freight Coalition, and focus on research and outreach in commercial vehicle operations training, economic analysis training and regional freight planning.

As it moves forward, the coalition will continue its mission to support the economic well-being of the industries, farms and people of the region by keeping their products flowing to markets reliably, safely and efficiently.

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Minnesota Department of Transportation
Research Services Section
M S 330, First Floor
395 John Ireland Blvd.
St. Paul, MN 55155-1899
(651) 366-3780
www.research.dot.state.mn.us

This Technical Summary pertains to the ongoing Pooled Fund TPF-5(156) Mississippi Valley Freight Coalition Pooled Fund Study. Details of this effort can be found at http://www.pooledfund.org/projectdetails.asp?id=382&status=4 and http://www.mississippivalleyfreight.org/.

For more than 25 years, FHWA’s Transportation Pooled Fund Program has been providing state DOTs and other organizations the opportunity to collaborate in solving transportation-related problems. The TPF Program is focused on leveraging limited funds, avoiding duplication of effort, undertaking large-scale projects and achieving broader dissemination of results on issues of regional and national interest.