

MnDOT District 4 Freight Plan

Advisory Committee Meeting 2

Key Themes and Findings

Freight Mobility Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT):

During the meeting, attendees provided feedback on the SWOT elements relevant to District 4's freight transportation. Elements like the ones below will be explored further in Working Paper 4.

Strengths

- **A lack of overall congestion.** District 4's road network is relatively uncongested, and stakeholders feel that reliable and fast travel is a local strength.

Weaknesses

- **Local seasonal traffic.** While overall congestion is low, travel speed and safety can be reduced in winter months due to heavy snowfall. There are also seasonal congestion issues in some communities associated with tourist traffic in the summer, and agricultural traffic during harvest seasons.
- **Rail service limitations.** District 4 lacks intermodal container or transloading facilities.
- **Lower weight limits than North Dakota.** Some stakeholders expressed concern that Minnesota's relatively lower truck weight limits make it less competitive than North Dakota for the development of industries that ship or receive heavy truckloads.

Opportunities

- **Further freight development in Moorhead and the Fargo area.** Continued freight-related development on the northwestern end of the District could create new opportunities for the establishment of additional freight-related firms.
- **Using rail access to attract development.** District 4's extensive rail network could be used to help attract businesses that require rail service, although additional construction of industrial sidings may be needed.
- **Investment in freight mobility.** The District may be able to further improve its strength of low congestion by making additional investments on trunk highways such as passing and turn lanes.
- **Investment in rail safety.** Investment in quiet zones can improve grade crossing safety, reduce rail-related noise, and improve community livability

Threats

- **Uncertain transportation funding.** The implementation of more efficient vehicles and electric vehicles may make it more challenging to fund transportation maintenance and investment through established revenue mechanisms like the gas tax.
- **Labor force shortages.** This impacts the number of truck drivers and drives up freight costs for local businesses and industries.
- **Climate change impacts on transportation.** Increased freeze-thaw cycles and temperature extremes may contribute to premature degradation of pavement and bridges.

Other Feedback on Freight System Needs and Issues:

- **Intersection and highway corridor safety is important.** Attendees ranked mainline road and intersection safety as more important topics for the District relative to railroad grade crossing and bicycle/pedestrian safety.
- **Traffic congestion and long truck routes are the most relevant freight mobility considerations.** Geometry concerns (low clearance bridges, tight turns, etc.) and weight restrictions came in third and fourth based on eight poll responses.
- **Suggestion to consider derailment data.** Looking at railroad derailment data (if available) can provide further insight into freight safety, as well as events that impair freight mobility