

MnDOT District 7 Freight Plan

Advisory Committee Meeting 3 Meeting Summary

At Advisory Committee Meeting 3 on October 26, meeting participants provided feedback on draft materials from Working Paper 4. Two major topics of discussion were the plan’s Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis, and the plan’s draft recommendations. Summaries of each discussion are provided below.

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) Discussion

In addition to the SWOT factors presented at the meeting (see agenda handout for further details), the Advisory Committee members noted the following items as key SWOT factors relevant to their work and the District 7 Freight Plan. Many of these topics also influenced the discussion about recommendations:

| Strengths | Weaknesses |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extensive 4-lane highway access to the Twin Cities and I-90. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenges balancing traffic calming measures and mobility of trucks in urban environments. • Windom bottleneck affects traffic between I-90 and the Cities, but ongoing projects are intended to address the issue. |
| Opportunities | Threats |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Truck weight limit increases are a potential approach to increase efficiency and address Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) reduction goals. • VMT reduction policies as an opportunity to drive improvements in freight efficiency and address other issues such as the driver shortage. • Railroad service and investment are an economic development tool for rural areas – there are opportunities to build car storage and transloading for businesses that don’t currently use rail. • Railroad connections could or should be preserved in order to ensure access to efficient shipping options. • Development of air freight at Mankato’s airport may be an opportunity in the future. • Including freight considerations into land use planning to anticipate freight infrastructure that may be needed when new industrial facilities are planned. • Wind, solar, and energy storage development could be considered in transportation planning, there may be complementary opportunities with transportation planning and development of renewables. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Congested international supply chains are impacting businesses across Minnesota and reducing shippers’ ability to obtain empty containers for the export of agricultural products. • The truck driver shortage is a threat to the efficiency and reliability of truck service. • Extreme or severe weather and land use planning considerations – example of flooding on rural roads. • Utility policies can affect demand for wind or biofuel projects, and demand for these transportation services in the District. It can be difficult for alternative energy developers or providers to work through some of these policy issues. |

Recommendation Discussion

Working Paper 4 provides a set of preliminary recommendations that can help address issues and needs, and unlock opportunities in District 7. These draft recommendations are relevant for MnDOT as well as other transportation stakeholders in District 7. Meeting participants provided feedback on recommendations they believed were most important for the region:

Policy Recommendations

- Track the development of intermodal opportunities in the Twin Cities. Imports to the Twin Cities provide the empty containers that MN shippers use to export their goods. MN has traditionally had a shortage of available containers for backhaul/export.
- Twin Cities and Western RR shortline railroad access into the Twin Cities is important for many agricultural shippers, MnDOT could seek to ensure that access remains available and reliable.
- Any updates or resolutions to federal transportation funding packages should be considered in the draft and final report.
- Flooding due to extreme weather and severe rainfall events should be considered in investment and planning decisions. This flooding affects road condition as well as the efficiency of trucking.

Partnership Recommendations

- Ensure that planning and economic development partners have easy access to information on programmed projects. MnDOT publishes this information online, but stakeholders may not know that it is available.
- MnDOT could provide local partners with assistance on “how to work with railroads.” A particular topic of interest is making improvements in railroad crossings.
- MnDOT could partner further with the US Army Corps of Engineers to understand river access and maintenance issues. This is an important consideration for the export of agricultural products out of Minnesota.
- MnDOT could document truck size and weight issues and impacts, which will be important information for future legislative discussions.