

# Summit airs perspectives on efficient, competitive freight transportation network

By Sue Roe

Supporting an efficient and competitive freight transportation network in Minnesota was the predominant theme of the Minnesota Statewide Freight Summit Dec. 5 in Minneapolis.

The Center for Transportation Studies hosted the summit in cooperation with MnDOT.

Attendees included shippers, carriers and other private sector organizations involved in logistics and transportation, government officials, and representatives from nonprofit organizations and academic institutions. They participated in interactive discussions and working sessions to help shape the development of a statewide freight action plan. The sessions focused on identifying needs, issues and opportunities, and how to take these opportunities into actions.

“The freight action plan is a tool to help Minnesota compete in the national and global economy,” said John Tompkins, freight project manager. “We’ll need to have an efficient transportation system to compete.”

Commissioner Charlie Zelle, who gave the opening remarks, said one of MnDOT’s most important customer segments are Minnesota-based manufacturers that ship their products over roads and bridges to local, state, national and international markets. He said these businesses rely on safe, efficient multi-modal infrastructure to deliver their products. He said MnDOT can better align its work to support manufacturers’ success and the economic vitality of the region and state by better understanding these customers’ business and transportation needs.

Zelle also said funding transportation should be thought of as an investment instead of an added expense. Investing in infrastructure will require a shift in mindset from expensive short-term fixes toward longer-term solutions.

Keynote speaker Jeffrey Rainey, Greater MSP, told attendees that one of Minnesota’s strengths lies in its central location that offers quick access to both coasts and Canada, and shipping on the Great Lakes and Mississippi River.

Rainey said that for Minnesota to take its place on the global stage, it must tell its story, prioritize talent and assert global leadership for its strongest sectors, which includes manufacturing.

Other speakers were Caitlin Rayman of the Federal Highway Administration; Bill Goins, FedEx and chairman of the Minnesota Freight Advisory Committee; and Erika Witzke, Cambridge Systematics, Inc., and Statewide Freight Plan consultant team leader.



Caitlin Rayman, Federal Highway Administration, speaks to attendees at the Statewide Freight Summit Dec. 5 in Minneapolis. Leaders from the freight community met to share the development of a statewide freight action plan and share perspectives on transportation issues that affect Minnesota industries and the economy. *Photo by Erika Witzke, Cambridge Systematics*