

Successes In Stewardship

Celebrating 10 Years

April 2012

Considering Freight Priorities in the NEPA Process

Freight transportation is integral to achieving national, regional, and local objectives that promote economic growth, develop livable and sustainable communities, and support natural environments. To meet these objectives, it is increasingly important to integrate freight transportation priorities into the transportation planning and project development processes. However, in some cases, the stakeholders that manage these processes may overlook the priorities and impacts of freight movement and instead focus on issues that are more commonly addressed, like the movement of people and the protection of the environment.

In September 2010, the Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) Office of Operations published a report entitled [Integrating Freight into NEPA Analysis](#) to guide transportation planners and freight stakeholders on how to incorporate freight needs and impacts into the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process. Members of the transportation and freight communities can use the report to aid in advancing projects that effectively address the needs of freight while limiting adverse effects on the local community and the environment.

Freight transportation relates to a broad range of roadway projects, including intersection improvements, roadway reconstruction and rehabilitation, roadway widening, and roadway improvements to accommodate rail expansion. The report is applicable to two types of freight transportation projects:

- 1) Projects that directly address a specific freight transportation need.
- 2) Projects whose design and location could affect freight or freight-related issues, such as warehousing or access to intermodal features.

Navigating the NEPA Process

The report identifies opportunities for project proponents to integrate freight concerns throughout the NEPA process, including those outlined below.

Stakeholder Involvement: Project proponents should engage stakeholders from the freight community to provide input regarding the movement of freight along the corridor, existing freight facilities, and other suggestions for improvement. Freight stakeholders can include, but are not limited to, trucking firms, railroads, marine ports, warehouse operators, and freight-related Federal agencies, such as the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration and the Federal Railroad Administration. These stakeholders should be engaged throughout the NEPA process.

Alternatives Analysis: Project proponents should consider freight impacts when developing and evaluating project alternatives. For example, narrowing lane widths to make an additional travel lane allows more cars to pass through an intersection, but it creates a hazard for trucks that are too wide to pass safely. Also, projects may result in changes to the routes or modes that freight carriers use to transport cargo.

Environmental Impacts: Project proponents should consider freight when identifying the ecological, historic, economic, and health effects of a project. For example, changes in freight routes may affect freight emission levels and job opportunities within certain communities.



Project sponsors should engage freight carriers such as CSX Transportation (CSXT) in transportation projects that impact goods movement. (Courtesy of the National Gateway Clearance Initiative)

Mitigation: Project proponents should evaluate the impacts of increased freight activity in order to develop measures to mitigate them. One mitigation measure that can directly address the increased freight transportation activity is to alter local transportation networks to minimize interactions between trucks and automobiles, pedestrians, and bicycles.

Showcasing Freight and NEPA Integration

The *Integrating Freight into NEPA Analysis* report identifies freight-focused and freight-related projects. The National Gateway Clearance Initiative exemplifies the effective coordination of freight priorities, issues, and solutions in the NEPA process.

The [National Gateway Clearance Initiative](#) aims to reduce highway congestion in the Midwest and Mid-Atlantic regions by shifting long-haul freight transportation from the regions' roads onto double-stacked trains, essentially doubling containerized freight capacity without increasing the length or frequency of trains. Partners in the initiative include, but are not limited to, State Departments of Transportation; State environmental, preservation, and resource agencies; local municipalities; and CSXT.



Notching tunnels allows double-stacked cars to pass through while retaining the historical integrity of the structure. (Courtesy of the National Gateway Clearance Initiative)

In order to accomplish the goals of the initiative, the partners worked to address 40 overpasses and tunnels in Maryland, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia that were too low to accommodate double-stacked intermodal cars.

State Historic Preservation Offices have designated many railroad bridges, tunnels, and track segments along the project corridor as historic properties. Because of these designations, the project proponents sought to limit impacts to the historic structures along the route. To increase clearance on a bridge, project proponents can raise the existing bridge, modify or replace the bridge superstructure, remove the bridge, or lower the tracks beneath the bridge. For tunnels, project proponents can achieve the necessary vertical clearance by modifying the tunnel liner, notching the tunnel portal, or open-cutting the tunnel.

Project proponents identified 10 historic tunnels along the route that required modification to accommodate double-stacked freight trains. Through the NEPA alternatives analysis process, the project proponents determined that historically sensitive modifications were not structurally viable for three of the tunnels in Somerset County, Pennsylvania. Therefore, the only viable alternative available to project proponents was to open-cut the tunnels, which would affect the historic character of the facility. To mitigate these planned impacts, the project proponents agreed to thoroughly document the preexisting structures

and create a website with historic information about the freight corridor. Throughout the NEPA process, project proponents engaged freight stakeholders to consider freight priorities along with historic preservation concerns.

Improved Cooperation

The NEPA process enables transportation officials to make project decisions that balance engineering, freight, and mobility needs with social, economic, and natural environmental factors. Engaging a wide range of partners, including freight stakeholders, early in the planning and environmental processes helps ensure that projects can adequately address freight needs.

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Look What's New!

- On March 6, 2012, the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) released final guidance for Federal agencies on improving the efficiency and timeliness of their environmental reviews under NEPA. The guidance highlights and clarifies opportunities to encourage efficient, thorough environmental reviews and quicker and better informed Federal decisions. [Click here](#) to review the guidance.
- On April 24, 2012, FHWA will conduct a training Webinar entitled "FHWA Guidance on Using Corridor and Subarea Planning to Inform NEPA." The free Webinar is designed to help transportation professionals and resource agency practitioners to better understand, coordinate, and integrate transportation planning at a corridor or subarea level of study, and to use information and decisions to inform the environmental review process. The Webinar will be held from 1:00 to 2:30 p.m. Eastern time. For more information, visit the [Webinar registration webpage](#).
- The U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution is hosting the 2012 National Conference on Environmental Collaboration and Conflict Resolution (ECR2012): "Working Across Boundaries," to be held on May 22-24, 2012 in Tucson, Arizona. ECR2012 will include training workshops, plenary discussions, technology exhibits, panel sessions and presentations across four diverse conference tracks. Visit the [ECR2012 website](#) for more information and to register.

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