

Freight Planning Update - 2013

South Western Region Freight Overview

The [South Western Region Freight Overview](#) was completed in 2010. The report describes the region's freight system and presents trends that may impact the freight system over the next twenty-to-thirty years. The report follows a framework suggested by [NCHRP 570: Guidebook for Freight Policy, Planning, and Programming in Small- and Medium-Sized Metropolitan Areas](#). The report contains three sections: 1) Regional Freight Profile; 2) Future Freight Transportation System Demands; and 3) Integrating Freight into the Transportation Planning Process. The Regional Freight Profile section breaks down freight transportation through the region by mode, identifies the type and quantity of commodities flowing through the region, and describes freight as it relates to land use and employment. The Future Freight Transportation System Demands section presents vehicle traffic and commodity flow projections and analyzes their potential impacts on the freight system. The Integrating Freight into the Transportation Planning Process section suggests strategies to incorporate freight into the transportation planning program.

Since the report was completed, a new version of the [Freight Analysis Framework](#) (FAF), known as FAF³, was released by Federal Highway Administration. FAF is a dataset of the commodity flow (commodity type, origin, destination, and quantity) by mode across the nation. The FAF² data in the report dates from 2002 while the newer FAF³ data, the latest available, dates from 2007. Unfortunately, the FAF³ data does appear to be as accurate as the FAF² data. For instance, FAF³ lists western Connecticut's major export by weight at cereal grains, which given the limited amount of land devoted to agriculture in the area, is probably not true. One possibility is that contracts for cereal grains owned by Connecticut financial firms are being picked up by FAF³. Because FAF³ data cannot be relied upon, it is my suggestion to not update the commodity flow data in the report.

MAP-21

The new surface transportation bill, Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21), is notable for [several provisions related to freight](#). These include establishment of a national freight policy, national freight network, and national freight strategic plan, as well as a requirement that US DOT encourage States to create State freight advisory committees and freight plans. Further, MAP-21 continues the requirement that metropolitan planning

organizations (MPOs) consider projects and strategies that enhance freight transportation and creates a new requirement for MPOs to develop and periodically report on freight performance measures.

Connecticut DOT is in the process of determining how to implement the freight provisions in MAP-21. Connecticut DOT is in discussion with Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) about a state freight plan and freight advisory committee. Since nearly all freight moves through Connecticut by truck, most highway system improvements benefit the freight transportation system. Recent intermodal freight transportation improvements supported by Connecticut DOT include pier and warehouse work at the ports of New Haven and New London as well as financial assistance to freight railroads for track and grade crossing work.

The FHWA Connecticut Division has suggested it could play the role of facilitator to help implement MAP-21 freight provisions in Connecticut. For instance, FHWA staff suggest one possible initiative would be to convene a meeting of MPO staff along with representatives from the FHWA resource center to learn about freight advisory committees in nearby states. If training was successful and MPO staff wished to further pursue it, the next step would be to reach out to Connecticut DOT staff and eventually private sector freight representatives.

Connecticut Deep Water Port Strategy Study

In 2012, the Connecticut Office of Policy and Management (OPM) released the [*Connecticut Deep Water Port Strategy Study*](#). The report notes that despite the historic importance of ports to Connecticut's development, modern maritime trade has largely bypassed the state in favor of larger east coast ports. Given the physical limitations of Connecticut's deep water ports, the report recommends that ports focus on maintaining their existing business and seek out new, niche markets. One potential niche market cited in the report is scrap metal exports. The report notes that scrap metal exports from the northeast have grown over the last decade and highlights two scrap metal operations in the southwestern Connecticut, LaJoies in Norwalk and Rubino Brothers in Stamford. Although there are no deep water ports in the South Western Region, it is nonetheless encouraging to see the State take a greater interest in waterborne goods movement.

Connecticut State Rail Plan: 2012 – 2016

In 2012, the Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT), Office of Rail released the *Connecticut State Rail Plan: 2012 – 2016*. While the Plan mostly focuses on passenger rail service, it does inventory and identify the needs of the existing freight rail system and suggests projects that would bring it into a state of good repair while also growing freight traffic.

All railroads in the South Western Region are owned by the State of Connecticut. CSX Transportation, a Class I railroad, provides freight service on the New Haven Line and New Canaan Branch while Providence & Worcester, a Class II railroad, provides freight service on the Danbury Branch and has through traffic rights over the New Haven Line.

North American railroads have established weight and clearance standards. On railroads that do not meet these standards, large or fully loaded railcars cannot be operated, resulting in higher

shipping costs. Across North America, there is a 286,000 pound per railcar standard. The current weight limit on South Western Region railroads is 263,000 pounds. The current deficiencies are due to substandard bridges. The Plan suggests a goal of upgrading the New Haven Line and Danbury Branch to the 286,000 pound weight limit. While it is possible that weight standards on the New Haven Line and Danbury Branch could be increased, it will not be possible to achieve full overheight clearance of 22' 8" because of the catenary. Likewise, achieving the 20' 6" clearance necessary for double-stack container trains is not possible because of the catenary. Freight cars on the New Haven Line are limited to Plate E (> 17') clearances. Were any container cars ever to run on the New Haven Line or Danbury Branch, they would need to be single stack, which add to shipping costs. Two railroads in eastern Connecticut (the New England Central between Vermont and Willimantic and the Providence and Worcester between Willimantic and Worcester, Massachusetts) are cleared to operate double-stack container trains.

Annually, about 3.6 million gross tons of freight move by rail through Connecticut. The busiest rail freight route in Connecticut is the Springfield Line. Improvements now being made to the line as part of the New Haven-Hartford-Springfield rail project should allow better scheduling of passenger and freight trains and may raise weight and clearance limits. The plan notes that a large and growing source of Connecticut generated freight rail traffic is construction and demolition debris heading to recycling facilities and landfills in other states.

There are a number of major rail freight facilities in New York and Massachusetts. Because these facilities are within about 100 miles of most places in Connecticut, it is common for freight with a local origin or destination to move by truck to these facilities. Rail freight moves from Connecticut to the rest of North America via the CSX Boston & Albany line, the New England Central Palmer Line, or the Pan Am Southern/Norfolk Southern Patriot Corridor. If realized, the planned New York Cross-Harbor Tunnel would accommodate two daily Connecticut trains.

The State of Connecticut provides financial support to rail freight companies through the gross earnings tax exemption program and through the rail preservation and improvement program. Rail freight companies pay State tax only on their gross earnings from railway operating revenues. The gross earnings tax exemption program provides rail freight companies with a non-refundable tax credit for qualified investments in their physical plant. The program is monitored by CTDOT, Office of Rail. The rail preservation and improvement program provides capital grants to freight rail companies. The Connecticut General Assembly has authorized \$10 million in bonds to fund the program, with an emphasis on projects that improve, modernize, or repair privately owned lines, increase freight rail traffic, improve safety at-grade crossings, or connect to major freight generators.