

0-6846: Identify Involved Agencies Addressing Safety When Freight Centers Are Planned and Developed

Background

This project aimed to improve coordination and cooperation among various entities in the planning process for developing safer and more efficient connections between intermodal facilities and the highway network. Coordination and cooperation are extremely important given the number of public agencies (local, regional, and state) and private companies (railroads, transportation, manufacturing, etc.) that become involved in the planning process. Guidance was needed to provide a consistent approach to involve all of the entities that should be part of the process. Excluding some entities, even unintentionally, could result in important facts, issues, and other considerations being left out of the process. These exclusions could result in project delays, increased costs, omitted project steps, duplication of efforts, etc.

What the Researchers Did

This project:

- Investigated previous and current freight planning efforts involving multiple agencies.
- Identified lessons learned and best practices to be applied in Texas to include the work and findings of the Texas Department of Transportation's Panama Canal Stakeholder Working Group.
- Developed guidance that stakeholders in Texas can use in planning and coordinating multimodal and intermodal facilities to

improve freight movement, enhance safety, and minimize congestion.

- Identified short-term accessibility improvement opportunities that could be considered to address current roadway operational issues such as curb radius at intersections in the vicinity of multimodal facilities.

What They Found

Safety and accessibility improvements are often overlapping and not always easy to distinguish. For example, adding a climbing lane (with appropriate distance prior to the grade beginning) on a steep bridge over a navigable waterway will obviously improve mobility and accessibility for all vehicles—something a driver on the roadway can easily observe and experience. In addition, the same improvement may also improve safety by removing speed differentials from the other lanes of traffic, likely preventing crashes—something that is not as easy to observe as a driver.

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Coordination among agencies involved in planning improvements or new roads to access intermodal freight facilities is crucial. Each agency involved should use its strengths in a cooperative effort to work with the public and affected property and business owners, include necessary private-sector industry representatives, explore all potential funding opportunities, and keep each other advised of project development and changes. Having one agency, such as a city, county, metropolitan planning organization (MPO), or state department of transportation (DOT), serve as a central coordinating agency has proven very helpful in many case studies.

Coordination among seaports, port authorities, state DOTs, MPOs, and other local agencies is very important for project identification, selection, prioritization, and programming. This type of coordination helps ensure that all potential projects are considered and given opportunities to be implemented. Additional coordination among seaports and inland ports is very helpful. Some states, such as Georgia and South Carolina, have state port authorities that oversee seaports and inland ports, thus maximizing coordination of freight movement and access issues.

Researchers found:

- The group developing the concept should look at the entire corridor, including all potentially impacted transportation facilities

- and modes. Issues to be considered include options such as reliever routes, even on very small scales, and overall facility connectivity.
- While one or two agencies may take the lead on developing and planning a project, it is very important to contact the MPO, if one exists in the area.
 - Funding sources need to be identified as early in the process as possible, including any innovative methods or sources.
 - State port authorities often coordinate and fund improvements, which makes them a valuable stakeholder group to consider.
 - The stakeholders developing a project need to be able to include the public early in the process and give them a sense of ownership by including them in appropriate concept and plan options.

What This Means

This research provides short-term solutions to current, pressing operational issues and an organizational framework for future guidance. Planners, engineers, and other stakeholders will be able to implement best practices and coordinate on projects related to improving safety and mobility around intermodal freight facilities. The research team anticipates implementing the findings of this research through workshops, stakeholder discussions, and training.

For More Information

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