

Freight Stakeholders Reauthorization Agenda Item

Freight Cooperative Research Program

Proposal

Create and fund a Freight Cooperative Research Program similar to the existing NCHRP.

Background

To provide more timely, complete, and detailed origin-destination (O/D) commodity flow and other types of freight data and better planning tools for state and MPO freight planning professionals, as a foundation for multimodal domestic and international planning for freight-related transportation infrastructure needs and other freight program initiatives. States and local governments rely on freight flow data to do the planning that is required by TEA-21, and other users rely on these data for a wide range of applications. This project would provide data that states, local governments, and other users have told us that they need more timely than the every-five-years data currently available, more complete in their industry coverage, and more detailed at the metropolitan area level.

Specifics

Description For Data: The existing every-five-years Commodity Flow Survey (CFS) would be replaced with an annual American Freight Survey (AFS) that would have a large enough sample size to produce publishable O/D results down to selected Metropolitan Areas. The new survey would include a wider range of industry coverage, such as farm-to-market, logging, import, and government shipments now excluded from the CFS. The program would provide for enhanced shipper/carrier freight data collection that would include a variety of data collection and analysis tools and would integrate data from several sources, private and public. The program would provide input data for FHWA's Freight Analysis Framework (FAF), the Office of Intermodalism's Intermodal Bottleneck Evaluation Tool (IBET), and other DOT freight program initiatives.

Description For Planning Tools: States and localities need to enhance planning, outreach, financing and project management skills for freight projects. Private sector interest should be engaged to help design and deliver this training.

Funding

For Data: The proposed funding level is \$15 million per year, or \$90 million over a six-year reauthorization. The comparable six-year funding for the existing Commodity Flow Survey was \$19.3 million. The funding source should come from the Highway Trust Fund.

For Planning: The program should be funded out of FHWA's State Planning and Research (SP&R) funds initially at \$5-7 million for the first year, then by five percent of SP&R dollars for future years.

Benefits

This proposal has important links to the strategic goals of enhancing mobility and accelerating economic growth. More accurate and more timely data on freight movements will allow state and local governments to plan transportation infrastructure improvements that will more closely match actual future changes in transportation needs. Infrastructure improvements that are more closely matched with needs will contribute more to mobility and reduce congestion and bottlenecks. More need-based infrastructure investments will also promote economic growth by reducing barriers to growth created by inadequate and mismatched infrastructure investments.