

Regional Planning Commission for Jefferson, Orleans, Plaquemines, St. Bernard, and St. Tammany Parishes

# NHS Intermodal Connectors

Baseline Assessment

# NATIONAL HIGHWAY SYSTEM INTERMODAL CONNECTORS BASELINE ASSESSMENT

## INTRO

The freight industry in the New Orleans region currently faces major challenges to its continued growth and development. The impacts of both Hurricane Katrina and the recent recession on the freight industry have been severe; prior to 2005 there were already significant obstacles to growth, including increased competition from other regions, outdated infrastructure, and shifts in the economy. Nonetheless, freight remains an important part of the regional economic landscape and southeast Louisiana still plays a critical role in the national freight transportation system. A major hindrance to development has been a lack of understanding about the complex and inter-related needs of various freight interests.

The Regional Planning Commission has begun a comprehensive, regional effort to identify and address the challenges the region faces. As a multimodal agency charged with planning and programming federal transportation funds, the Regional Planning Commission is in an ideal position to identify and prioritize the freight community's needs. Furthermore, the RPC can help develop a more successful and competitive freight transportation system by both directly implementing projects and facilitating the development of partnerships necessary for growth and innovation. The program will seek to identify both project specific needs and policy recommendations. It will also attempt to establish a framework for maintaining an ongoing dialogue between transportation agencies and freight interests.

The first logical step in renewing RPC's freight planning program is to assess on-the-road conditions in the locations where the RPC can have a direct impact on freight. As described below, the National Highway System Intermodal Connectors are a critical part of the regional freight system, and can be directly affected by the RPC's planning process. This assessment will help establish a baseline of current conditions that will inform the RPC's next steps in establishing a freight planning program. The RPC has conducted a similar survey in the past, completing work in 1999. The subsequent 11 years have seen substantial changes in the region, warranting a new round of surveys with a renewed emphasis on engaging stakeholders and incorporating their needs into the metropolitan transportation planning process.

## NHS INTERMODAL CONNECTORS

The current work effort is focused on designated National Highway System Intermodal Connectors. The National Highway System (NHS) is the federally designated network of freeways, highways, and arterial roads that carry a significant portion of the nation's vehicles and are considered essential to the functioning of the economy and national defense. The NHS was established in 1991 by the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA), and is composed of the Interstate Highway System, the Strategic Highway Network, significant principal arterials, and intermodal connectors, the focus of this report. Intermodal connectors are defined as roadways that connect an intermodal facility to the nearest NHS mainline route. Intermodal facilities are those in which people or goods are transferred from one mode of transportation to another, such as the transfer of freight from rail to truck or the transfer of passengers to cars. See below for detailed designation criteria. This report will primarily focus on intermodal freight movements, but passenger transfers will be noted where appropriate.

Primary Federal criteria to designate intermodal NHS Connectors:

### Commercial Aviation Airports

- Passengers--scheduled commercial service with more than 250,000 annual enplanements.
- Cargo--100 trucks per day in each direction on the principal connecting route, or 100,000 tons per year arriving or departing by highway mode.

### Ports

- Terminals that handle more than 50,000 TEUs (a volumetric measure of containerized cargo which stands for twenty-foot equivalent units) per year, or other units measured that would convert to more than 100 trucks per day in each direction. (Trucks are defined as large single-unit trucks or combination vehicles handling freight.)
- Bulk commodity terminals that handle more than 500,000 tons per year by highway or 100 trucks per day in each direction on the principal connecting route. (If no individual terminal handles this amount of freight, but a cluster of terminals in close proximity to each other does, then the cluster of terminals could be considered in meeting the criteria. In such cases, the connecting route might terminate at a point where the traffic to several terminals begins to separate.)
- Passengers--terminals that handle more than 250,000 passengers per year or 1,000 passengers per day for at least 90 days during the year.

### Truck/Rail

- 50,000 TEUs per year, or 100 trucks per day, in each direction on the principal connecting route, or other units measured that would convert to more than 100 trucks per day in each direction. (Trucks are defined as large single-unit trucks or combination vehicles carrying freight.)

### Pipelines

- 100 trucks per day in each direction on the principal connecting route.

### **Amtrak**

- 100,000 passengers per year (entrainments and detrainments). Joint Amtrak, intercity bus and public transit terminals should be considered based on the combined passenger volumes. Likewise, two or more separate facilities in close proximity should be considered based on combined passenger volumes.

### **Intercity Bus**

- 100,000 passengers per year (boardings and deboardings).

### **Public Transit**

- Stations with park and ride lots with more than 500 vehicle parking spaces, or 5,000 daily bus or rail passengers, with significant highway access (i.e., a high percentage of the passengers arrive by cars and buses using a route that connects to another NHS route), or a major hub terminal that provides for the transfer of passengers among several bus routes. (These hubs should have a significant number of buses using a principal route connecting with the NHS.)

### **Ferries**

- Interstate/international--1,000 passengers per day for at least 90 days during the year. (A ferry which connects two terminals within the same metropolitan area should be considered as local, not interstate.)
- Local--see public transit criteria above.

## **REGIONAL FREIGHT TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM OVERVIEW**

Freight is an integral part of the regional economy, and the New Orleans region is home to multiple freight facilities for each of the major modes: Maritime, Rail, Aviation, and Motor Carrier. The facilities making up the regional freight transportation system are briefly described below.

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### **MARITIME**

The New Orleans region boasts five port authorities, including:

- The Port of New Orleans
- The Port of St. Bernard
- The Port of South Louisiana
- The Plaquemines Port, Harbor and Terminal District

- The Millennium Port Authority

Together, these ports handle the largest volume of cargo in the world, and thus require a vast network of rail and road infrastructure to support the movement of goods. The RPC lends assistance to the region's port authorities by planning for the needs of the transportation network, especially the roadway system, which connects the port to regional, national, and international population centers. Because the roadway network is such a significant component of a successful port system, the Port of New Orleans represents the maritime industry's interests on the RPC Transportation Policy Committee.

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## RAIL

The New Orleans metro area has six Class I railroads operating in North America, including the Burlington National and Santa Fe (BNSF), Canadian National (CN), CSX Transportation, Kansas City Southern (KCS), Norfolk Southern (NS), and Union Pacific (UP). Combined, these six Class I railroads offer connections to 132,000 miles of Class I rail. In addition, each railroad also operates intermodal freight terminals within the region. Due to the large scale of rail operations in the metro area, a significant amount of rail congestion is generated. In order to alleviate the congestion, the New Orleans Public Belt Railroad – which is a publicly owned asset by the citizens of New Orleans – serves as a terminal switching and consolidation entity.

The New Orleans Public Belt Railroad also represents the interests of rail on the RPC's Transportation Policy Board. The RPC works with the rail community to both study and invest in infrastructure which improves the safety of railway crossings, enhances the ability of the transportation system to facilitate the movement of goods, and lessens impacts to other modes of transportation.

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## AVIATION

The New Orleans region boasts five airports, with Louis Armstrong International Airport serving as the primary commercial airport. Augmenting the services of Louis Armstrong International Airport, the Lakefront Airport in the City of New Orleans, St. Tammany Regional Airport and Slidell Airport serve general aviation needs. Finally, Plaquemines Parish is home to Alvin Callender Field, a large military airport. The interests of these aviation entities are represented on the RPC Transportation Policy Board by Louis Armstrong International Airport.

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## MOTOR CARRIER

As a major urban area with an active port, the New Orleans metro region has a network of nationally significant highway infrastructure. Major East-West routes such as I-10 and I-12 accommodate substantial truck traffic. In fact, nearly 25% of all vehicles travelling on I-10 near the New Orleans CBD are trucks. This has a significant impact on passenger travel, as the size and slower acceleration of trucks have a disproportionately large impact on roadway congestion.

To plan effectively for the mobility of both goods and passengers, the Regional Planning Commission develops plans in consultation with local and state officials, community members, and other stakeholders. In addition, the Louisiana Motor Carriers Association represents motor carriers' interests in the RPC's Transportation Policy

Committee.

Typically, for a roadway to receive federal funds for maintenance, expansion, or other improvements it must be classified on the federal aid highway network, which includes the interstate system, the national highway system, and the NHS intermodal connectors. However, most of the arterial roadways in the New Orleans region though locally owned are also part of the federal aid network. These roadways are included because they facilitate regional mobility. Local truck routes, designated by municipalities and parishes, also play a critical role to prevent large trucks from causing undue damage to neighborhood street infrastructure and the overall quality of life for residents and thus may be eligible for federal funds.

## NHS INTERMODAL CONNECTOR ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The RPC's primary tool for assessing connector conditions is the FHWA's NHS Connector Condition and Investment Inventory Form. This form is comprised of a series of checklists and survey questions to be completed during a site visit. It provides a standardized tool for assessing major problems and deficiencies on intermodal connectors, and has been utilized by transportation planning agencies across the country for several years. The RPC first used the survey tool during its freight planning efforts in the late 1990s. Reusing the survey will therefore allow for comparisons between past and current conditions, as well as providing information about future needs. The survey is composed of four parts:

- Part 1 – HPMS Universe Data from HPMS National Database: Basic connector information, including functional class, ownership, traffic volume, and other variables, that is available through FHWA's Highway Performance Monitoring System. Where HPMS data is not available, RPC has attempted to include its own data.
- Part 2 – Connector Condition Information: Data regarding pavement quality, congestion, safety, and other issues on the connector that is collected in the field by the surveyor. The RPC gathers this information during site visits.
- Part 3 – Investment Information: Summarizes past investments on the connector and any future planned investments. This information is taken from RPC's own past and future programs as well as those of DOTD, local governments, and other relevant agencies.
- Part 4 – Investment Processes: Information about the planning agency's process for identifying and advancing investments on the connector. Generally, this information is the same for all connectors in the RPC's Metropolitan Planning Area.

Wherever possible, RPC staff also conducted site visits at terminals and interviewed key stakeholders such as terminal managers. The interviews provided valuable information beyond that collected by the connector surveys. Information collected has been used to supplement the survey tool, and will further inform the RPC's efforts to establish stronger relationships with regional freight stakeholders.

## ASSESSMENT RESULTS

The results of the RPC's initial NHS Intermodal Connector assessment are below, listed by terminal. Completed surveys are included in Appendix A, and overview maps for each connector are in Appendix B.

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### PORT OF NEW ORLEANS

The Port of New Orleans has historically been one of the largest and most important ports in the U.S., and it remains so today. It operates multiple facilities along the Mississippi River and Industrial Canal, three of which are served by designated NHS intermodal connectors.

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#### PORT OF NEW ORLEANS - DOWNTOWN WHARVES

The Port of New Orleans's downtown wharves are located adjacent to the Bywater, an historic residential and commercial neighborhood. It is a truly urban terminal, and the series of roadways comprising its intermodal connector present unique challenges to port-related traffic.

##### LA 18P 1 - CHARTRES ST., FERDINAND ST., NORTH PETERS RD., ELYSIAN FIELDS AVE.:

The streets comprising this connector are mostly two lane roads with little to no available shoulders, with the exception of Elysian Fields, which is a major 6-lane divided boulevard. The streets are generally adjacent to medium-density, mixed use, historic neighborhoods. Portions of the connector are also adjacent to the Mississippi River levee, which also limits roadway and shoulder width. This connector is in physically good condition, with the exception of a small portion of brick paving on Chartres St. near NOCCA High School. This portion of the roadway is somewhat damaged and the road surface is rough. Immediately adjacent to this part of the roadway is a rail crossing, which is protected by lighting but no gates. Another rail crossing near the port facility entrance is similarly only protected by flashing lights. The primary issues on the roadway concern the dense surrounding land uses, which have largely eliminated the possibility for shoulders and have created tight turning radii in some sections, particularly at St. Ferdinand St. It is not uncommon for the roadway to become blocked by trucks delivering goods to businesses and residences along the connector.

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#### PORT OF NEW ORLEANS - MISSISSIPPI RIVER TERMINAL COMPLEX

The Mississippi River Terminal Complex is the Port of New Orleans's largest single facility, with significant capacity for container cargo that is expected to expand in the future. Like the downtown wharves, it is located in an urban environment that presents unique problems to its NHS Intermodal Connector.

##### LA 19P 1 – FELICITY ST., RELIGIOUS ST., TCHOUPITOULAS ST.:

The roadways comprising this connector are 2-4 lanes. For a portion of the connector Religious St. and Tchoupitoulas St. operate as one-way couplets, with Felicity St. making the connection between the two. This corridor is in excellent physical condition and has seen substantial investment in recent years to improve operations. Congestion remains a problem on some sections, however, especially at the intersection at US 90B. The neighborhood adjacent to the connector has undergone significant revitalization, with the redevelopment and

construction of multiple residential and commercial developments. It is also adjacent to the Earnest M. Morial Convention Center, a cruise ship terminal, and Mardi Gras World, which can each generate substantial traffic. It is therefore an important corridor for both freight and non-freight vehicle travel.

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#### PORT OF NEW ORLEANS - JOURDAN ROAD TERMINAL

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The Jourdan Road terminal is located on the Industrial Canal at the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet (MR-GO). As the MR-GO is currently being closed to maritime traffic, the Jourdan Road facility itself is undergoing changes. It is primarily used for cold storage and shipments of perishable goods, and will be the future site of an expanded rail marshalling yard. Land uses surrounding the terminal and its NHS Intermodal Connector are primarily industrial, and many are related to freight. Jourdan Road is designated as connector LA 17P 1, which connects the terminal to Almonaster Blvd., and thereby I-10.

#### LA 17P 1 - JOURDAN ROAD:

Due to changes in the usage of the Jourdan Rd. terminal this two lane connector may have seen a drop in intermodal traffic. However, it is still the sole connector to the terminal, which serves a specialized purpose within the Port of New Orleans's operations. Adjacent land uses are largely industrial or freight related, and therefore do not present a major problem. Due to its location, however, the roadway is prone to debris and plant overgrowth problems.

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#### BNSF WESTWEGO TERMINAL

The BNSF Westwego terminal is located on the west bank of the Mississippi River in Jefferson Parish, near the Huey P. Long Bridge. Land uses immediately adjacent to the terminal are mostly vacant, with some light industrial facilities. The terminal's intermodal connector is Bridge City Ave., which connects the terminal to US 90.

#### LA 11R 1 – BRIDGE CITY AVE. (LA 18):

Bridge City Ave. is a two-lane facility connecting the BNSF Westwego terminal to US 90. The roadway is adjacent to light industrial and commercial uses, and is a primary access route for nearby low-density housing. The majority of the pavement is in fair condition; however, narrow lanes and a lack of shoulders are a problem. There can also be significant delays at the railroad crossing, which also lacks gates. The current roundabout interchange at Bridge City Ave. and US 90 is difficult for trucks to navigate, but it will be replaced as part of the Huey P. Long Bridge upgrade currently under construction.

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#### CSX – NEW ORLEANS TERMINAL

The CSX New Orleans terminal is located near New Orleans East adjacent to the Industrial Canal. Surrounding land uses are primarily industrial. It is served by two designated Intermodal Connectors, both of which are located on

Almonaster Ave. LA 15R 1 serves traffic to the west of the terminal, from the terminal entrance to Alvar St. LA 15R 2 serves traffic to the east of the terminal, from the terminal entrance to I-510.

#### LA 15R 1 – ALMONASTER AVENUE (TERMINAL TO ALVAR):

This connector is a four-lane, divided roadway located adjacent low-density, industrial land uses. Debris on the roadway is a major problem, as observed during site visits and reported by CSX staff. Unsecured loads on dump trucks may be contributing to the debris problem. Most of the connector has pavement in good condition, with the exception of the portion west of the Industrial Canal. However, the Almonaster bridge over the Industrial Canal has been closed for several years, making the western portion of the segment effectively inaccessible from the CSX terminal. Trucks using this connector to access the CSX terminal presumably use Jourdan Rd. to access the NHS mainline. As such pavement conditions on the western portion of the connector do not affect CSX truck traffic. Similarly, the connector's railroad crossings are all on the western portion or on the bridge approach, removing them as an issue. Consideration should be given to altering the connector's western terminus due to the bridge closure, which may remain in effect for a long period of time.

#### LA 15R 2 – ALMONASTER AVENUE (TERMINAL TO I-510):

This connector is a four-lane, divided roadway located adjacent low-density, industrial land uses. While traffic volumes and congestion are not particularly high, a large percentage of the vehicles using the roadway are heavy trucks. These contribute to the two major problems on the roadway, pavement conditions and debris. The pavement between I-510 and Read Blvd. is in particularly poor condition, but between Read and the CSX terminal entrance it is in good condition. A large amount of debris accumulates on the roadway and shoulders, possibly caused by loose loads on dump trucks. On some portions of the roadway, the shoulder has begun to be overgrown by plants, reducing the amount of usable space. There are also no signs indicating the CSX terminal's location on the connector or the NHS mainline. The connector's single rail crossing has only passive safety devices; however, the rail line is a spur track and not heavily used.

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### KANSAS CITY SOUTHERN METAIRIE TERMINAL

The Kansas City Southern Terminal is located in the Labarre business park in Metairie. Surrounding land uses are light industrial and commercial. The designated intermodal connector is Labarre Ave., which connects the exit gate of the terminal to US 61. However, the RPC recommends extending the connector to include L&A Road from Labarre to Cold Storage Road, and Cold Storage Road from L&A Road to US 61. Trucks entering the KCS facility frequently use this route, and the terminal entrance gate is located on L&A Rd.

#### LA 12R 1 - LABARRE RD. (TERMINAL TO US 61):

This two lane connector is extremely short – approximately one tenth of a mile – and the pavement is in generally good condition. However, the gate's proximity to both a rail crossing and the intersection of US 61 can lead to substantial delays, especially during peak hours. There are no shoulders on the connector. In addition, the intersection of US 61 and Labarre is near the Causeway Blvd. / US 61 interchange, further contributing to delays on

the connector. The rail crossing has only passive warning devices, and there appear to be problems with vehicle under-clearance. There are also no signs for the terminal on Labarre or US 61.

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#### NORFOLK SOUTHERN NEW ORLEANS TERMINAL

The Norfolk Southern Terminal is located in the Upper Ninth Ward in New Orleans, between a residential neighborhood and a major commercial corridor. The terminal is located in a fairly dense urban setting, presenting some challenges for truck access and potential improvements. The designated NHS Intermodal Connector, LA 14R 1, is Florida Ave. from the terminal entrance to Elysian Fields Ave. (LA 3021).

#### LA 14R 1 – FLORIDA AVE. (TERMINAL TO ELYSIAN FIELDS / LA 3021):

Florida Ave. is a two-lane, undivided roadway adjacent to a moderately dense mix of residential, commercial, and light industrial land uses. While much of the road surface is in fair condition, some portions are in need of repair. The intersection of Florida and Elysian Fields Ave. (LA 3021) is problematic for trucks due to the complex geometry caused by the Elysian Field overpass over Florida Ave. The connector is accessed via service roads from Elysian Fields which can be difficult to navigate and have tight turning radii.

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#### UNION PACIFIC AVONDALE TERMINAL

The Union Pacific Terminal is located in Avondale, on the west bank of the Mississippi River in Jefferson Parish. It is located near the Huey P. Long Bridge, and is adjacent to both industrial and residential land uses. The terminal's Intermodal Connector is Avondale Garden Road, which connects the terminal entrance to US 90.

#### LA 10R 1 – AVONDALE GARDEN RD. (TERMINAL ENTRANCE TO US 90):

Avondale Garden Rd. is a two lane facility connecting the Union Pacific terminal with US 90. Pavement conditions are generally poor, especially near the terminal entrance, with severe rutting and potholes along the entire corridor. Travel lanes are somewhat narrow, and there is a lack of stabilized shoulders. The connector travels through a residential neighborhood, which not only prevents significant expansion but also creates the potential for conflict between residential and freight interests.

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#### NEW ORLEANS INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT (LOUIS ARMSTRONG INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT)

The Louis Armstrong International Airport is the region's primary commercial airport for both passenger travel and air cargo. Though it is owned by the City of New Orleans, it is located in Kenner, Louisiana in Jefferson Parish. It is served by two designated NHS Intermodal Connectors. Crofton Road is designated as LA 9A 2 and primarily serves air cargo traffic. It links the airport's air cargo facilities and US 61. LA 9A 1 is comprised of Airport Rd. and Veterans

Memorial Blvd., and serves both air cargo and passenger traffic. It links the airport's main entrance to LA 49 (Williams Blvd.) and I-10.

#### LA 9A 1 – AIRPORT RD., VETERANS MEMORIAL BLVD. (MAIN TERMINAL TO LA 49 & I-10):

These roadways connect the airport's main passenger terminal with the NHS mainline at either I-10 or LA 49. The four lane divided roadways therefore serve both passenger and freight traffic. The roadways are in good physical condition, though a 5-ton weight restriction inhibits large trucks from using the facility. Delays can occur at the intersection of Veterans Blvd. and LA 49, largely due to non-airport related congestion.

#### LA 9A 2 – CROFTON RD. (AIR CARGO FACILITIES TO US 61):

This connector is a two-lane roadway that primarily serves the cargo businesses associated with the New Orleans International Airport. It is connected to US 61 via a service road, the intersection of which can be a problem for trucks. There are tight turning radii, no turning lanes, and a complex geometry. The pavement is in generally fair condition, but a few sections exhibit poor pavement quality. While signage does exist on the connector, the wide variety of facilities it serves makes it difficult for the airport to provide detailed navigation aids. The connector does not experience significant congestion, with the exception of delays caused by the Crofton / US 61 intersection.

## CONCLUSION & NEXT STEPS

The information summarized in this report provides a baseline of knowledge about NHS Intermodal Connectors in the New Orleans region. Aside from the data collected, the survey process also provided RPC staff with valuable first-hand knowledge of freight facilities and contact with freight stakeholders. This information will be used to inform and direct the RPC's ongoing freight program. The next steps in establishing the RPC's freight planning process will include:

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### ONLINE SURVEYS

The RPC will develop and host a series of online surveys directed at different groups, with the intention of gathering first-hand information about freight needs, priorities, and issues in the region.

- **Operators / Drivers:** A survey directed at vehicle operators / truckers has been developed and is currently offered on the RPC's website. Results from the survey will help the RPC identify on-the-road freight priorities and needs.
- **Management:** A survey for managers of freight facilities and companies is under development, with the goal of identifying policy needs as well as long-term goals.
- **Logistics:** Freight logistics interests will be contacted and surveyed in order to provide a deeper understanding of freight needs in the region. It is expected that such non-traditional partners will

provide the RPC with new information and a fresh perspective on regional freight issues.

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#### FREIGHT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The RPC will pursue the establishment of a freight advisory committee, either as a stand-alone entity or using an existing industry group as a proxy. The purpose of this committee will be to share knowledge between the transportation planning community and various freight interests, with the goal of incorporating freight needs into the broader planning process. A first step is already being planned in the form of a workshop hosted by the RPC for representatives of various motor carriers in the region. Input gathered at this meeting, as well as from the online surveys and site visits, will help direct the RPC's efforts in establishing a permanent freight advisory body.

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#### FREIGHT PLANNING PROCESS

The information gathering efforts and ongoing freight advisory committee will help the RPC develop a clearly defined process for incorporating freight into the metropolitan transportation planning process. It is expected that through this process freight needs will be considered during project selection and development, and ultimately lead to policy and project recommendations. The RPC intends to establish a process that gives freight a permanent, ongoing, and prominent place in its planning process, thereby improving freight movements in the