EDFAC

Minutes
February 16, 2023 at 10:00am

February 16, 2023 Economic Development and Freight Advisory Committee (EDFAC) Meeting

Voting Members	**Representing**	**Present**
Pamela Bernard	Chatham County Engineering	X
CPT Anthony Moltz	Hunter Army Airfield	
Amanda Clement	Bryan County Planning	
Jared Downs	Savannah Area Chamber of Commerce	X
Ned Green	GDOT Policy and Freight Branch	X
Joseph Drake	Gulfstream	
Jim Aiello	Savannah Airport Commission	X
Brandt Herndon	Effingham Industrial Development Authority	X
Stephen Henry	City of Savannah	
Trip Tollison	SEDA	
Dennis Jones	CEMA	
Alternate	**Representing**	**Present**
Jesse Dillon	SEDA	X
Michele Strickland	City of Savannah	X
Others	**Representing**	**Present**
Wykoda Wang	CORE MPO	X
Vivian Canizares	GDOT Freight Planning	X
Zachary Dykes	Bryan County Planning	X
Denise Grabowski	Symbiosity	X
Carlos Espindola	Cambridge Systematics, Inc	X
Asia Hernton	CORE MPO	X
Christopher Lindsey	Cambridge Systematics, Inc.	X
Joseph Longo	FHWA	X
Sally Helm	CORE MPO/MPC	X

I. Approval of Agenda

There was not a quorum, so no motion was made for approval of agenda.

II. Action Items

1. Approval of the October 20, 2022 Meeting Minutes

There was not a quorum for the EDFAC committee meeting, therefore, there was no motion made to approve the minutes. There were no comments from the members that were present.

III. Other Business

No other business.

IV. Status Reports

2. CORE MPO Regional Freight Plan Update

Mr. Christopher Lindsey introduced some of the team members. He said today's priorities are to provide an update on the ongoing technical tasks as part of the regional freight plan, and to gather some feedback from everyone that's here and online on how we are intending to go about identifying and developing our recommendations. So we're kind of moving into that recommendations phase of the freight plan. Much of the technical work has been completed at this point, and we're going to provide an update on some of those tasks that you haven't had a chance to see in previous presentations. That will be the first half of the meeting. The second half of the presentation will be focusing more so on what we are seeing as the broad overview of the needs for the region, potential strategies that can be deployed to meet those needs or to address them, and a draft evaluation framework. These are essentially the performance measures of the different indicators that we would use to identify and recommend projects to meet those investment needs.

The technical tasks that we'll go over this morning include the land use assessment, economic development market assessment, and environmental and community impacts. From there, we're going to move into needs and prioritization. For everyone that's here, and those online, there are a couple of interactive slides as part of the presentation, and we're going to be using Mentimeter. So if you have a smartphone or another device that's available, please just take some time to go ahead now to www.menti.com. Use that code that's on the screen. You will be able to offer feedback this way.

The various tasks that are a part of the regional freight plan - stakeholder outreach, needs assessment and analysis. etc. – were presented before. The ones that we're going to be focusing on today are the land use assessment, the economic development and the environmental and community impact scan and analysis.

Land Use Assessment

In prior presentations, we had not yet delved into the land use assessment. All the technical memos have draft versions that are posted to the Freight Plan Update website, but the land use memo is not up yet. We are working to get that posted quickly as well.

With the land use assessment, there are three main components that we're looking at documenting: existing land uses, future land use (understanding what future anticipated land uses will look like), and impacts to freight and the region (using that information to gauge potential impacts). For existing land use, the focus is on identifying those existing clusters of freight activity centers; For future land use, we are focusing on where those future freight activity centers might be located within the region. For impacts to freight in the region, we are looking at where there might be potential conflicts with residential, environmental and other land uses. That's the main focus of that technical task. One of the main takeaways from that land use assessment is that the amount of industrial and freight related development has accelerated in recent years. One thing the data show was that from 2018 to 2022, the new warehouse inventory increases from 57 million square feet to over 94 million square feet. That is about 9.3 million square feet annually. Not only has the pace of development accelerated, but essentially the facilities are also getting larger. So not only are you seeing more developments, but you're also seeing larger industrial, larger logistics-related developments. That's going to have a big impact on traffic patterns and on freight in the region. And that's really the main reason we're looking at that type of information. There is a graphic that characterizes vacancy rates for industrial properties throughout the region. You see that spike in vacancy during the pandemic timeframe. There was a drop but now all of those developments are more occupied. And with those vacancy rates drop, that's indicating that the demand is there. You can see that every day as you drive through the region.

Some of the factors that are influencing land use, particularly as it relates to freight, are population growth, employment growth/economic development, and freight demand. The region is continuing to add residents and jobs. That's just going to increase local demand for goods and services, as well as the goods and services that you are serving across the nation. When we

looked at the commodity flow data for the region, some information that we got from the tTranssearch database showed you are anticipated to double the amount of freight in terms of total tonnage that is coming in, going out or going through the region by 2050. That is a substantial increase in the amount of freight that you're anticipating.

The data that we got from both the comprehensive plans as well as information from the local economic development agencies show that you have these emerging clusters of freight activity throughout the region. Historically, you've had a lot of industrial development, east of downtown along the President Street corridor, also historically a lot of freight related development in and around the port. What you're seeing now are these emerging centers that are towards north Effingham County, West Chatham County, Bryan County, and also further south approaching but not quite into Liberty County down the I-95 corridor. There are over 14,000 acres of new properties slated to come along. This will significantly impact traffic patterns in the region. The clusters in Effingham, West Chatham, and Bryan County, and the cluster to the south, there is not a lot of network connectivity between those areas, especially if you need to get from that North Effingham County area to I-16 or from West Chatham, Bryan County area to I-95. Those are things that we want to keep in mind as we're developing recommendations moving forward.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & MARKET ASSESSMENT

For Economic Development and Market Assessment, we focused on identifying what are some of those regional economic trends that are impacting the region and impacting freight. We wanted to look at the region's freight intensive industries to understand the economic impact that they're having on the region. And lastly, we wanted to look at some of the broader macro level trends that might impact freight in the demand for freight over the long term.

The employment data is historical data as well as forecast data. For the economic output, historical data is between 2011 and 2021, and the forecast is being generated by the REMI TranSight model. The main takeaway is not only have you had strong growth in employment and economic output over the years, but the forecast is also projected to continue. All indicators that we're seeing from the REMI data, information that's coming from the Department of Labor, as well as commodity flow data, indicates that the economic development is not going to slow down. The growth that you've experienced will continue into the foreseeable future by all the indicators that that we're looking at as part of the freight plan.

With this analysis, we're also looking at freight intensive industries. Freight intensive industries are where freight is essential to their services, and where being served by Truck or rail is something that's a part of their everyday business. Without it, they can't survive. These are classified in the categories of agriculture & forestry, utilities, construction, manufacturing, transportation and warehousing, as well as Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction. We wanted to take a look at these industries and get a better idea of what is their economic impact, and what is their economic contribution. This is important, because it really helps us to kind of make the business case for why this is an important and worthwhile focus area for the region. When you look at the information coming from the REMI TranSight model, these industries increased and accelerated economic contribution to the region. The 2011 - 2021 Data shows that over 12,000 jobs were added. Not only adding jobs, but their share of total employment increased from about 16% to 18%. This accounted for a greater share of the region's economic influence. Their economic output also increased from about 11.4 billion to 14.3 billion from 2011 to 2021. These industries are contributing a lot from an economic perspective. Identifying investments that can support these industries is going to be important and essential for the freight plan.

We looked at broad macro level trends that could potentially impact freight and the demand for freight. Those included e-commerce, nearshoring and distributed manufacturing, international trade, alternative fuel vehicles, connected and autonomous vehicles, and understanding how these different trends could potentially impact freight. For Ecommerce, the share of total retail sales that can be attributed to e-commerce increased tremendously. From 1998 to 2020, you can see that the share accelerates almost exponentially over time. And it indicates that people are increasingly consuming goods and services in this manner. And that has an associated impact on land use. You must have the distribution centers and the logistics facilities to support that type of economic activity. So as consumers continue that trend, on the land use and the transportation side, you got to continue to see the types of industrial land and warehousing developments needed to support that. There is an increase in the number of manufacturers that are anticipating bringing more production back to America or at least close by. We are seeing those investments locally, with Hyundai being at the top of the list to have those types of manufacturing plants locally. That's going to continue to be a trend to impact the region. That is something we want to account for in the freight plan update.

ENVIRONMENTAL AND COMMUNITY IMPACTS

The purpose of this task is to get a better idea of how freight might be impacting the environment and different communities. The environmental impacts analysis looked at wildlife habitats, safety as it relates to wildlife, freight, and also emissions.

On the community side, we're looking at equity from a freight transportation standpoint, trying to understand where there might be disproportionate impacts to certain communities in terms of safety or freight activity, and being able to quantify those impacts as well. The idea behind that is that if we can measure the impact, then we can develop some strategies around alleviating the impact or avoiding it altogether. Key to the analysis, the MPO has an Environmental Justice Plan. We took the information out of that plan to identify what have been identified as environmental justice communities. Also, US DOT has recently published some information on historically disadvantaged communities. Identifying those areas by sorting the data helps us to identify essentially how freight might be impacting those communities, so we can get some strategies around addressing those impacts.

With wildlife habitat, we got information from the Department of Natural Resources and the US Fish and Wildlife Service to essentially identify where those critical habitats are. Those are parts of the region that you can expect wildlife and really want to preserve. We took that information and overlaid it with information of freight activity (truck volumes, where are the rail lines, where are those industrial zoned properties, etc.) to try to get an idea of where there might be some overlap, or where these environmental sensitive areas might be adjacent to some of these freight activity areas. Proximity of wildlife habitats to industrial zoned properties is an indication of their potential to impact these areas. Thus, industrial zoned properties are generally removed from these sensitive areas.

From a safety perspective, we looked at crash data from GDOT, specifically the crash data that involved vehicles and wildlife. The data shows that only four truck-animal crashes took place over a five-year time period.

From an environmental perspective, we looked at emissions. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) publishes some information on CO2 emissions per mile for interstate highways and National Highway System (NHS) roadways. We can see from that data that CO2 emissions per mile had generally decreased over the past few years in the region. Some of that could be pandemic driven. As we exit this stage, we'll see if that increases again. That is the type of information that we're looking at.

The environmental impacts and the economic development memos are posted to the website. I encourage you to take a look at them, and you will get a lot more detailed information.

For community impact, we identified those environmental justice and disadvantaged communities. We looked at the Truck travel time index in historically disadvantaged communities, in environmental justice areas and in communities that are neither of those two. The index that we're looking at is a measure of truck related congestion. The higher the index, the more congestion; the lower the index, the lower the congestion. The congestion associated with these communities is generally higher than what you see outside. That would indicate to us from a recommendation's perspective that if there are certain operational solutions such as certain ITS solutions that are centered in some of these areas, that's a good project or investment from an equity perspective.

For at-grade rail crossings, about 90% of these crossings are located in EJ or disadvantaged communities. That signals to us from a freight investment perspective that anything aimed at separating grade crossings or improving operations around grade crossings is good not only from an operational perspective for the region as a whole, but it's also good from an equity perspective because those challenges tend to be concentrated in those areas.

Mr. Les Fussell asked if the update includes the hospital in the Northern Bryan County area across from the mega site. Mr. Lindsey said he will check on the acreage. He does not know if that specifically includes the hospital there or if it is something else. Mr. Brandt Herndon commented that Bryan County had carved out part of the Interstate Center to locate the hospital, so it's part of the Interstate Center, not additional acreage that would be added. Ms. Wang said it looks like it is included.

Ms. Michele Strickland said that Rockingham Farms is not included on the map. Mr. Lindsey said it should be, and that's an omission. We are aware of that one. We need to add that one to the map.

Mr. Herndon of Effingham County commented on the EMERGING FREIGHT ACTIVITY CENTERS map, indicating that where you have number seven (Georgia National Trade Center) and eight (Grandview) on the right hand side of Old Augusta Road, there are multiple warehouse developments on both sides. Along the Old Augusta Road, there's 7 million square feet of space plan being built just on that corridor alone. It has happened very quickly. You will want to add the 7 million square feet of space that's either being planned or built. There are three or four million being built right now. Effingham alone has 7 million of the 19 million in the region. I think Bryan got 4 million and this is a spec not build suit. So a tremendous amount of spec activity in Effingham, specially on the Old Augusta Road corridor, which is going to have a major impact on freight moving forward.

Ms. Wangs asked "do you have the GIS data or the data that you just mentioned?"

Mr. Herndon said yes. Old Augusta Road branches off of Highway 21 right at the Chatham County - Effingham County Line. Old Augusta Road is directly across the Georgia National Trade Center by a rail that goes up to Georgia Pacific. It is a truck corridor. It is designed as a two-lane road but the right of way has been set aside for the expansion to four lanes.The county is going to expand it about halfway up to Georgia Pacific with roundabouts. The water intake is over there and that's been very highly discussed because of all the development and the impact on their environment. Mr. Lindsey said North Effingham County is one area that we flagged as part of the land use assessmentand part of the needs assessment from Task Two as one of those emerging freight centers. He further indicated that you could take these individual points, and really cluster them all together into three contiguous areas - West I-16 area, south into Belfast Commerce Park, and Rockingham Forest. Those three contiguous areas are emerging or newer versus the President Street corridor and the areas in and around the port facilities.

NEEDS, STRATEGIES, AND EVALUATION & PRIORITIZATION

Mr. Lindsey proceeded by stating for the Needs, Strategies, Evaluation and Prioritization, we are taking all the information from the analyses presented today as well as the information that was presented at our last meeting where we focused a lot on safety and measures of congestion and bottlenecks, and trying to distill it down into a discrete set of six areas.

Congestion and reliability: When you look at the data for the region, such as the travel time data, you can see multiple routes that have either high levels of congestion or indicate more unreliable truck travel times. At-grade crossings are prevalent throughout the region. And they heavily impact operations, not just for freight vehicles, but also for commuter traffic. We put that into one bucket of needs.

Infrastructure conditions: The second bucket of needs is infrastructure conditions where we are looking at pavement conditions and bridge conditions. By and large, there are not very many bridges in the region that are rated as being in poor condition, and the ones that are rated as being in poor condition already have projects to to replace them. On the condition side, we are seeing low vertical clearances and things like that.

Freight Network connectivity: In the earlier map, we identified those emerging centers that don't have a lot of good roadway connectivity between them. We think that that's an important area to carve out on its own. There is only so much that you can do for existing roadways before you have to start looking at new connections between places. We wanted to look at those connectivity aspects. And also, from an at-grade crossing perspective there were some projects included in the TSPLOST that want to address some of those grade crossings. Going forward, that's just going to continue to be an issue. When we had the opportunity to speak with some of the rail operators for the region, it was raised as something that they always look at as well.

Truck parking: The fourth bucket of needs is truck parking. Part of that task was to inventory truck parking in the region. There have been a lot of recent truck parking developments. We wanted to call this out specifically because we talked about the figure of tonnage doubling over the long term and the projected growth for the Port of Savannah. As you have those volumes, truck parking needs are going to accelerate for the region. All of that needs don’t have to be met within the region, as there are facilities in Liberty County, further west in Lawrence County and others. But as you continue to see the increase in volumes, it is going to be more demand for drivers to have a safe space to park and have their rest periods or wait on pickup or delivery windows.

Safety: From the fifth bucket “safety” perspective, multiple corridors that are critical to freight mobility exhibit relatively high truck crash rates compared to the regional average. These are not necessarily corridors that we would say are unsafe, but they're sticking out from the others and need projects or investments that can address the safety issues. Safety is always the number one priority. And for grade crossings, there are multiple crossings in the region that have experienced multiple incidents. That's not very common for grade crossings. Grade crossing incidents are normally pretty rare, as you might see one every few years. When you see multiple over a five-year period or so, those stick out from the pack. We identify those crossings.

Resiliency: The last bucket is resiliency. One thing that we did was the risk analysis that we presented at the last meeting. We're looking at the prevalence of flooding events, hurricane events, as well as coastal flooding, and seeing the sections of the multimodal freight infrastructure that overlap those zones. They have some risk to flooding or some risk to being disrupted. We are identifying those areas and coming up with strategies to either harden them or make the system otherwise more resilient. If one part goes down, it can handle that disruption with relative ease or as much ease as possible. We have not explicitly looked at equity environment, but we cover it under resiliency. We don’t specifically look at land use but that is covered under other sections as well.

Mr. Brandt Herndon said congestion and reliability is the most important of your six buckets. Not to say the other ones are not as important, but at least for me in Effingham, congestion and reliability is continuously talked about on a daily basis.

Ms. Pamela Bernard asked “all these new areas that are really growing rapidly, that may not necessarily show up on the congestion and reliability, would it?”

Mr. Lindsey said not from an existing measurement standpoint, but from a future year. But even with that, even with a projection, unless you specifically accounted for that development, if you didn't know about it beforehand, you could not account for it. Some of those corridors, if they have existing problems, it could be possible that even forecasts are off and lower than where any future congestion level might be.

Ms. Bernard asked “what does this fall under, congestion, unreliability or network connectivity?”

Mr. Lindsey said it hits multiple areas: congestion, reliability, truck parking, and land use issue as well. And even with the network connectivity, because the land use changes are kind of what's driving the need for network connectivity.

Mr. Les Fussell said the reason I'm late today for this meeting starting at 10 o'clock was a train delay on President Street where I sat there and watched the train pull forward and backupfor 22 minutes. And I timed it. What I did not see in the presentation was train length and delay on the track. It contributes to congestion. It contributes to safety. Because as I sat there on the off ramp of the Truman Parkway, I had cars going in between cars trying to get onto Truman Parkway and the South had cars that were going everywhere and it was like just sit here and don't get hit. So where in your presentation do we talk about train delays at intersections and surface tracks. How's that being addressed? You know, you can call the railroad and tell them “you've been on the track for 30 minutes at this intersection”, and they say “thank you very much” and here is a 1-800 Number, and that person goes away at the end of their shift. So how are you addressing this?

Mr. Lindsay said I would say that would really fall under the network connectivity, and the congestion and reliability. You're right, that is certainly a big issue for the region, one that we've heard in every stakeholder interview that we did with counties, development agencies, even the industrial property owners who have manufacturing plants, because it impacts them as well, if they're sending trucks up and down these corridors. That would be sort of more technology or operational strategies to manage traffic in and around those crossings. A good example is an ITS project that GDOT completed - looking at Jimmy Deloach coming down SR 21, where they have the dynamic message sign that can essentially give you an indicator for a crossing that is being blocked. Drivers can make different decisions on the route that they would take. And then the second one would be looking at separation opportunities, where we have taken crossings that have a big impact, trying to make the case for why it's a good candidate for separation and identifying potential funding sources to do that. Those would be the two main ones. As far as the length of trains and how long they sit on the tracks, that's completely up to the Surface Transportation Board and more regulated at the federal level. I don't think that at this level, there's much that can be done as far as what goes on on the track itself, but certainly managing the traffic around it and helping to separate those crossings where possible will help. Surface Transportation Board and Federal Railroad Administration are who would have control of that. But anything that happens at the street level or interacting with those, there are solutions that we can do to mitigate it or get around it, but nothing specifically to say that this train can't be a certain length.

Ms. Bernard said I know you were kind of talking in general terms, but I just want to let you know that specifically, we did get some federal funding for a study that Chatham County is going to start hopefully in the next six months or so. We will study that specific location, President Street at Truman Parkway, and that railroad crossing. This will be a feasibility study to see what kind of alternatives we can come up with. And one thing that we will probably consider is the ITS option.

Ms. Strickland said there's also funding in terms of Mobility 2045. We included a project in Cost Band Three for President Street.

Mr. Lindsey continued the presentation by stating we also identify some potential strategies for addressing those needs which are sorted into three categories. Infrastructure strategies are essentially more project specific and general infrastructure strategies, such as a grade separation or more capital investment. Technology and operational strategies are those that don't necessarily expand the footprint of the network, but better manage with the system that you have, such as looking at certain intersections that can operate more efficiently by deploying ITS and other solutions. The policies and programs strategies are more broad activities that the region could do to address these needs. Some examples for infrastructure improvements are increasing capacity and adding new capacity. Examples for technology and operations include signal retiming, access management, and incident management. Examples for policy and programs strategies include looking at various public private partnerships, and maybe some partnerships with the railroads to address some of those problematic crossings, or even just multi jurisdiction projects that require various counties to work together for corridors that stretch the length of the region.

On the infrastructure side, issues identified include poor pavement conditions, low vertical clearances on bridges, prevalence of at-grade crossings, etc. When you look at those and the potential bucket of solutions, prioritizing corridors of high levels of truck traffic for maintenance funding would be a potential solution. As bridges approach their useful life, a potential solution would be

looking at raising those elevation so trucks don't get stuck, or they don't have to reroute because they weren't aware of that low crossing. Other potential solutions include coordinating with the railroads to improve rough at-grade crossings. Those are the types of solutions that will fall under the infrastructure strategies category.

For Technology and Operations, issues and opportunities identified include corridors of high volumes leading to congestion, unreliability of corridors due to high density of driveways, crash rates that are higher than regional averages, etc. Examples of potential solutions include expanding the number or the amount of ITS managed freight corridors, upgrading traffic signals, closing or separating crossings, etc.

For Policy and Program, a lot of that land use would probably fall under this category, since you will have kind of coordination or reforms in land use planning and permitting to encourage development in areas that can better support freight than other areas, or limiting conflicts between residential and commercial properties and freight intensive properties, promoting green infrastructure to limit flooding events and other things that can disrupt the system. These are the examples of the potential solutions that we'll be looking at under these different categories. And as we develop those as part of the recommendation's phases, we'll share them and make sure that all the information gets posted to the website.

The interactive poll today shows access management, network redundancy, upgrading signals and new intersection control as priorities. Those are kind of emerged as some of the top areas, leaning heavily on the congestion management side and improving safety.

Lastly we covered more of the types of ITS solutions and land use strategies that we could look at. Some information sharing, on the resiliency side, use an ITS and operations to alert in case of flooding events or other things so you can properly prepare for if you think part of the network is going to be disrupted. For example, on the land use side, looking at kind of reforms to meet the growing need for truck parking demand. This would be more so at the local level, looking at permitting, looking at maybe some of the specifics and county ordinances or development ordinances that govern truck parking, to make it such that those impacts are less on communities but are also meeting the growing demand for truck parking. Promoting Workforce Development initiatives for communities disproportionately impacted by goods movement would be more so from an equity perspective. In those communities we should be coming up with different types of solutions or strategies that might not only mitigate those impacts, but maybe allow the community members to better share in the economic benefit in terms of access to jobs or access to multimodal projects or other infrastructure associated with it.

<u>Draft evaluation and prioritization framework</u>

Mr. Lindsey presented the Draft Evaluation and Prioritization Framework including the elements, factors and the point system. Once we start identifying projects and recommendations, we want to develop the evaluation and prioritization framework to rank strategies. This will help us determine which project is superior to the others. In the survey, Safety and Security were top on the list, and Accessibility, Mobility, and Connectivity came in second.

In addition to the feedback from stakeholders earlier in the study, we also identify a set of goals and performance measures. We took that information and added it to project readiness. Projects that are ready to go sooner than others should get a little bit of a bump and benefit. For every recommendation and for every project, we would look at that project, see how it aligns with these different performance measures and these different categories that we have here, and we use that to score it. That is how we would get the framework that we would use to have a prioritized list of recommendations as part of the freight plan.

Ms. Wang asked where the freight conflicts with bicycle and pedestrian in the EJ communities be included? Those areas have less cars so there are more bikes and pedestrians.

Mr. Lindsey said that would fall under the environment and quality of life, looking at annual rate of crashes and EJ disadvantaged communities.

Ms. Bernard asked, "are you going to do like short-term, midterm and long-term recommendations". Mr. Lindsey said yes, the ones that will have the bigger impact probably will be bigger projects and will have to be pushed out to the long term.

Upcoming technical tasks - most of the number crunching has been done and we are moving into that recommendations phase.

Next Steps – Virtual Forum- March 6th.

Ms. Wang said the presentation, technical memos, and deliverables are available on the CORE MPO Freight Plan website.

V. Information Reports (verbal)

Ms. Bernard said Quacco Road will have a contract for clearing soon and Little Neck Rd is in ROW acquisition.

VI. Other Public Comments (limit to 3 minutes)

No public comments

VII. Notices

3. NEXT CORE MPO EDFAC meeting June 22, 2023 at 10am.

There being no further business, the February 16, 2023 EDFAC committee meeting was adjourned.