



EDFAC

Minutes
June 26, 2023 at 10:00 am

June 26, 2023 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND FREIGHT ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING (EDFAC)

Voting Members	Representing	<u>Present</u>
Pamela Bernard	Chatham County Engineering	X
CPT Anthony Moltz	Hunter Army Airfield	
Amanda Clement	Bryan County Planning	
Jared Downs	Savannah Area Chamber of Commerce	
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	<u>Present</u>
Jesse Dillon	SEDA	X
Michele Strickland	City of Savannah	<u>X</u>
Others	Representing	<u>Present</u>
Wykoda Wang	CORE MPO	X
Horace Carter	Member of the public	X
Brent Brantley	Savannah Chamber of Commerce	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

II. Action Items

1. [Approval of the February 16, 2023 CORE MPO EDFAC Meeting Minutes](#)

Ms. Pamela Bernard, Chairwoman, stated there was no quorum so the minutes cannot be voted on. There are no comments regarding the minutes.

III. Other Business

No other business

IV. Status Reports

[2. CORE MPO Regional Freight Plan Update](#)

Mr. Christopher Lindsey gave the Regional Freight Plan Update.

In summary, the Regional Freight Transportation Plan Goals and Objectives are as follows.

- Safety and Security – Provide a safe, secure, and resilient multimodal freight system.
- State of Good Repair – Maintain a state of good repair of infrastructure critical to multimodal freight movement.
- Accessibility, Mobility, and Connectivity – Improve connectivity to regional freight and industrial hubs, connectivity between freight modes, and reduce barriers to mobility.
- System Performance – Improve the reliability of freight movements to improve efficiency and support economic competitiveness.
- Intergovernmental Coordination – Build regional and statewide freight partnerships to help maximize freight funding opportunities and the transportation and economic development impacts of the investments brought by those funds.
- Environment and Quality of Life- Minimize adverse impacts of freight operations on communities and the environment while increasing community awareness of freight's importance.

Overview of Key Findings

The Key findings relate to five different areas.

- Safety -multiple corridors with hotspots for truck crashes. About 6.5% of all crashes involved trucks and 2.2% resulted in a serious injury or fatality.
- Congestion and Reliability- Freight corridors experience some of the most significant congestion and reliability challenges. This results in higher costs for businesses and negatively impacts other roadway users.
- At-Grade Rail Crossings – Nearly 200 at-grade crossings contribute to safety and congestion challenges. Highway-rail crashes were concentrated at 34 of these crossings.
- Equity and Environment – Certain communities are overburdened by freight-i.e. more intense truck congestion, poorer reliability, and 90% of at-grade rail crossings. Wetlands and environmentally sensitive areas have been impacted by freight- related development.
- Land Use – Freight-related development has accelerated, and facilities are becoming larger. New freight activity centers are emerging and will add over 15,000 acres of industrial space to the region.

Stakeholders Outreach

The outreach efforts consisted of one-on-one interviews with multiple freight stakeholders throughout the region. We spoke to GPA, Colonial Terminals, Rail operators and many other freight stakeholders to get the key needs and types of recommendations they feel that the region should be prioritizing to move forward.

Key findings from the stakeholder outreach included the following.

- Preserving efficient access to the Port is crucial to the region's long-term economic success. What separates Savannah from Charleston or LA Long Beach and New York is there is a lot

of access to the port. There is not as much congested access as some of those other areas experience.

- More intense freight related land use development. There is a lot of freight-oriented growth along the I-16 corridor to the west, SR 21 to the north, and President St. to the east. Hyundai has a plant currently under development and will accelerate western growth. North of downtown Savannah and in Effingham County, there has been a lot of warehouse development along the SR 21 corridor. South along the Belfast Keller corridor in Bryan County, and further north there are a lot of freight related developments that will result in new clusters being formed.
- Need for east-west connectivity across Savannah and Effingham County (SR 21 to I-16).
- At-grade crossings remain an issue-Garden City and President St.
- Land use conflicts in Effingham County due to warehousing developments.

Two Freight Priorities are ranked at the top by the stakeholders.

Safety and Security

- Reducing crashes, improving safety at rail crossings and on roadways that carry truck traffic.
- Providing safe spaces for truck drivers so that they do not park on roadway shoulders, on/off-ramps, side streets or other unauthorized locations.

Accessibility, Mobility, and Connectivity

- Reducing congestion and travel times on roadways with substantial truck volumes or rail crossings through capital improvements such as road widening, new facilities, etc.

Needs Assessment and Draft Recommendations

Overview of Needs

Congestion and Reliability - Multiple freight routes exhibit high levels of congestion or unreliable travel times. The prevalence of at-grade crossings contributes to the region's congestion and reliability challenges.

Infrastructure conditions - Several freight corridors have poor pavement conditions; some bridges have low vertical clearances and constrain freight mobility.

Freight Network Connectivity - the lack of network connectivity and redundancy contributes to congestion and reliability challenges.

Truck Parking - Future growth in trucking activity may quickly consume existing truck parking capacity.

Safety- Some freight corridors exhibit crash rates that exceed region-wide averages. Certain at-grade rail crossings have experienced multiple crashes over the past ten years.

Resiliency- Several of the region's freight assets are at risk to disruption from multiple hazards.

Freight Plan Recommendations

In Developing Freight Plan Recommendations, we started out with all the previous study recommendations. We collected recommendations from the Coastal Empire Study, Bryan County Transportation plans, and Effingham County Transportation Master Plan. We want to filter the ones we thought would have an impact on the freight network and where possible, make recommendations to support them. The goal is that we did not want to duplicate or be contrary to some of the other priorities that have already been identified. We want to support and enhance those. The last step was to fill in the gaps. If we identified a need in the area and we did not see where one of those previous efforts was already identified, we put something in its place. We followed this process and developed recommendations and sorted them into three kinds – project, policy, program. Some of the recommendations were Project recommendations - capital, technology,

and operational investments. Policy recommendations are guidelines or principles that shape the way the region approaches freight needs. Program recommendations are ongoing actions, initiative, or activities.

The prioritization framework was to have initiatives prioritized along 3 dimensions - Timeframe (complexity and cost), Group A or B (CORE MPO Boundaries), and Tier (impact/score).

- The projects were separated into Tiers. Tier 1 are the ones we feel will have the biggest impact on the region such as congestion and safety. Since those have a bigger impact, they tend to be the bigger dollar projects.
- There are two groups of projects, Group A (inside MPO boundary) and Group B (outside MPO boundary). This will help separate which projects can advance through the MPO process or through the TIP and are supported through studies such as this one.

Ms. Barnard asked if these were based on the existing boundaries or the newly proposed boundaries. Mr. Lindsey said these are based on the existing MPO boundaries.

There are seven different categories of scoring.

- Safety/Security (25pts)
- Accessibility, Mobility and Connectivity (25pts)
- State of Good Repair (15pts)
- System Performance (15pts)
- Environment and Quality of Life (10pts)
- Intergovernmental Coordination (5pts)
- Project readiness (5pts)

When we started collecting projects from the previous efforts - Effingham County, Bryan County, Coastal Empire, MPO's Long Range Plan, and the 2023 TSPLOST, there were over 200 projects. We filtered that down to under 100 projects that we felt should be the focus of the Regional Freight Plan. We organized those into eight different sections.

- *Advance Strategic Capacity Expansions, Proactively Increase Network Connectivity.* These actions provide relief to existing bottlenecks and get ahead of new demand by expanding the physical footprint of the network.
- *Implement Operational Strategies to Enhance Freight Mobility and Safety.* These strategies improve the ease, efficiency, and safety of freight operations with minimal impacts to the footprint of the network.
- *Support Increased Capacity, Enhanced Operations, And Safety on the Freight Rail Network.* Rail-focused solutions ensure that shippers have an alternative to trucking and support economic competitiveness.
- *Implement Technology Strategies to Enhance Freight Operations and Safety.* The strategies use technology and information to ease freight-related congestion and improve the mobility and efficiency of freight operations.
- *Increase Access to Safe Truck Parking.* These actions improve safety for truck drivers and provide relief for areas that experience unauthorized truck parking.
- *Improve Freight Network Resiliency.* These steps improve the freight network's ability to withstand and recover from disruptions.
- *Mitigate Freight Impacts on Communities and the Environment.* Avoid where possible and limit the negative impacts of freight to communities and the environment.
- *Integrate Freight Considerations into Land Use Planning.* These steps help to guide where and how freight-generating land uses are developed, so that certain challenges may be limited or avoided.

Advance strategic capacity expansions, proactively increase network connectivity - we considered the following recommendations.

- Alternative Southern Alignment for Effingham Parkway.* Currently Effingham Parkway is supposed to come into the Benton Blvd corridor. There might be opportunities to look at alternatives for that alignment that would avoid some of the residential areas. Ms. Bernard said the Effingham project has been in the works for a long time, and the original intent was for that to be a commuter route. The whole idea was because SR 21 had both trucks and commuters on it and was over capacity, Effingham parkway would pull the commuters off and leave the trucks on SR 21. Have you heard anything about this? It sounds like there is development on Effingham Parkway that would put trucks on it. Is that what you are hearing? Mr. Lindsey said yes, that is the impression that we got. We have not heard anything about trucks specifically being prohibited. Ms. Jesse Dillon said there has been nothing decided at this time. Mr. Brant Herndon said as of now trucks getting on Effingham Parkway and heading south towards Savannah would have to divert on Highway 30 and go back to Highway 21. No one wants trucks on Benton Blvd. I think the general thought right now is maybe having trucks going down Highlands to Jimmy DeLoach. We understand not having trucks run by residential and an elementary school area, like the one in the middle of the industrial park there. Ms. Denise Grabowski said at one point the southern part of Effingham County was slated for residential mixed-use development. It has transitioned to be primarily industrial. Effingham Parkway bisects that tract. Ms. Michele Strickland said on the western end of Highlands Blvd connecting from Jimmy DeLoach to Jimmy DeLoach was going to be all residential neighborhoods and then the western end became Morgan Lakes Industrial which is covered in warehousing. The City does prohibit commercial vehicles on Benton Blvd north of Jimmy DeLoach and Islands Blvd. Ms. Melanie Wilson said the City is rapidly annexing and there are developments that might not have been occurring or a part of what was originally planned for in those areas. That is creating different impacts. It is important to make sure we look at the Land Use Plan. Those areas were looked at closely when we updated that with the 2040 Plan less than two years ago. Ms. Bernard said it is better to have trucks separated from other traffic when possible. Mr. Lindsey said we do recognize the importance of not wanting the truck traffic to spill out on Hwy 30 and back on to SR 21.
- Proactively increase network redundancy in emerging freight clusters.* This is more of a policy recommendation. We identified several specific clusters - Belfast Keller Road, Rockingham Farms, West of I-16 toward the Hyundai plant and north of Effingham County. One of the highly recommended projects the Coastal Empire Study mentioned was Bluejay Road having the east/west alternative across Effingham County. Those are the types of solutions that we are advocating for along with opportunities to connect John Carter Road and Pine Barren Road to have an alternative east/west alignment. That would be a big project that involves multiple bridges, crossing rivers, and wetlands. If that area continues to grow, having that type of redundancy would relieve pressure on existing routes.

Implement Operational Strategies to Enhance Freight Mobility and Safety

- One of the projects that came out of the outreach is the East-West Connectivity Improvements. East of downtown, Presidents Street corridor, that is a historic freight intensive area of the region. A lot of growth has already happened, but that area still has potential for even more growth. Included in that, we are looking at interchange modification reports, specifically Truman Parkway at Abercorn/SR 204, and supporting solutions for the Presidents Street crossing. We are looking at long-term policy strategies for DeRenne, east of White bluff Road. The City is advanced with improvements west of the corridor. To the east, over the long term, as some of those properties continue to re-develop, potentially on the north side, we should look at opportunities to close off or combine driveways to have less access into the road. This will allow better flow for the trucks that do have to use that to access I-516.
- Another project is US 17 Corridor Phase II. The County is moving forward with the US 17 Corridor Study for Chatham County. We recommend a Phase II looking south.

One thing we noticed was there are performance challenges south into Bryan County connecting with a lot of development that is going on in Liberty County as well.

Support Increased Capacity, Enhanced Operations, and Safety on the Freight Rail Network

- Support Expansion of Local Freight Rail Capacity – partner with the private sector to perform a feasibility study that identifies potential locations for shared rail yards and engages rail operators to determine the feasibility of leasing space at nearby rail yards.
- Support Expansion of Regional Freight Rail Capacity – partner with rail operators to identify existing sidings that could be extended or potential development sites for new sidings as a strategy for increasing the region's rail capacity.
- Implement Rail Quiet Zones – Identify candidate crossings for quiet zones and work with the region's rail operators to upgrade to meet the quiet zone requirements.
- Rail Crossing Safety Improvements – Highway-rail incidents were concentrated at 34 crossings. The region should upgrade the safety equipment at these locations.
- Rough Rail Crossing Improvements - partner with the region's railroads to improve pavement conditions at rough crossings throughout the region.

Implement Technology Strategies to Enhance Freight Operations and Safety

- US 80 Freight Signal Priority
- Truck Parking Availability System Pilot
- Lathrop Avenue Over-Height Warning System
- President St. At-Grade Crossing Dynamic Message Sign
- Real-Time Information Signage for Port Traffic

Increase Access to Safe Truck Parking

- Regional Truck Parking Demand Study – Conduct a study to estimate the truck parking demand generated by new commercial and industrial developments.
- Incorporate Truck Parking into Traffic Impact Assessments – Revise traffic impact assessment processes to include anticipated truck volumes at a site, the impacts of staging near the site, and the potential for truck parking demand generated farther from the site.
- Revise Planning Ordinances and Policies to Include Truck Parking – Encourage local governments to revise ordinances to include on-site truck parking minimums.

Improve Freight Network Resilience

- Freight Supply Chain Resilience Study – Conduct a freight supply chain resilience study to identify supply chains for critical goods and services, potential effects on these supply chains from disruptions, and recommended actions to mitigate impacts.
- Implement Action Plan for handling disruptions to freight assets – As a next step, develop an action plan that implements the recommendations of the Resilience Study and identifies those entities and their roles and responsibilities for managing a supply chain disruption.

Mitigate Freight Impacts on Communities and the Environment

- Adopt and Track Freight Equity Indicators – Define a set of freight equity indicators that may be tracked over time as a part of a freight equity impacts program.
- Develop a freight Equity Analysis Screening Tool – Develop and Deploy an equity analysis and evaluation screening tool to help the region proactively address freight transportation equity concerns.
- Partner with Chatham Area Transit (CAT) to Incorporate Industrial Hubs into the Transit Network - Partner with CAT to include industrial employment centers in the transit network.
- Install Green Infrastructure along Freight Routes and in Industrial Hubs – Incorporate green infrastructure such as bioswales, planter boxes, and street trees into freight

corridor designs to help to filter roadway surface pollutants from stormwater runoff and serve as another layer of flooding control.

Integrate Freight Considerations into Land Use Planning

- Conduct Regional Freight Efficient Land Use plan.
- Support Freight-Intensive Clustering, Infilling, and Land Banking.
- Encourage Consistent Land Use Categories.
- Concentrate New Developments along Freight Corridors.
- Discourage Greenfield Freight Development to Specific Strategic Sites.
- Study the Impacts of Potential Industrial Expansion into South Carolina.
- Encourage Community Improvement Districts to Support Freight Operations and Address Challenges in Freight Clusters.

There is some consideration for a CID (community improvement district) along the River Street corridor in downtown Savannah. Something prevalent in Atlanta is there are CIDs that are centered not just on downtown employment or tourist districts, but also CIDs that are centered on Freight clusters. There are several around the Atlanta Airport area, Fulton Industrial Boulevard area, and some of the freight intensive areas to the north in Gwinnett County. By having CIDs that gives people the opportunity to take a portion of their property tax to invest back into infrastructure, this provides a way to handle some of the issues, for example, repaving the roadway that has been beat up by truck traffic, redoing sidewalks, fixing signage that has been damaged, and upgrading signals. This makes a difference in the communities that are impacted.

Next Steps

The next step is to present the draft recommendations for feedback to the MPO Board. Once we receive the comments back, we will incorporate those, finalize the recommendations as needed and complete the final report.

Ms. Jesse Dillon said it is important to look at the freight corridors in addition to the housing, because you can't separate the two of those and any potential Land Use Plan. I would suggest we expand that Land Use Study beyond just freight.

Ms. Wang said there is a technical memo that documents which county has restrictions on freight travel. Effingham County was the most restrictive, since they do not allow truck traffic on any of the corridors unless they are designated corridors. Chatham County designates certain truck corridors. For the recommendations, we need to cross check the restrictions.

V. Information Reports (verbal)

Ms. Pamela Bernard, Chatham County, said there is a project to add a traffic signal on Johnny Mercer Boulevard at Long Point subdivision, Lyman Hall. The project was just awarded to a contractor. Quacco Rd clearing for the widening project, the clearing will start shortly within the next 30 days. Little Neck Rd widening is still in the ROW acquisition phase.

Ms. Michele Strickland, City of Savannah, said Project DeRenne is ongoing, working on additional comments for EJ outreach. Truman Linear Park Trail Phase II-B is having pre-bid this week.

Ms. Jesse Dillon, SEDA, said there are two suppliers to Hyundai going vertical in the Savannah Chatham manufacturing center.

Brandt Herndon, Effingham Industrial Development Authority, said they had some freight related activity in town last week and they are doing construction on their 700,000 sq ft building. They will have approximately 170 trucks per day. The location is Old Augusta Rd. There are a lot of questions about the road widening. The County is talking about widening the road up to Chimney Rd. Hopefully with the passage of TSPLOST they would extend the four lane from Chimney all the way to Ft. Howard. SR 21 can get very congested at times, and this is something we will need to look at moving forward.

Ms. Dillon said the interchange off Veterans Parkway by Rockingham Farms should be open publicly imminently. There are two end users that should be opening their doors by the beginning of July. We will start seeing freight traffic and trucks on Veterans Parkway heading into Rockingham Farms as well.

Mr. Herndon said a real estate group is working with Norfolk Southern to get the at-grade crossing within Savannah Gateway Industrial Park so they can continue construction of Gateway Parkway which would connect McCall Road to Effingham Parkway. The purpose of that is to allow the truck traffic to be able to access Effingham Parkway. They are moving at a speed at which Gateway Parkway would be finished at the same time Effingham Parkway would be opened in June of 2025. Having access points for Effingham County is critical moving forward. The county continues to grow on the industrial front. Ms. Bernard asked if Effingham County is doing a Land Use Study? Are they looking where freight is going in versus residential? Ms. Wilson said they have been talking about doing an update since last year. They have hired someone to work with them on the planning side. They are planning on doing updates.

VI. Other Public Comments (limit to 3 minutes)

No Public Comments

VII. Notices

[3. Next CORE MPO EDFAC Committee Meeting TBD](#)

VIII. Adjournment

There being no further business, the June 26, 2023 EDFAC meeting was adjourned.

The Chatham County- Savannah Metropolitan Planning Commission provides meeting summary minutes which are adopted by the respective board. Verbatim transcripts of minutes are the responsibility of the interested party.