

7 Conclusion and Next Steps

7.1 CONCLUSION

The Oklahoma freight transportation system serves the people of the state by delivering the necessities of everyday life, including food, fuel, clothing, medicine, building materials, and equipment needed for communication, transportation, sporting, and a multitude of other purposes. The system serves the businesses of Oklahoma by ensuring their supply lines and giving them access to markets near and far, thus contributing to employment for people and prosperity for the state. To residents, these fundamental functions are largely invisible because they perform well, and their vital importance attracts attention only because of disruptive events. Even so, the quality of performance must be sustained at a favorable cost so that Oklahoma is an affordable place to live and a competitive place for businesses to locate.

Good performance is reliable, productive, safe, and secure; it is generated daily through freight operations and longer term through capital investments and policies in the public and private sectors. A high-quality transportation system benefits from multiple modes of transportation because modal options keep competition sharp, thus contributing to lower costs. A variety of modes accommodate a range of shipments whose volume, time commitments, and physical characteristics are quite diverse. The Oklahoma multimodal freight system does all these things. Moreover, it performs these functions for people well beyond its borders through the large quantity of goods that pass through Oklahoma on its highways, railroads, and waterways.

This is the second comprehensive freight plan ODOT has issued. This Plan sets forth the following:

- A vision and goals
- Strategies and policies to achieve the goals
- Measures to track achievement
- Investments selected because they support the goals

ODOT has identified investments for priority multimodal freight projects to be funded by traditional means that go beyond the \$114.5 million five-year federal allocation from the IJA. They are part of a statewide investment program totaling more than \$3.5 billion over the next eight years. ODOT also has defined a set of significant freight bottlenecks for potential investment in future editions of its Eight-Year Construction Work Plan.

The development of this Plan and identification of priority investments, including those addressing freight bottlenecks, represent ODOT's commitment to freight transportation institutionalized in several important ways:

- Through performance measures monitor progress toward freight goals.
- Through incorporation of freight elements in the tools for project prioritization, using the process adopted and documented through this Plan, ODOT will ensure that the influence

of investments on freight transportation is accounted for, and the Eight-Year Construction Work Plan is a vehicle for promoting that investment. This has the effect of *mainstreaming* freight, meaning freight is treated as an everyday focus in transportation management instead of something unusual or ancillary.

- Through continued outreach to the FAC, ODOT will
 - Remain abreast of developments in industry and retain direct input on multimodal concerns.
 - Communicate performance to stakeholders and incorporate substantiated responses.
 - Solicit stakeholder views on freight projects in the process of updating the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program.
- Through pursuit of federal competitive grants that emphasize freight and are typically opened for annual bids, ODOT may augment its resources for freight investment and cultivate a platform for public-private partnerships.
- Through ongoing coordination with MPOs in their freight planning, particularly in respect to bottlenecks that tend to concentrate in metropolitan areas.
- Through ongoing coordination with adjoining states who also develop multimodal freight plans, ODOT can align selected investments with neighbors to improve performance contiguously along freight corridors.

In keeping with the IJJA, ODOT will update its freight plan on a four-year cycle. The methods outlined above will enable the next update to be the culmination of continuing efforts instead of a periodic revisiting of freight requirements. In other words, the aforementioned steps represent the institutionalization of the management of freight in the ordinary way that ODOT does business. The stakeholders in freight transportation are the residents and industries ODOT supplies and supports. These people and entities are the ones who will benefit from ODOT's commitment and its steady dedication to the vision and goals articulated in this Plan.

7.2 NEXT STEPS

This Plan was developed in consultation with the Oklahoma FAC, as recommended by the IJJA. Thereafter:

- The Freight Investment Plan will be executed and funds expended according to federal regulations.
- The CUFCs and CRFCs defined in this Plan will become part of the NHFN following FHWA verification, and projects on these facilities will be eligible for grant applications under the INFRA program.
- Freight bottlenecks not yet addressed by projects will be evaluated for future editions of the Eight-Year Construction Work Plan.
- The institutionalization of freight management at ODOT will proceed as described above.
- This Plan will be posted on the ODOT website and made available to stakeholders around the state and to interested parties elsewhere.