Air, Rail, and Freight

Chapter 11

Introduction

The movement of freight is necessary for local, state, and national economies. A regional transportation system must be efficient, accessible, and contain intermodal connections between rail, air, and trucks on the roadways to bring goods to and from market.
The Midland-Odessa MPO is responsible for ensuring that freight movement is considered in the transportation planning process and that freight shippers and providers of freight transportation operators are afforded reasonable means to participate in the long-range transportation planning process.

Best Practices

Various best practices exist to ensure the efficient and effective movement of freight on a regional transportation system. While each mode has its own unique characteristics and features, they all should work together in a seamless fashion.

Air

Freight transported by air usually involves high-value, low-weight cargo with time-sensitivity issues. Therefore, investments that provide improved access to the area's airports for such cargo is very important. Further, continued investment in airport infrastructure is necessary for broader economic development reasons to continually attract customers and businesses to the region.

Continued best practices in operations and system preservation are also essential in maintaining the infrastructure of an airport. Midland International Airport is the only commercial airport serving the Midland-Odessa region. The airport is run by the City of Midland, which receives funding from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). Funds through the Airport Improvement Program are available for a wide variety of airfield improvements, including preservation and maintenance. Additionally, the Airport Certification Manual (ACM) establishes the operations and safety standards for the Midland International Airport in accordance with Part 139 of the Federal Aviation Regulations for airports with a Class I Airport Operating Certificate. The Midland International Airport will continue to follow the system preservation and operations procedures set forth by FAA.

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Rail

Rail improvement projects are generally the responsibility of the private rail companies. For example, railroad companies are required to make investments in their track so that they meet the Federal Railroad Administration's Track Safety Standards. However, both private and public funds are spent on railroad-related projects at locations where the railroad tracks cross public roadways. For example, projects that improve the surface of the roadway at railroad crossings are often funded by a combination of private and public monies. At-grade railroad crossing signals, on the other hand, are typically funded entirely by public funds.

As the Midland-Odessa region continues to grow and traffic increases, rail and roadway conflict could become an increasing concern. Infrastructure improvements and programs which could improve this conflict include grade separation projects to improve system efficiency, improved traffic control devices, and special monitoring and promotion programs that educate motorists on safety concerns related to railroad crossings. These improvements and issues are also relevant for pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit providers.

Truck

Multiple road projects that are discussed in Chapter 8: Roadway Plan are important for the movement of trucks. Many of these improvements are targeted at improving traffic flow and increasing safety, and their benefits extend to all vehicles, including trucks. Finally, because heavy commercial vehicles cause far more pavement damage than passenger cars, the maintenance and preservation of the region's truck routes are of utmost importance.

Other considerations for commercial vehicles include intelligent transportation systems (ITS) technology and intersection and roadway design standards. Moreover, designated truck and hazardous materials routing is appropriate for separating commercial and non-commercial vehicles.

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Apart from oil and gas, much of the freight movement in the Midland-Odessa region consists of "through" traffic in the form of trucks traveling on Interstate 20 or railcars traveling on Union Pacific's Texas Pacific line, both of which traverse the region in an east-west direction. To increase economic development opportunities and harness the potential of the La Entrada al Pacifico trade corridor, additional north-south freight movement capacity is needed. Therefore, the MPO will continue to work diligently with MOTRAN, freight industry representatives, and other regional stakeholders to advance regional freight-related infrastructure investments. These investments are needed to help diversify the regional economy and to realize the vision of the region becoming a crossroads for national freight movement.

Specifically, the MPO will pursue a variety of long-range projects, including a new north-south rail line, the La Entrada al Pacifico corridor, improvements to the Midland International Airport, and the development of a new intermodal facility to serve as an inland port.

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Figure 11-1: Air, Rail, and Freight Plan