

**TRANSPORTATION RESEARCH BOARD
COMMITTEE ON LOCAL AND REGIONAL RAIL FREIGHT TRANSPORT
(AR040)
COMMITTEE STRATEGIC PLAN
MARCH 2006**

MISSION

The mission of the TRB Committee on Local and Regional Rail Transport (the Committee) is to promote research into and share knowledge of issues related to the use of rail freight transportation at a regional and local level.

SCOPE

The Committee is concerned with the spectrum of issues related to rail freight transportation on a local and regional basis, as provided by Class II and Class III railroads and the feeder lines of Class I railroads. Among the Committee's areas of emphasis are relationships between railroads, including the impacts of mergers; demand for local and regional freight services, including intermodal traffic; maintaining the long term viability of local railroads; integrating rail transport into state and local transportation planning processes; highlighting private and public investment strategies, including public/private partnerships; assessing regulatory issues and impacts; and promoting implementation of new technology.

GOALS

The Committee's overall goals may be summarized as follows:

1. To increase general awareness throughout the broader transportation community of issues facing local and regional rail freight service and encourage innovative research into these topics.
2. To promote the communication and dissemination of research findings and best practices in local and regional rail freight transportation (including international developments).
3. To enhance the understanding of local and regional rail freight transportation issues and opportunities among transportation leaders and professionals.
4. To ensure that rail freight transportation is an integral component of state and local plans to address critical transportation issues.

STRATEGIES

To pursue the stated goals, the Committee will pursue a number of broad strategies. The subsequent action plan examines each strategy in detail to highlight past accomplishments and future plans. The strategies are to:

1. Develop and/or sponsor sessions on local and regional rail freight transportation at annual and mid-year TRB meetings and actively seek to co-sponsor sessions on related topics.

2. Sponsor or actively participate in workshops, training, and other special events that address issues relevant to local and regional rail freight transportation.
3. Promote participation in Committee activities with a diverse membership and a large network of friends, with representation from local and regional railroads, Class I railroads, shippers, consultants, academia, government agencies, and a variety of transportation organizations both public and private.
4. Through cooperative approaches with related TRB committees and other organizations, serve as a clearinghouse and resource to others to ensure that the transportation community knows the full range and crosscutting nature of issues related to the Committee's mission and that the Committee is informed about activities of other organizations and TRB committees.
5. Define transportation research needs for local and regional rail freight transportation and advocate the conduct of research and the development of syntheses for these research problem areas.
6. Solicit and review papers on local and regional rail freight transportation for TRB publication and presentation.
7. Using a broad range of information activities and peer exchanges, communicate the research findings, best practices, ongoing research, and related information on local and regional rail freight transportation.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION OF COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES

This section presents an assessment of the Committee's historic and proposed activities in support of each of the strategies presented in the previous section.

Strategy 1: Develop and/or sponsor sessions on local and regional rail freight transportation at annual and mid-year TRB meetings and actively seek to co-sponsor sessions on related topics.

Actions During the Past Triennium

The Committee is very active in this area, and has successfully used all of the allotted TRB "session credits" during each of the past three years. Sessions have been developed on a number of relevant topics. Interaction with other committees has been extensive.

Specifically, the Committee:

- Co-sponsored a 2004 Annual Meeting session "Short-Line Railroad Heavy-Axle-Load Issues" with Committees on Railroad Track Structure System Design and Steel Bridges.
- Organized two 2004 Annual Meeting sessions (Parts 1 and 2) on "Public Investment in Private Rail Infrastructure"; obtained co-sponsorship from Committees on Freight Transportation Economics and Regulation and Intercity Rail Passenger Systems.
- Co-sponsored a 2005 Annual Meeting session "Shared Use of Railroad Corridors and Facilities" with Committees on Rail Transit, Intermodal Transfer Facilities, Commuter Rail Transportation, and Intercity Rail Passenger Systems.
- Organized and sponsored a 2005 Annual Meeting session "Shared and Joint Use of Railroad Corridors."

- Organized and sponsored a 2005 Annual Meeting session “Valuing Local and Regional Rail Freight Services.”
- Organized and sponsored a 2006 Annual Meeting session “Perspectives on the Future of Single-Car Railroad Shipments.”
- Organized and sponsored a 2006 Annual Meeting session “Public Finance for Local Rail Improvements: Opportunities and Issues.”
- Sponsored presentation of a paper by Manuel Terra and Jeffrey Warner entitled “Assessment of Texas Short Lines Railroads” at January 2006 committee meeting.

Planned Annual Actions

During the upcoming triennium, the Committee plans to maintain the same level of intensity. Specific actions will include:

- Soliciting topics for annual meeting conference sessions;
- Selecting topics and create annual meeting sessions;
- Exploring poster session opportunities and create as needed;
- Scheduling brief presentations at committee meetings; and
- Working to incorporate local and regional rail transport issues into mid-year meeting sessions.

Strategy 2: Sponsor or actively participate in workshops, training, and other special events that address issues relevant to local and regional rail freight transportation.

The Committee should actively participate in meetings, workshops, and other events relevant to the mission. Historically, Committee members have been regular participants in rail related workshops, though not through formal direction from the Committee. The Committee has, however, actively participated in both the AASHTO Standing Committee on Rail Transportation (SCORT) and the TRB mid year committee meetings. These opportunities need to be expanded to include other associations.

Actions During the Past Triennium

During the past triennium, the Committee has had regular annual representation at meetings bringing together persons with coincident interests. These include:

- Participation in the TRB Joint Summer Meeting of the Planning, Economics, Finance, Freight, Management, and Environmental Committees held in Portland, OR, with a committee meeting held July 18, 2003.
- Mid year meeting held in conjunction with the AASHTO SCORT Annual Meeting September 14, 2003 in Buffalo, NY.
- Participation in the TRB Joint Summer Meeting of the Planning, Economics, Finance, Freight, Management, and Environmental Committees held in Park City, UT, with a committee meeting held July 27, 2004.
- Mid-year meeting held in conjunction with the AASHTO SCORT Annual Meeting October 5, 2004 in San Diego, CA.
- Participation in the TRB Joint Summer Meeting of the Planning, Economics, Finance, Freight, Management, and Environmental Committees held in Boston, MA, with a committee meeting held July 11, 2005.
- Mid-year meeting held in conjunction with the AASHTO SCORT Annual Meeting August 30, 2005 in Coeur D’Alene, ID.

Planned Annual Actions

During the upcoming triennium, the Committee hopes to continue and even expand the level of participation in such events, specifically to:

- Participate in SCORT and TRB mid-year events.
- Examine opportunities to partner with related committees to sponsor workshops in conjunction with the Annual Meeting.
- Consider opportunities for other special events that focus on local and regional rail freight transport. For example, the Committee will be represented in the TRB organized “Research to Enhance Rail Network Performance: A Workshop” on April 5-6, 2006.

Strategy 3: Promote participation in committee activities with a diverse membership and a large network of friends, with representation from local and regional railroads, Class I railroads, shippers, consultants, academia, and a variety of transportation organizations both public and private.

The Committee’s vitality is dependent upon maintaining contact with the broad universe of constituencies having an interest in local and regional rail freight transportation.

Actions During the Past Triennium

- The committee underwent its triennial rotation in 2005. During this time, care was taken to maintain the desired balance.
- Reestablished contacts with the American Short Line and Regional Railroad Association.

Planned Annual Actions

- Review committee membership and rotate members as needed.
- Maintain e-mail distribution list to add new friends of Committee.
- Seek additional young and woman members for the Committee.

Strategy 4: Through cooperative approaches with related TRB committees and other organizations, serve as a clearinghouse and resource to others to ensure that the transportation community knows the full range and crosscutting nature of issues related to the committee’s mission and that the committee is informed about activities of other organizations and TRB committees.

Actions During the Past Triennium

- As described in Strategy 1, the committee has worked closely with other committees to develop sessions on topics of mutual interest. These committees include:
 - Railroad Track Structure System Design,
 - Steel Bridges,
 - Freight Transportation Economics and Regulation ,
 - Intercity Rail Passenger Systems,
 - Rail Transit,
 - Intermodal Transfer Facilities, and
 - Commuter Rail Transportation.
- The Committee has worked to identify TRB committees and other organizations (AASHTO, AAR, FRA, ASLRRA, AREMA, ITE, ASCE T&DI, etc) needing liaison

and to identify liaison volunteers. Committee members now represent or have membership in each of these outside organizations and are working to ensure that the committee maintains contact with them. The interaction of the committee with other TRB committees is done on a less formal basis. However, committee officers have been representing the committee at both the Rail Group and Freight Systems Group Executive Board meetings. This is a great help in keeping abreast of the activities of related committees.

- The committee has joint membership in the Subcommittee on Shared Rail Corridors and Facilities. Other participating committees are Intercity Rail Passenger Systems, Intermodal Transfer Facilities, Commuter Rail Transportation, and Light Rail Transit.

Planned Annual Actions

The Committee will:

- Continue to actively seek out co-sponsoring opportunities with other TRB committees for sessions and events;
- Hear liaison reports from members working with other TRB committees and with other organizations both to identify joint opportunities and to keep the committee informed of activities of other groups;
- Continue to maintain a close liaison with the Freight Systems Group and other committees in the Rail Group; and
- Explore opportunities for establishing additional joint sub-committees.

Strategy 5: Define transportation research needs for local and regional rail freight transportation and advocate the conduct of research and the development of syntheses for these research problem areas.

Identification of research needs is a key role for TRB committees. While individual members of this Committee are very involved in research, the Committee as a whole has significant opportunities to increase its role in fostering research. There are currently no formal research statements. Development of a recommended research program will be a significant focus area for the Committee during the upcoming triennium.

Actions During the Past Triennium

- The committee regularly tracks ongoing research of interest, and reports on these projects at meetings. The committee has also provided input into these projects. As examples, the committee was approached by the investigators conducting NCHRP 8-42, "Rail-Freight Solutions to Roadway Congestion," and Synthesis of Highway Practice 36-10, "Impacts of Intermodal Freight Terminal Closures."

Planned Annual Actions

- Prepare new research problem statements based on emerging issues. The Millennium Paper outlined a number of broad areas of concern for the industry. It should serve as a basis for the development of research statements.
- Respond to call for problem statements for TRB synthesis program.
- Advocate—through AASHTO committees, the Freight Cooperative Research Program, FRA, and other means—support for funding problem statements.

- Maintain compendium of ongoing research projects and report on their status at the annual meeting.

Strategy 6: Solicit and review papers on local and regional rail freight transportation for TRB publication and presentation.

During the past triennium, the Committee received few papers for review. A more aggressive approach to paper solicitation needs to be adopted, perhaps with formal annual calls for papers. The research statements should be a basis for desired topics.

Actions During the Past Triennium

- Encourage committee members and friends to submit papers for consideration.

Planned Annual Actions

- Solicit committee members for paper topics to be considered for annual call for papers.
- Choose topic for annual call for papers.
- Develop call for papers by March for TRB web site and distribution.
- Assign committee members and friends to review submitted papers.
- Choose papers for presentation and publication.

Strategy 7: Using a broad range of information activities and peer exchanges, communicate the research findings, best practices, ongoing research, and related information on local and regional rail freight transportation.

Actions During the Past Triennium

- Begin work on development of committee web site.
- Prepared and disseminated committee meeting minutes to members and friends.

Planned Annual Actions

- Complete and update the committee web site.
- Publish at least two electronic newsletters each year, including information about the committee, topics, sessions, updates, news alerts, etc.
- Solicit information from TRB staff on status of NCHRP projects for inclusion in the newsletter.
- Look for opportunities to submit newsletter items to other committee/organization newsletters and to publish their items in our newsletter.
- Maintain a comprehensive e-mail list of members and friends and an accurate and complete set of meeting minutes.

STRENGTHS

The Committee at present has a diverse membership representing the railroad industry; numerous public sector agencies at the federal, state, and local levels; academia; the consulting industry; and the financial community. The membership brings to the Committee both a tremendous depth of expertise, broad knowledge of relevant issues and concerns, and a wide range of contacts.

The Committee has been fortunate to have a dedicated and energetic core membership. These members have contributed materially to the development of sessions and other committee activities.

Committee friends have been extremely helpful and committed. They provide significant additional strengths in each of the areas described above and are a major force in promoting interaction with other TRB committees.

The Committee has been very successful in developing sessions for the Annual Meeting. These sessions have featured recognized leaders in the industry, have been well attended, and have received positive feedback.

The Committee meeting held at the TRB Annual Meeting has been well attended by both members and friends.

LIMITATIONS

The Committee has not developed the information tools to disseminate information. There is no web site or newsletter.

Committee members have limited interaction between meetings. Mid-year meetings have not been as well attended as the Annual Meeting. Because of the limited time at TRB events, it is difficult to accomplish all Committee business during them.

While Committee membership is diverse, not all members are able to participate actively. This limits the Committee's ability to accomplish some strategies.

CHALLENGES AND THREATS

The Committee has not become a major force in formulating research in the field. There is not yet a set of research problem statements. More attention needs to be devoted to this area.

With all of the demands of the workplace, members have increasingly limited time and energy to devote to the Committee. In addition, travel budgets are always an issue when attending committee meetings.

Obtaining participation by representative of local and regional railroads has been difficult. These small businesses are typically not focused on research. In addition, they typically cannot afford the time and expense to send people to meetings such as TRB.

OPPORTUNITIES

The railroad industry as a whole is undergoing a remarkable renaissance, and traffic is at an all time high. With highway capacity at a premium in many areas, the trucking industry facing problems related to fuel costs and a driver shortage, and environmental concerns hindering highway expansion, the relevance of local and regional rail freight transportation has never been greater. Recent transportation bills have focused more attention on freight,

and state and metropolitan freight advisory councils/committees are increasingly becoming “rail aware.”

These concerns, among others, point to the continuing relevance of the Committee and its goals. The Committee needs to continue to attract new talent through the periodic member rotation process. The Committee has a major role to play in promoting communication among stakeholders having interests in local and regional rail transport. Furthermore, the Committee should foster the creation of an integrated research agenda by clarifying rail freight transport research needs and opportunities, developing a list of problem statements, and pushing for sponsorship of freight rail related research.