

California's Freight Policy Recommendations for Consideration

There are fundamental elements that must be considered in the process of developing a national freight policy. National freight policy must consider global economic competitiveness and work to promote a sustainable national freight system. Particularly, in California, we must recognize the impact of national freight movement on local/regional economies and neighborhoods. Therefore, sustainability is about stewardship of the system and the environment. Beyond just protecting and fixing the existing system, we also must work to armor elements of the system from vulnerabilities like climate change and other safety and security breaches. However, to make any of these policy considerations a reality, there must be a dedicated funding source for freight. The following are some suggestions for considerations for a national freight policy framework.

Create Dedicated Freight Fund Sources

- Add a Harbor Maintenance Tax expenditure requirement to utilize funding and not let it sit in the Trust Fund beyond a 20% reserve for emergencies. Expenditures should be 90% return to state of origin, with states selecting projects following national guidelines.
- Dedicate a percent of Customs fees proportional to amount of revenue generated in the Custom District to implement freight system preservation, maintenance, operations, safety, and security projects in that Custom district.
- Enable revenue generating activities at safety rest/truck stops with generated funding reinvested in maintenance, operations, rehabilitation, and expansion of those facilities.
- Create a funding program for shortline freight railroads for capital improvements such as improved grade crossings, upgrade of track gauge, and other improvements.
- Create a Freight Program that has dedicated funding, rather than merely making freight projects eligible for existing federal funding at a higher share. The Freight Program should be substantial and targeted to key national priority freight corridors and the full set of multi-modal facilities associated with the corridor.

Better Definition of National Freight System

- Expand the primary freight network identified in MAP-21 beyond the currently designated 30,000 centerline highway miles, to include additional state and local connector routes to intermodal facilities such as seaports, intermodal rail yards, and airports with substantial cargo volumes, and other key freight facilities.
- Expand the network to include additional state highways and local roads with truck volumes that meet national thresholds.
- Expand the primary freight network to include seaports, railroad facilities, airports, maritime navigation channels connecting to seaports included in the network, and other key facilities that meet national freight thresholds.

Community Impact Reduction/Mitigation

- In addition to the existing air quality requirements, include greenhouse gas (GHG) reductions as a goal of the national freight program and make projects that achieve a specified level of GHG reduction eligible for enhanced federal funding share.
- Create federal railroad grade separation program targeted to rail lines on a newly designated priority national freight rail network, similar to priority highway network.
- Emphasize that community impact reductions are eligible uses of federal freight funding.
- Create a truck parking program to increase truck parking opportunities in impacted areas such as along the priority highway network.

Fix Existing System

- Policy recognition should be accorded to maintaining the existing infrastructure to sustain the economy of freight movement.
- Set aside funding could be targeted at strategic backbone system elements, such as 100 percent federal funding or priority funding.

Planning

- Require that freight be included within Metropolitan Transportation Plans.
- Freight Plans should be basis for strategic implementation of national freight policy. MAP-21's requirement for a freight plan allows for a rational discussion of strategic freight needs.