

Bulletin #5

“Get a Move on Freight, Before it’s too Late!”
The essential role of goods movement in Morris County.

September 2007
Morris County Division of Transportation



The Morris County Division of Transportation, in coordination with the Morris County Planning Board, is developing the Circulation Element of the Morris County Master Plan. A series of ten transportation bulletins, which will be released individually, is currently under development to reflect major countywide and regional transportation issues that affect our daily lives. In addition to the bulletins, a technical document is being developed. This document will reflect detailed county projects, demographics, issues, and projections. It is anticipated that these broad based bulletins, which will have a large distribution, will create an exchange of ideas, therefore becoming an important part of the plan's development.

PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED

Bulletin #1: It's Not Cool to Drive to School – An examination of school-related congestion (June 2006)

Bulletin #2: Putting the Brakes on Congestion! – Will it only get worse? (February 2007)

Bulletin #3: Not Another Accident! – Improving roadway safety and enhancing emergency response. (March 2007)

Bulletin #4: Exercise Your Right to Bike or Walk!! – How can we enhance the bicycle and pedestrian facilities in Morris County? (July 2007)

Bulletin #5 presents strategies to manage the existing and forecasted growth in freight movement through northern New Jersey. During the county's municipal outreach to elected officials, planners, engineers, and residents, concerns were raised over increased truck traffic and rail activity. Efficient freight movement is a primary planning goal of the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority's (NJTPA) Regional Capital Investment Strategy. While the growth in truck freight is a sign of positive economic activity, moving a greater share of freight by rail would help the region manage future increases in goods movement. The discussion in this bulletin focuses on the management of truck traffic and rail freight through coordinated planning, infrastructure improvements, and land use decisions in order to improve efficiency and support freight growth.

This bulletin, as well as the previous bulletins mentioned above, can also be found on the Morris County Division of Transportation's (MCDOT) website at www.mcdot.org. Questions may be directed to Deena Cybulski of the MCDOT at mcdot@co.morris.nj.us or by using the contact information provided below.

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Get a Move on Freight, Before it's too Late!

The essential role of goods movement in Morris County

During the nineteenth century, the economic vitality of the New York metropolitan area was dependent upon the efficient movement of coal, iron ore, and produce. The Morris Canal opened in 1831 to transport coal from Pennsylvania and iron from Morris County to towns in the east. The presence of the canal bolstered the region's economy and spurred development in communities such as Rockaway and Dover along its banks. In 1907, service was discontinued on the Morris Canal, which became obsolete because of the advent of railroads and later, highways. Businesses and towns located near rail to take advantage of the economic opportunity, efficiency of freight transport, and jobs the railroads provided. As highways became the major method of freight transportation in the mid 20th century to present, warehouses, distribution centers, and shopping malls developed in close proximity to these major routes of travel.

The efficient movement of goods is vital to economic development and commerce in Morris County. Trucks and trains bring in raw materials for manufacturing and transport finished goods for consumption; thus many jobs are related to and dependent on the freight industry. According to the NJ Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Morris County employs over 63,000 people in wholesale and retail industries and transportation and warehousing, services that depend on the delivery of freight. These job sectors are expected to grow an average of 12% over the next decade. An effective transportation system that optimizes freight capacity must exist if Morris County is to maintain and enhance its economic strength.

Morris County is a net importer of freight tonnage. According to the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority's (NJTPA) Freight System Performance Assessment (April 2005),



trucks transport 99.9% of the intra-state freight destined for Morris County. In addition, Morris County serves as a freight corridor. A large portion of the over 110 million tons of freight that travels through North Jersey traverses the county primarily via I-80 and I-287. Increased port activity and demand for international goods is expected to lead to an increase in truck freight traffic by as much as 80% over the next 25 years. The county road network is already at capacity. Ever increasing traffic congestion and air pollution levels require that freight transportation options be further explored.

Proper land use planning can support freight transportation needs and promote economic development in a manner that reduces traffic congestion and increases both land use and transportation efficiencies. For example, placement of warehouse and distribution centers near highway access can reduce truck traffic on local roads. The redevelopment of brownfield sites in these locations may be particularly appropriate for this type of development.

Large brownfields or other sites may also be developed into Freight Villages. Freight Villages concentrate freight dependent businesses and related freight activities into a convenient and secure location with access to major highways and freight railroads. This reduces the number of trucks that need to travel on local roads between locations and helps cargo move more efficiently to their final destinations. Freight Villages, like truck stops, also provide a secure and convenient area for freight operators to eat and rest.

One rail car can hold three to four times what a single truck can.

Trucks carry 80% of all manufactured freight transported in New Jersey.

More than half of New Jersey's railroads are jointly used for passenger and freight rail.

On a daily basis in New Jersey, trucks moved an average of 519,416 tons of inbound freight and 481,085 tons of outbound freight.

Trucks are involved in a relatively low number of accidents, but the potential severity of a truck-involved accident is much greater than a typical car accident. Well rested drivers are less likely to be involved in accidents. By law, truck drivers must take rest periods, but the limited number of truck stops often forces drivers to seek refuge along the sides of highways and ramps, which become significant hazards to other vehicles. Highway parking is further intensified when existing rest facilities are being utilized above their capacity. The NJTPA is currently conducting a “Truck Rest Stop Study” to evaluate existing conditions and develop recommendations. Early data indicates that highways and ramp parking is a problem on I-287 and I-80 in Morris County. Freight Villages and truck stops help to reduce accidents caused by tired truck drivers by providing safe and secure rest facilities for the people that transport essential commodities to, from, and through Morris County.

Traffic congestion continues to rise in New Jersey. The state, counties, and freight carriers are seeking to have more freight transported by rail; one average freight train can replace between 280 and 500 trucks, helping to reduce congestion (*Railroads and Highway Congestion*, Association of American Railroads, 2006). Land use strategies can focus industrial development along existing rail lines to encourage the use of rail freight transport in Morris County. Targeting freight dependent development along rail corridors, especially warehouse and distribution centers, would allow Morris County to capture new economic opportunities while reducing truck travel on highways and local roads. Furthermore, if Freight Villages are built along rail lines, intermodal transfer stations can be included in these developments to further assist in the delivery of goods and augment the viability of rail freight.

Increased rail freight usage can also have a positive effect on air quality in Morris County. Freight locomotives have become cleaner as technology improves, releasing three times less carbon dioxide (CO₂) than trucks. Additionally, rail is three times more fuel efficient than trucks, making rail ideal for long hauls (*Railroads and Greenhouse Gas Emissions*, Association of American Railroads, 2006). Morris County is currently served by three freight railroad operators: the Morristown & Erie Railway, Norfolk Southern Railway, and the New York, Susquehanna, and Western Railway. Mor-

ris County also owns two rail lines; the Dover and Rockaway Railroad and the High Bridge Branch Railroad.

RAIL IS THREE TIMES MORE FUEL EFFICIENT THAN TRUCKS, MAKING RAIL IDEAL FOR LONG HAULS

Reactivation of abandoned rail lines would enable more freight to travel on rail into and through our region. There are challenges with reactivation. Many of these currently dormant rail lines traverse residential neighborhoods. The potential for increased noise and possible delays of vehicular traffic at rail crossings often prompts opposition to rail line reactivation. Many concerns can, however, be addressed through mitigating actions. For example, the creation of grade separated crossings and installation of automated directional horns at crossings to focus noise primarily along intersecting roads can reduce conflicts with vehicles and nearby residents.

Another concern of residents is that reactivated rail lines will one day be used to transport solid waste. In reality, boxcar dimensions required for hauling trash exceed the physical limitations of most rail lines in Morris County, including the proposed Lackawanna Cut-off, which if restored, would provide passenger rail service between New York City and Scranton, PA. Additionally, the frequency of passenger train trips on existing rail lines make it unfeasible to share the rail line with trains hauling garbage. Public concerns can be addressed by increased public education explaining the benefits of rail freight, the technologies available to minimize potential impacts, and the facts regarding proposed expansion projects.

Morris County must improve the rail freight infrastructure to reduce the impacts of the increased demand for freight movement in our growing regional economy and make the most efficient use of the existing infrastructure. Managing both truck and rail freight issues can best be handled through strategic planning, targeted infrastructure improvements, and land use decisions. The following are proposals to improve freight transportation in Morris County:





Proposals



1 ♦ Managing Truck Traffic

Manage truck movement to guide trucks efficiently through communities, improve traffic flow, and reduce truck traffic along roadways in Morris County.

COUNTY ACTIONS

- ▶ Identify and post signs in locations lacking clear indication of height restrictions and weight limitations.
- ▶ Clearly define existing truck routes through mapping and signage initiatives and identify new truck routes where possible.
- ▶ Incorporate Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) technologies into the county’s transportation network to manage capacity and demand. ITS for traffic management includes dynamic message signs, which direct truck drivers and motorists to alternative routes to avoid accident scenes and congestion.



GENERAL ACTIONS

- ▶ Explore options for providing business incentives supporting off-peak freight transportation to minimize truck impacts on morning and evening commuter congestion.



2 ♦ Supporting Freight Through Land Use

Develop major freight dependent activities near major highways and rail routes to increase the efficiency and connectivity of freight movement.

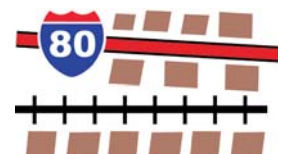
COUNTY ACTION

- ▶ Promote Freight Village development to reduce the need of truck drivers to make multiple trips for distribution, food, fuel, and rest.
- ▶ Review recommendations from NJTPA’s “Truck Rest Stop Study” for future rest stop development and apply them where appropriate.
- ▶ Update the land use inventory along County freight lines to identify vacant land, commercial/industrial buildings, and under utilized parcels that could be used to support businesses requiring freight movement.
- ▶ Work with the Morris County Economic Development Corporation to capture new economic opportunities and identify locations that are appropriate for Freight Villages and businesses requiring rail freight.



GENERAL ACTION

- ▶ Concentrate new warehousing, distribution, major retail areas, and manufacturing activities along principal arterials and rail lines using brownfield sites wherever possible.
- ▶ Provide adequate truck stops and weigh stations to provide rest areas for drivers. Enforce weight limits, which will prevent damage to our roads and bridges, enhancing safety for all users.



3. Rail Infrastructure Expansion

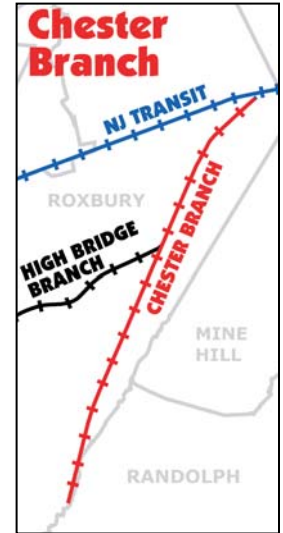
Expand and improve the rail freight system so that it attracts greater use.

COUNTY ACTIONS

- ▶ Assess whether it would be feasible to acquire and rehabilitate the Chester Branch Railroad to provide direct access for rail freight to the county-owned High Bridge Branch.
- ▶ Determine the impact of the Highlands Act and the Highlands Regional Master Plan on the development of land use adjacent to these rail lines.
- ▶ Research the possible extension of the High Bridge Branch to the Raritan Valley Line.

GENERAL ACTIONS

- ▶ Increase funding for rail infrastructure maintenance and improvements that support freight and retain or encourage new employment in the county.



4. Public Outreach and Policy Initiatives

Expand public knowledge of the benefits of freight infrastructure and initiatives.

COUNTY ACTIONS

- ▶ Create public-private partnerships to publish brochures informing companies of what rail freight services are available and how to use rail freight.
- ▶ Educate the public on the benefits of rail freight to increase support for investments.
- ▶ Study viability of creating grade crossing separations, where tracks disrupt traffic flow.
- ▶ Advocate to the public the benefits of truck stops and the need to have them in appropriate locations.



GENERAL ACTIONS

- ▶ Install automated wayside horns at grade crossings, which focus noise primarily along the intersecting roads in order to decrease the noise impact on nearby residents in the vicinity.
- ▶ Identify and offer incentives to companies to encourage rail freight use, creating a more cost-effective alternative.
- ▶ Maximize rail freight usage on NJ TRANSIT owned rail lines during passenger off-peak times.
- ▶ Explore the establishment of “Quiet Zones” at road-rail grade crossings near neighborhoods. A “Quiet Zone” is a section of rail line that contains one or more consecutive public crossings at which locomotive horns are not routinely sounded.
- ▶ Identify and prepare shovel-ready industrial sites near highways or rail lines to facilitate the development on the location. Shovel-ready sites are parcels of remediated land that are pre-approved by the Department of Environmental Protection. New York State has a similar program in place, visit http://www.gorr.state.ny.us/Main_GORR_Pages/NY_International_Plaza_SR121406.html



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