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# Executive Summary

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The efficient movement of freight is the backbone of the Texas economy. Working with local, federal and private stakeholders, The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) is leading efforts to develop the Texas Freight Mobility Plan (TFMP) in accordance with federal guidelines. In order to truly understand freight network challenges and opportunities, TxDOT undertook a robust and diverse stakeholder engagement process and actively engaged the freight community across modes, business interests, government entities and geographical areas.

The TFMP's multifaceted, multi-layered engagement process includes:

- The Texas Freight Advisory Committee (TxFAC), a diverse group of high-level stakeholders, to guide TFMP development
- Two rounds of statewide Listening Sessions to solicit input from the broader freight community around the state
- The Texas Freight Leadership Summit, bringing together key freight and transportation professionals to discuss freight network issues and solutions
- Motor carrier surveys which focused on gathering important trucking industry data and suggestions for improving the network
- Commercial vehicle operator interviews regarding trucking travel patterns
- Other technology-based outreach via the project website, [www.MoveTexasFreight.com](http://www.MoveTexasFreight.com)

As a crucial part of TFMP outreach, two rounds of Listening Sessions were conducted around the state. The first round of 11 sessions occurred in May and June 2013, while the second round of 12 sessions occurred in June and July 2014. These sessions served as the core of the stakeholder engagement process. They are a proven mechanism to engage local, regional and statewide interests, and provided an opportunity for stakeholders to participate in a forum that is focused on them, their issues and their concerns. The sessions were facilitated to ensure meaningful engagement and robust participation from attendees.

The purpose of the first round was to gather information for the TFMP needs identification and assessment, and input into freight project prioritization and freight improvement strategies. During the second round of sessions, TxDOT and the project team presented draft TFMP recommendations that had been developed using input from data analysis, local plans and policies, the TxFAC, and the first round of listening sessions. Participants were invited to comment on the draft recommendations, suggest different or additional recommendations, and discuss ways to prioritize the recommendations.

The Listening Sessions allowed for a variety of perspectives to be incorporated into the TFMP, including the private sector freight community, economic development organizations, local government representatives, elected officials, and other transportation-related interests.

Additionally, they served for meaningful discussions across a wide variety of freight topic areas, allowing the team to develop a statewide plan which represents the diversity of challenges within the Texas freight network.

## 2014 Listening Sessions

This report focuses on the second round of sessions, conducted in June and July 2014. The TFMP team visited each city which hosted a first-round session in 2013, and added Midland/Odessa, a key energy-sector area. Each session was conducted in an identical format to foster a universal outline from which each region could denote statewide and area challenges and solutions.

The 2014 Listening Sessions were held in the following locations, June 10 – July 9, 2014. The sites and session dates were:

### Location and Attendance of Second Round of Listening Sessions

LOCATION	DATE	ATTENDEES
Corpus Christi	Tuesday, June 10, 2014	19
Brownsville	Wednesday, June 11, 2014	41
Laredo	Thursday, June 12, 2014	26
San Antonio	Tuesday, June 17, 2014	29
Houston	Wednesday, June 18, 2014	40
Beaumont	Thursday, June 19, 2014	11
El Paso	Tuesday, June 24, 2014	21
Midland/Odessa	Wednesday, June 25, 2014	28
Lubbock	Thursday, June 26, 2014	15
Tyler	Tuesday, July 1, 2014	13
Fort Worth	Tuesday, July 8, 2014	19
Dallas	Wednesday, July 9, 2014	11

In addition to the sessions listed above, a remote Listening Session was conducted on July 10 to ensure stakeholders who could not attend one of the Listening Sessions could still provide their input. The remote session consisted of a webinar (WebEx) and video conference hosted at TxDOT's Riverside Campus in Austin, with satellite locations at TxDOT district offices in Amarillo, Atlanta, Austin, Brownwood, Bryan, Childress, Lufkin, Odessa, Paris, San Angelo, Waco, Wichita Falls and Yoakum.

At each session, participants were given several informational handouts including a detailed list of TFMP recommendations. Large format maps displayed the proposed Texas Freight Network and more detailed TFMP information centered on the region in question. A PowerPoint presentation led attendees through TFMP background, progress and examples of high-level

TFMP recommendations. The recommendations focused on key TFMP topics including highways, rail, maritime, air cargo, NAFTA and border/ports-of-entry, planning, funding/financing, and policies.

A facilitated discussion followed each topic area, and engaged the participants in discussing whether any recommendations should be changed, whether any were missing, and how the recommendations should be prioritized. On some points, the participant comments helped to confirm perceptions that had been suggested elsewhere. In other cases, comments provided fresh perspectives that did not appear in other sessions, plans, or previous outreach efforts. While previous reports and studies help provide an overall view of regional and statewide conditions, they do not fully capture the on-the-ground knowledge gained through daily experience.

## Stakeholder Input

More than 700 observations and comments were captured during the 2014 Listening Sessions. The largest percentage of comments, approximately 45 percent, focused on highways. Some key overarching themes that appeared in many comments include:

- Freight movement is closely linked with economic competitiveness
- The growing Texas economy, the energy sector, and trade with Mexico are straining the current freight network
- There is a lack of available funding for freight network improvements, and alternative funding strategies may be required
- While increases in capacity may be necessary, operational and technology improvements can play an important part in alleviating congestion issues
- Regular communication between government agencies, and between public and private sectors, is crucial for solving problems and planning for the future

While recent planning studies and initiatives provide a wealth of technical information about the state's transportation network, many of these studies fail to address some of the more nuanced, less easily quantifiable aspects of freight planning, such as impacts on community livability, benefits of regional and statewide goods movement, unique operational needs of regional industries, and unknown future economic conditions. The Listening Sessions helped bring local, real-world issues into the TFMP planning process and provide a more holistic set of recommendations to address the state's freight challenges.

# 1. Overview

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## 1.1 Introduction

TxDOT is developing the Texas Freight Mobility Plan (TFMP) in response to the latest federal transportation bill, “Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century” (MAP-21). MAP-21 not only encourages each state to develop a comprehensive freight plan, it encourages each state to pursue an extensive public engagement process to ensure plan recommendations reflect a diverse range of freight and transportation interests.

The federal legislation recommends establishing a freight advisory committee made up of key stakeholders representing a variety of modes and interests. This group will help shape and direct plan development by providing input from real-world experiences across the freight network. Consistent with those recommendations, the Texas Transportation Commission established the Texas Freight Advisory Committee (TxFAC), which includes representatives from various freight modes, business interests, geographic areas and elected offices.

While the TxFAC provides ongoing and multifaceted input into TFMP recommendations, several other forums and venues were developed to engage the Texas freight community. These include:

- Statewide Listening Sessions
- Texas Freight Leadership Summit
- Motor carrier surveys
- Commercial vehicle operator interviews
- Other technology-based outreach (via the project website, [www.MoveTexasFreight.com](http://www.MoveTexasFreight.com))

This stakeholder input will provide TxDOT with a clearer understanding of how the existing transportation infrastructure is being used, the system’s strengths and weaknesses, and opportunities for improvements.

## 1.2 Statewide Listening Sessions

As part of the outreach component of the TFMP, two rounds of Listening Sessions were conducted around the state. The first round of 11 sessions occurred in May and June 2013, while the second round of 12 sessions occurred in June and July 2014. These sessions serve as the core of the stakeholder engagement process. They are a proven mechanism to engage local, regional, and statewide interests, and they provide an opportunity for stakeholders to participate in a forum that is focused on them, their issues, and their concerns. The sessions were facilitated to ensure meaningful engagement and robust participation from attendees.

This report focuses on the second round of Listening Sessions. The purpose of the first round was to gather information for the TFMP needs identification and assessment, and input into freight project prioritization and freight improvement strategies. During the second round of sessions, TxDOT and the project team presented draft TFMP recommendations that had been developed using input from data analysis, local plans and policies, the TxFAC, and the first round of listening sessions. Participants were invited to comment on the draft recommendations, suggest different or additional recommendations, and discuss ways to prioritize the recommendations.

The 2014 Listening Sessions allowed for a variety of perspectives to be incorporated into the TFMP, including the private sector freight community, economic development organizations, local government representatives, elected officials and other transportation-related interests. They also served for meaningful discussions across a wide variety of freight topic areas, allowing the team to develop a statewide plan which represents the diversity of challenges within the Texas freight network.

### 1.3 Process

TxDOT recognized the need to conduct multiple Listening Sessions across the state, as freight needs vary across diverse regions. The TFMP team visited each city which hosted a first-round session in 2013, and added Midland/Odessa, a key energy-sector area. Each session was conducted in an identical format to foster a universal outline from which each region could denote statewide and area challenges and solutions. To achieve a wide range of awareness within the freight community, the team compiled a collection of stakeholders with diverse interests in the freight and transportation network including:

- Transportation providers, e.g. railroad, motor carrier, steamship line
- Freight generators, e.g. distributors, manufacturers, retailers, forwarders
- Elected officials and appointed representatives
- Transportation and planning agencies
- Economic development organizations and business groups
- Governing entities
- Enforcement agencies, national and statewide

Invitations and announcements were sent via email and U.S. Postal Service to individuals and association leadership. A grassroots notification was utilized, including phone calls, notices during other meetings and agendas, and other miscellaneous informal discussions to promote the Listening Sessions. An online registration process was provided for planning purposes, and all information regarding session dates, times and locations was posted on [www.MoveTexasFreight.com](http://www.MoveTexasFreight.com).

### 1.3.1 Listening Session Locations

The diversity of business sectors throughout Texas, as well as the different degrees of modal availability within the state, has led to a variety of freight transportation needs. To capture the unique needs and potential solutions observed by the private sector, 12 sessions were conducted in population centers within driving distance for participants. **Exhibit 1** shows the location, date and number of attendees at each Listening Session and **Exhibit 2** is map that depicts each location.

**Exhibit 1: Location and Attendance of Second Round of Listening Sessions**

LOCATION	DATE	ATTENDEES
Corpus Christi	Tuesday, June 10, 2014	19
Brownsville	Wednesday, June 11, 2014	41
Laredo	Thursday, June 12, 2014	26
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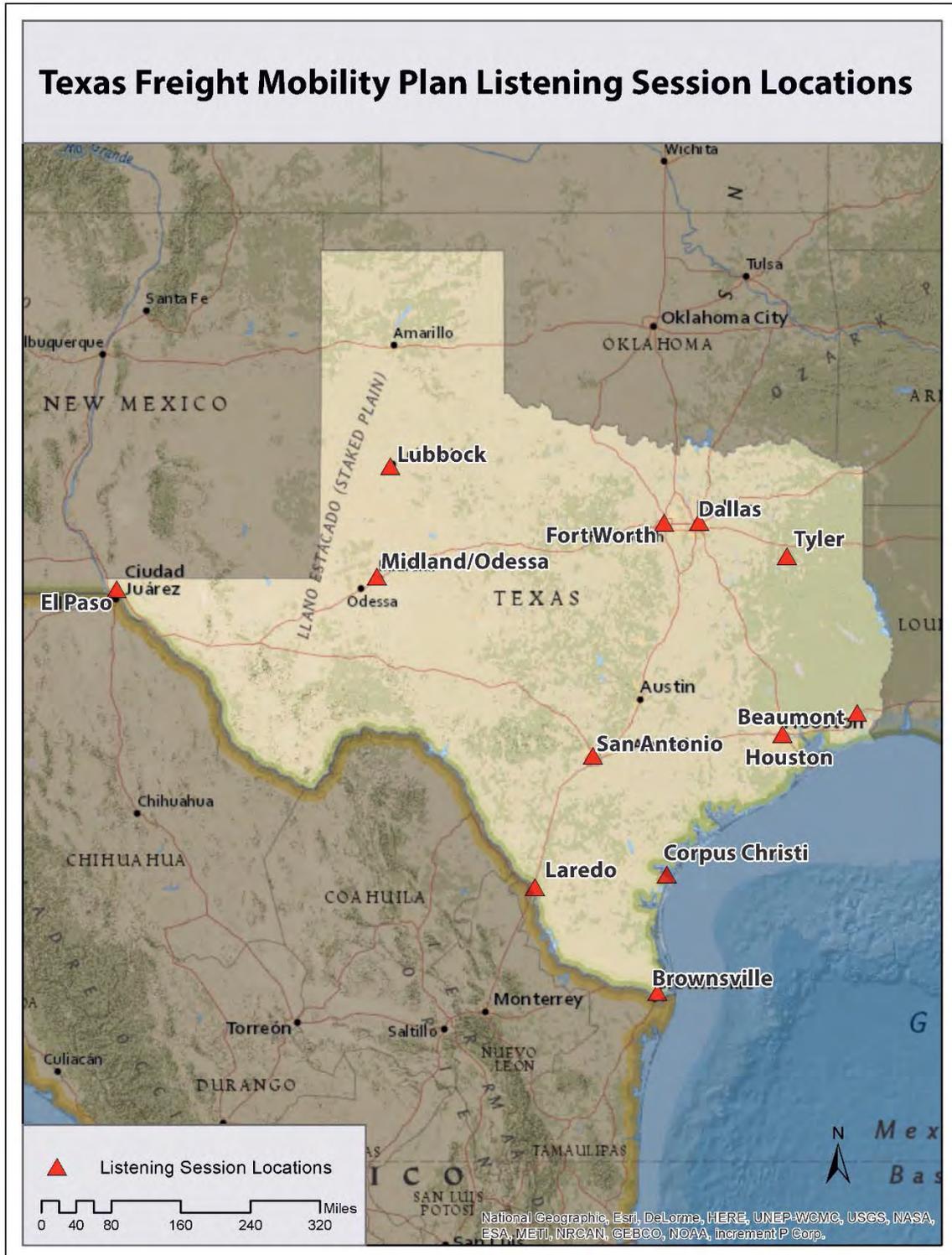
In addition to the sessions listed above, a remote Listening Session was conducted on July 10 to ensure stakeholders who could not attend one of the Listening Sessions could still provide input. The remote session consisted of a webinar (WebEx) and video conference hosted at TxDOT's Riverside Campus in Austin, with satellite locations at the following TxDOT district offices:

- Amarillo
- Atlanta
- Austin
- Brownwood
- Bryan
- Childress
- Lufkin
- Odessa
- Paris
- San Angelo
- Waco
- Wichita Falls
- Yoakum



Participants could participate in the remote session by either attending the session at each respective district office, or participate via WebEx. More than 24 participants either took part by WebEx or at one of the district offices.

**Exhibit 2: Map of Texas Freight Mobility Plan 2014 Listening Session Locations**



The sessions were scheduled for three hours, with most taking place between 9 a.m. and noon (the El Paso session took place between 10:30 a.m.- 1:00 p.m. due to the venue's schedule).

### 1.3.2 Session Discussion

The 2014 Listening Sessions were organized for TxDOT and the TFMP team to receive input on draft TFMP recommendations. Attendees were presented with specific handouts regarding the session and the TFMP including:

- Session agenda
- Summary of the city's 2013 Listening Session
- TFMP framework
- Detailed list of TFMP recommendations
- Two questionnaire forms for participants to write down additional thoughts on TFMP recommendations, as well as provide feedback on the sessions themselves



*Brownsville Listening Session, June 11, 2014*

The Listening Sessions included a comprehensive PowerPoint presentation which:

- Welcomed the attendees
- Outlined the TFMP background and provided an update on progress
- Discussed key themes from input received during 2013 sessions, unique to each city
- Facilitated group discussion by presenting high-level recommendations across multiple TFMP topic areas including highway, rail, maritime, air cargo, NAFTA and border/ports-of-entry, planning, funding/financing, and policies

A facilitated discussion following each topic area guided the attendees to provide observations on whether they agreed with the recommendations, whether any recommendations were missing, and how the recommendations should be prioritized. Participants were also invited to write down additional comments or thoughts following the sessions and email them to the TFMP Project Manager, Caroline Mays.

Two large-format maps were displayed at each session – a statewide map of the proposed Texas Freight Network, and a local map showing proposed projects within each Listening Session region. Participants were invited to view the maps either prior to or following each session, and discuss any questions or comments with TFMP team members.

## 2. Stakeholder Input

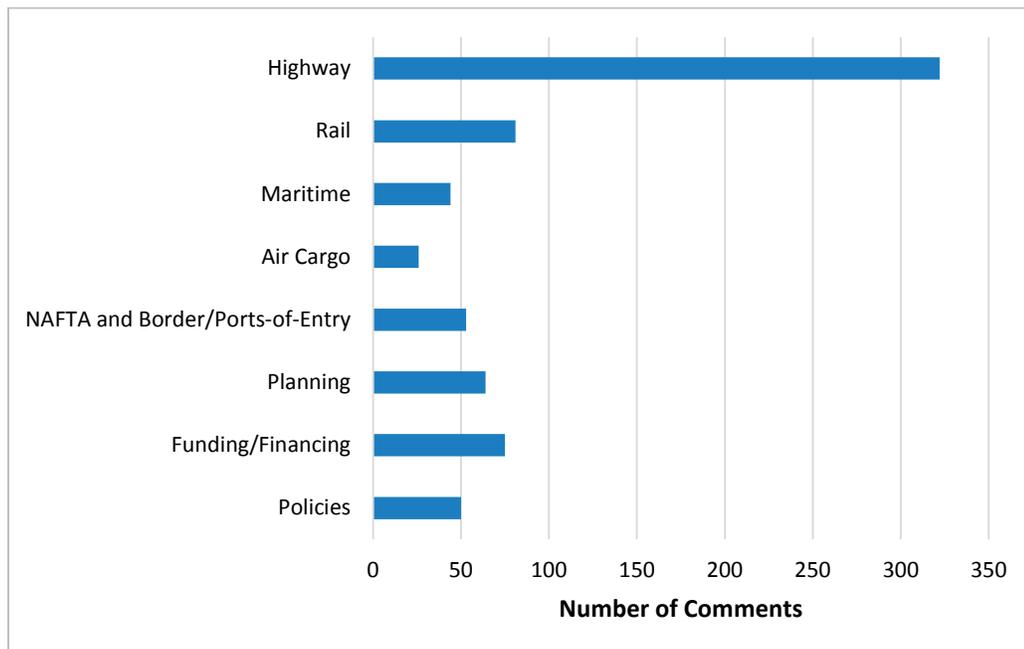
### 2.1 Key Themes from Stakeholder Comments

More than 700 observations and comments were captured during the 2014 Listening Sessions across various TFMP topic areas. The topic areas discussed during the 2014 sessions were:

- Highway
- Rail
- Maritime
- Air Cargo
- NAFTA and Border/Ports-of-Entry
- Planning
- Funding/Financing
- Policies

The number of responses by topic area is shown in **Exhibit 3**. Highway comments accounted for approximately 45 percent of all responses. The Highway topic area included various subcategories (capacity, operations and technology, bridges, interchanges/intersections, and safety) which gave participants several opportunities to provide input.

**Exhibit 3: Listening Session Comments by Topic Area**



### **2.1.1 Highway**

Nearly half of all comments made by stakeholders during the 2014 Listening Sessions focused on highways. Five subcategories discussed under highways included:

- Capacity
- Operations and Technology
- Bridges
- Interchanges/Intersections
- Safety

#### **Capacity**

Capacity was the No. 1 issue among highway comments. Congestion and bottlenecks were identified by stakeholders as key concerns in the state's freight transportation system. Participants suggested adding lanes to major freight corridors, designating and improving alternative routes (including frontage roads), and constructing bypass routes around urban areas. Maintaining state of good repair in a limited-funding environment was also a priority for stakeholders.

In terms of new freight corridors in Texas, participants mentioned the importance of I-69, Ports to Plains, and an additional east/west corridor in the Rio Grande Valley to supplement I-2. Improvements to I-10 in West Texas, I-20, I-30 and I-35 and were also mentioned as crucial to facilitating the flow of freight.

#### **Operations and Technology**

Most comments in this category focused on minimizing interactions between truck and passenger vehicle traffic, and accommodating oversize/overweight loads. Participants discussed the need to segregate truck traffic on highways (via truck-only lanes, truck restriction lanes or other options) in order to improve safety and reduce congestion. While some stakeholders felt oversize/overweight loads were damaging to roadways and should not be encouraged, others stressed the importance of finding ways to accommodate these loads, especially around port areas. Many noted the need for an oversize/overweight network, as well as the need to allow these trucks to travel on toll roads.

Stakeholders suggested many opportunities to improve freight transportation through technology, such as better use of dynamic messaging signs, providing real-time traffic and construction information, vehicle platooning, and alternative technologies such as the Freight Shuttle.

#### **Bridges**

Many comments focused on the need to raise bridge heights to accommodate larger trucks, and some local authorities discussed the problem of frequent bridge strikes. Other stakeholders felt raising bridge heights across the network might not be the best use of funds, since a relatively

small percentage of freight traffic is oversized. They suggested designating alternative routes for oversized loads.

### **Interchanges/Intersections**

Outdated and/or unsignalized intersections were identified as an issue throughout the state. Many interchanges were constructed decades ago and were not designed for either the volume, weight or size of current traffic, particularly large trucks. These intersections cause congestion bottlenecks and safety hazards. Participants discussed the need for signalization, larger turning radii, and improved traffic flows.

### **Safety**

A majority of highway comments included elements of safety improvements, including reducing congestion, maintaining state of good repair, improving frontage roads, segregating truck and passenger vehicle traffic, better use of technology, and improving interchanges and intersections. Undertaking a public education campaign on how cars can drive safely alongside trucks could help minimize accidents.

Stakeholders also noted the need for more truck stops throughout the state. They suggested using public-private partnerships to incentivize the private sector to develop new truck rest stops along the freight network. Several participants mentioned the need to designate hazmat routes, so truckers carrying hazardous materials know where to travel and do not jeopardize local community safety.

## **2.1.2 Rail**

Many representatives from the railroad industry participated in the Listening Sessions, including Class 1s, Short Lines, and Rural Rail Transportation Districts. Key issues related to rail included:

- Address at-grade rail crossings which cause delay and safety hazards
- Need for additional rail capacity to ease congestion and facilitate freight flows
- Need for new rail corridors, particularly in West Texas and energy-sector areas
- Lack of intermodal facilities in key freight areas
- Need to better facilitate intermodal connections, particularly port/rail and rail/truck

The largest number of rail comments focused on at-grade crossing issues, particularly in urban areas (Laredo and El Paso noted significant at-grade crossing concerns in their downtowns). At-grade crossings can delay traffic and cause safety and noise concerns. Local authorities are looking for ways to partner with the railroads to address these problems, or are looking to TxDOT to take the lead in these discussions.

Others noted that current rail service is largely operating at capacity, with no opportunity to expand service. Increasing amounts of freight demand additional capacity, perhaps through

double tracking or new rail lines. Participants in West Texas discussed the need for a north/south rail connection linking Mexico and the Midwest through the Midland/Odessa and Lubbock areas. With large amounts of agricultural freight, Lubbock specifically noted the need for an intermodal facility in the area, as cargo currently travels via truck to intermodal facilities in Dallas/Fort Worth, only to be shipped back west on rail lines.

### **2.1.3 Maritime**

Stakeholders emphasized the importance of Texas ports to state competitiveness and the energy sector in particular. Key issues raised were:

- Deepen channels to 50 feet or greater to accommodate larger ships, particularly post-Panamax
- Lack of funding for port and waterway maintenance
- Improve “outside the gate” connectivity to rail and truck intermodal facilities
- Increase use of container-on-barge service via the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway (GIWW)
- Capitalize the Port Access Fund

As cargo ships increase in size, ports must find ways to accommodate these vehicles in order to remain competitive. Other ports in the U.S. can handle the biggest ships, while Texas ports require large freighters be broken up into smaller ships in order to access port facilities. While expansion is important, simply maintaining current depths is a challenge with limited funds. One participant noted that only one-third of the necessary funds to maintain the GIWW are available.

Once at port, stakeholders noted the importance of first mile/last mile connections to major highway corridors and rail lines, particularly for oversize/overweight loads. Many roads leading to/from ports were not built to handle the cargo transported on today’s ships. Also, coordination is often lacking between ports and “outside the gate” intermodal operations.

Many maritime stakeholders recommended capitalizing the Port Access Fund, a state account for port maintenance and improvements, which exists but has never been funded. Those funds would be crucial to maintaining the economic competitiveness of Texas ports.

### **2.1.4 Air Cargo**

While the fewest Listening Session comments related to air cargo, it remains a crucial link in the freight network. The key air cargo issues included:

- Need for financial assistance for air cargo facilities; TxDOT currently does not have jurisdiction to work with the larger airports
- Improve intermodal access to air cargo facilities

- For areas without major airports, identify routes to connect with large international airports

While overall freight travel in Texas is increasing, air cargo has decreased in recent years due to a variety of factors. The decline is not spread evenly across all airports; some have declined more, some less and some have even increased their freight business. Those with a strong freight business discussed the need to improve their cargo facilities, but lacked funding. Larger airports mentioned wanting to work with TxDOT, but current guidelines only give TxDOT jurisdiction over smaller regional airports.

Other issues included deficient or congested first mile/last mile connections to airports, or inadequate intermodal facilities to transfer cargo between planes and trucks. Air cargo is mainly comprised of high-value and time-sensitive goods, so efficient intermodal connections are crucial for delivering cargo to its final destination. For areas with no airports or with only domestic service, it is important to identify efficient routes to large international airports, such as DFW or Houston's George Bush Intercontinental Airport.

### **2.1.5 NAFTA and Border/Ports-of-Entry**

With trade between Texas and Mexico growing rapidly, many comments in West and South Texas focused on border crossing issues and coordination with Mexico. Main themes included:

- Importance of trade with Mexico, and growth in volumes
- Reduce congestion and delays at border crossings
- Need for coordination among multiple government agencies
- Increase use of technology at border crossings
- Promote and utilize available border capacity during off-peak periods

Throughout Texas, the freight community is well aware of the key role Mexico plays in international trade and the U.S. economy. Maquiladoras across the border play a vital part in manufacturing supply chains. The Mexican agriculture industry supplies much of the produce sold in U.S. supermarkets, and lengthening delays pose concerns for perishable goods.

Stakeholders consistently described delays at border crossings, stemming from congestion, inadequate capacity, inspections and lack of coordination between agencies on both sides of the border. Participants discussed repetitive inspections conducted by Customs and Border Patrol and the Department of Public Safety, and the need for a streamlined inspection and/or pre-clearance process for freight providers who cross the border regularly. An improvement in border crossing efficiency could translate to significant time and money saved. Stakeholders agreed that increasing congestion and delays at border crossings could hurt economic competitiveness.

While participants largely agreed on border crossing issues, there were different opinions on ways to solve the problems. Some recommended increasing capacity by constructing new

border crossings, adding lanes to existing crossings, and increasing staffing levels to process more vehicles. Others suggested utilizing capacity currently available during off-peak hours, such as nights and early mornings. While using off-peak hours could be an effective way to decrease delay without the expense of new infrastructure, it would require shifts in supply chain schedules involving multiple parties which would take time and effort to implement.

New technology holds the promise of streamlining the border crossing process without large-scale infrastructure investment. Better data communication, shipment tracking, pre-clearance, or even Freight Shuttle technology could help improve processing times. Certain programs such as Project 21 in El Paso are piloting new technology for more efficient border crossing operations.

### **2.1.6 Planning**

As TxDOT looks ahead to implementing TFMP recommendations and managing the overall freight network, the project team solicited input from stakeholders on planning recommendations. Key planning themes included:

- TxDOT should facilitate coordination between local, state and national authorities as well as the private sector
- TxDOT needs a multimodal focus in its planning efforts, not just highways
- TxDOT should be at the table during local land use planning discussions
- Need for public education campaigns to link transportation and economic development
- Make sure rural areas are adequately represented in the planning process

Planning-related comments were quite diverse, but many of them revolved around some key ideas. The most common was the need for better coordination between government agencies, and between the public and private sectors. Stakeholders opined that many problems facing the freight network are caused by agencies and organizations not communicating or working together. Several participants felt TxDOT should be the one to organize and lead communication efforts.

Attendees suggested TxDOT should broaden its outlook on transportation and consider the network as a whole, not just highways. This would help re-define TxDOT's role in statewide transportation. Also, while stakeholders understood that land use planning was largely outside of TxDOT's jurisdiction, they recommended TxDOT take a more active role in coordinating with local land use and economic development agencies, in order to create a more informed context for transportation planning.

Many stakeholders felt the general public does not understand the importance of freight to the state's economic well-being. While citizens are largely supportive of economic growth, lower prices, and wider selections of goods and services, they tend to see freight as a nuisance and not something that directly contributes to positive economic outcomes. Participants discussed the need for a public education campaign that focuses on the linkages between freight and economic development.

Listening Session attendees in more rural areas of Texas stated that while rural areas lack significant population, they have a much larger percentage of freight traffic and are vital to the freight transportation network. Changes in funding allocation formulas are needed in order for rural regions to better compete for funds, and improvements in rural areas will benefit the entire freight system. They also noted that funds go further in rural areas than in urban areas, so the same amount of money can be spent more effectively on rural projects.

### **2.1.7 Funding/Financing**

Stakeholders recognized the importance of funding and financing to implementing TFMP recommendations. The majority of transportation funds come from the federal gas tax, which has not been raised since 1993. This puts a severe strain on the transportation sector to find alternative funding sources for transportation projects. Key issues related to funding/financing included:

- Funding is the No. 1 barrier to implementing TFMP recommendations
- Consider adjusting current transportation funding mechanisms
- TxDOT needs to expand its use of public-private partnerships
- Change the way TxDOT allocates funds so rural areas can better compete for funding
- Highlight the economic development potential of transportation improvements in order to focus on investment, not expense

While participants were mainly supportive of TFMP recommendations, they realized that lack of funding would be a significant challenge to implementing the plan. TxDOT already has far more needs than funds, especially as Texas' population grows and congestion increases.

Listening Session attendees suggested several ways to increase available funding, which fell into two basic categories: changing current transportation funding mechanisms, and working with the private sector to help fund improvements. The first category included raising and/or indexing the gas tax, taxing CNG and LNG fuels, and implementing VMT taxes, tolls or other user-based taxation methods. The second category included extensive discussions of public-private partnerships to fund everything from capacity improvements to truck stops. Many participants felt the current political climate in Texas would not permit traditional revenue increases, and leveraging private money would be necessary to fund vital projects.

Attendees addressed the need to better inform state legislators of the importance of the freight network. Instead of seeing transportation improvements as expenses, TxDOT and other key stakeholders need to clearly define the link between transportation and long-term economic competitiveness. They also need to state the consequences of inaction. With much of the legislature representing rural regions, several participants felt TxDOT would have a better chance of success if rural areas were able to compete more effectively for funding.

### 2.1.8 Policies

Effective policies will be necessary in order to implement TFMP recommendations. Participants were asked to identify key policies they would raise if they were given 10 minutes to speak with elected officials. These policy recommendations included:

- Emphasize the link between transportation investment and economic development
- Emphasize the importance of trade between the U.S. and Mexico
- Clarify TxDOT's changing role in state transportation
- TxDOT needs greater authority to form partnerships with the private sector
- Promote a paradigm shift to encourage technological innovations, e.g. the Freight Shuttle

Like the planning comments, policy-related comments were diverse and focused on everything from funding to technology. Several overarching themes ran through the comments, however, which related to key freight issues.

Many themes were funding-related, including emphasizing the link between transportation and economic development (and the importance of U.S./Mexico trade) in order to encourage investment, and adjusting current legislation to more easily allow TxDOT to partner with private industry. Several participants suggested the TFMP strongly recommend alternative freight technologies, such as the Freight Shuttle, in order to create a "paradigm shift" and not rely on traditional freight modes in future.

## 3. Conclusions

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While the first round of Listening Sessions focused on identifying key issues and potential solutions, the second round of sessions provided meaningful input into the development and refinement of TFMP recommendations. Participants received an understanding of the TFMP process, goals, and preliminary recommendations, and in turn contributed their thoughts on how the TFMP could best serve the needs of their organization, agency or geographical area. Sometimes stakeholder opinions conflicted with one another, but these circumstances provided valuable opportunities for the TFMP team to understand multiple points of view.

The TFMP process includes a balanced approach to problem-solving involving data analysis, local plans and policies, and multiple layers of stakeholder outreach. In a large, diverse state, a nuanced understanding of local issues and opportunities is crucial to developing a freight plan that responds to real-world challenges. The Listening Sessions provided necessary insights into the unique needs of individual areas and interests. While many of the specific issues identified by the stakeholders fall under the domain of other agencies and are not within TxDOT's jurisdiction, this does not eliminate the possibility of TxDOT influencing outcomes or taking a leadership role in improving freight movement across the state.

Input gleaned during the Listening Sessions will be used to further refine TFMP recommendations before the plan is complete. Participants were invited to stay involved in the process by visiting [www.MoveTexasFreight.com](http://www.MoveTexasFreight.com) and sending additional comments to TxDOT project management. As the TFMP moves toward implementation, opportunities for stakeholder engagement will continue, and the communication fostered by the TFMP stakeholder outreach process will help develop and maintain ties between TxDOT and the Texas freight community.



## 4. Appendices

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