

USDOT Talking Freight Seminar Summary

Critical Urban and Critical Rural Freight Corridors Guidance and Designation Process Discussion

August 29, 2018

Critical Urban and Critical Rural Freight Corridors

Chandra Bondzie, from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Office of Freight Management and Operations, focused the discussion on the Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) guidance on designating and certifying Critical Rural Freight Corridors (CRFCs) and Critical Urban Freight Corridors (CUFCs). She explained that the National Highway Freight Network (NHFN) was created by the Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act and has four components: 1) the Primary Highway Freight System (PHFS), which was designated in statute and comprised of around 41,000 centerline miles; 2) those portions of the Interstate System not part of the PHFS; 3) CRFCs; and 4) CUFCs. The PHFS did not come with a method for modification until re-designation, which will take place in 2020. To provide flexibility to the NHFN, the second portion (portions of the Interstate not part of the PHFS) allows all Interstates to be covered. Additionally, states have the opportunity to designate their own CRFCs and CUFCs, adding flexibility to incorporate state and local knowledge and to reflect last mile freight segments. She noted that CRFCs and CUFCs can be designated on a rolling basis and that there is no consequence for states that do not submit them.

Ms. Bondzie said the definition of CRFCs can be found in the FHWA guidance ([here](#)), but noted that the final potential descriptor for a CRFC ("G. is determined by the State to be vital to improving the efficient movement of freight of importance to the economy of the State.") provides flexibility, allowing states to choose an important segment of road even if it does not fit in to the other categories. She explained that the definition of CUFCs can also be found in the FHWA guidance but emphasized an important point: in an urbanized area with a population of 500,000 or more, the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), in consultation with the State, may designate the CUFC. In an urbanized area with 500,000 individual or less, the State, in consultation with the MPO, may designate the CUFC. She noted that the final potential descriptor for a CUFC ("D. is important to the movement of freight within the region, as determined by the MPO or the State.") provides the same flexibility as the final descriptor in the CRFC.

Both planned roadways and freight facilities can be designated as a CRFC or CUFC. Additionally, non-PHFS Interstate Systems can be designated as a CRFC or CUFC. Ms. Bondzie explained that high mileage states are limited to spending their National Highway Freight Program funds on the PHFS, CRFCs, or CUFCs and cannot spend them on non-PHFS Interstate Systems. To get around this, they can designate non-PHFS Interstate Systems as a CRFC or a CUFC.

CRFCs and CUFCs must be public roads and there are mileage limitations laid out by states. In general, the limitation for CRFCs is 150 miles or 20 percent of the total PHFS mileage in the State while the limitation for CUFCs is 75 miles or 10 percent of the PHFS mileage in the State. Exact numbers can be found in this online table [here](#). States are not required to certify all their CRFCs and CUFCs at the same time.

Ms. Bondzie explained that the CRFCs and CUFCs are proposed by either the MPO or State and then sent to the local FHWA state administrator for approval. After the state FHWA administrator approves the CRFCs or CUFCs, they must send them to FHWA headquarters within 10 days so headquarters can add them to the map. Ms. Bondzie noted that FHWA is working on a national mapping effort to ensure all segments are mapped. The map should be made public in the coming months.

She noted that the NHFN is different from the National Multimodal Freight Network (NMFN). The NMFN is intended to be used for planning purposes and is not currently associated with a specific funding program. It has gone through two rounds of public comments and is currently in development. Meanwhile, the NHFN is connected directly to National Highway Freight Program funding.

Washington State Department of Transportation Presentation

Wenjuan Zhao, from the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT), explained that Washington State's approach to designating CRFCs and CUFCs included both collaborative work and technical work. Washington State's State Freight Plan was published in 2017 and addressed many items, including CRFCs and CUFCs. They used the PHFS as a screening criterion to inform the development of their freight investment plan. She noted that the FAST Act specified the mileage limit for Washington State: the CUFC limit is 81.6 miles and the CRFC limit is 163 miles. Because Washington State has a large truck freight network, the limited mileage meant that only a small percentage of truck routes could be considered.

For designating the CUFCs, WSDOT found that only one urbanized area had a population of over 500,000, meaning the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) was in charge of designating the CUFCs in that region, in consultation with the State. The remaining urbanized areas had CUFCs designated by WSDOT in coordination with other MPOs. WSDOT took the lead on designating all of the state's CRFCs but also sought input from regional transportation planning organizations (RTPOs) across the state. The designation process began in February 2016, at which time PSRC and WSDOT signed a memorandum of understanding. WSDOT, PSRC, and the other RTPOs met frequently with each other, with other stakeholders, and with representatives of the FHWA division office throughout the process. The process was completed in August 2016, at which time Washington State became the first to get their corridor designations certified by the FHWA.

When designating the CUFCs, WSDOT and PSRC both started with the same set of criteria, as defined within the FAST Act. However, they used different datasets. PSRC screened their corridors using the region's nine designated Manufacturing and Industrial Centers (MIC) as well as connections to ports. WSDOT screened their corridors based on industrial parcel clusters based on land use datasets as well as connections to freight intermodal facilities. Both PSRC and WSDOT also screened the corridors for active freight projects.

For CRFC designation, WSDOT used the FAST Act criteria as well as a two-step screening approach: 1) initial screening based FAST Act criteria to identify candidate corridors; and 2) final screening to narrow down the corridors with active freight projects.

Ms. Zhao noted that the NHFN map in Washington State is not continuous but that it captures the most important freight routes in the state and is geographically balanced. She indicated five key takeaways from the process: 1) make sure to have a strong working relationship with the MPOs and RTPOs in the state; 2) use established committees to coordinate and engage stakeholders; 3) communicate limitations to achieve buy-in and to establish realistic expectations; 4) corridor designations can be revisited and re-designated as time goes on; and 5) the process allowed Washington State to identify National Highway Freight Program eligible projects that would benefit the freight transportation system.

Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments Presentation

Jon Schermann, from the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, explained that the National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board (TPB) is the federally designated MPO for D.C, parts of Maryland, and parts of Virginia. The TPB coordinated with the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT), the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT), and the D.C. Department of Transportation (DDOT) as well as the TPB Technical Committee and Freight Subcommittee to designate the CUFCs in the region. This was difficult because the member states requested different timelines – Maryland planned to complete their designations prior to both Virginia and D.C. The stakeholders wanted to develop a defensible process using readily available data and to ensure it addressed each state's unique situation. The CUFC mileage differed between each state: Maryland had 75 total CUFC miles, with 25 in the National Capital Region; Virginia had 83.35 CUFC miles, with 17.80 in the National Capital Region; and D.C. had 75 CUFC miles, all of where were located within the National Capital Region.

The CUFC designation methodology differed slightly between states. Maryland partnered with Cambridge Systematics to develop freight density scores in their State, a score developed based on the proximity of links to freight intensive areas. By combining freight density and truck volumes, the stakeholders found an overall score for each link and selected the top links based on planned MDOT investments.

For Virginia, they used truck volumes, freight density, and intermodal connectors to create the overall scores. Freight density in Virginia was determined based on COSTAR data which they used to sum the rentable building area of freight intensive building types on a segment. Once the scores were developed, the corridors were ranked by score and selected based on planned investments.

D.C. leveraged their 2010 District Truck and Bus Route designations and also took into account various other factors, such as traffic, freight generators, roadway classification, and planned projects to designate their corridors.

The official CUFCs were designated on November 15, 2017. Mr. Schermann said that coordination and collaboration between the MPO and the State DOTs was essential as were frequent internal meetings to ensure those involved understood how the process worked. During the process, TPB encouraged all stakeholders to think of the CUFC as a funding network and emphasized that they could be re-designated as needed.

Question and Answer

Q: What was the iterative process used to identify the top 25 candidate links for each state in the National Capital Region?

A: Mr. Schermann said they looked at the corridors as a tool and scored segments higher if they made important links. They also attempted to combine smaller segments into meaningful larger segments in order to come up with a map that seemed reasonable.

Q: Has with WSDOT or TPB used the designations yet, and if so, how has it changed how you allocate funding?

A: Ms. Zhao said they have adopted the designations and they have already received freight formula funds in the State. She noted that one of WSDOT's screening criteria was to identify projects on the freight plan. Mr. Schermann said the state DOTs are in charge of allocating the freight formula funds. So while TPB did select corridor segments that had planned capital improvements, he was unsure if any portion had received funds.

Q: How many total miles are there of the Interstate System not designated as part of PHFS?

A: Ms. Bondzie said the number changes every day as states designate new segments. She said FHWA will try to keep the mileage totals update on their website ([here](#)) and most recently are updating the segments through May 1, 2018. They plan another update in about six months.

Q: How often will FHWA update the maps given that routes change frequently?

A: Ms. Bondzie said they are updating the maps right now up to May 1, 2018 and plan to update them again in six months. Their goal is to create an interactive map that will allow users to zoom in and out to see the routes in more detail. This will also allow them to keep track of corridors that have been submitted over time.

Q: Do CUFCs and CRFCs have to connect to the Interstate System?

A: Ms. Bondzie said they do not have to connect.

Q: Does FHWA have guidance for updating or changing corridors after they have already been designated?

A: Ms. Bondzie said FHWA is working on such guidance but emphasized that the CUFC and CRFC designations can occur on a rolling basis.

Q: Does FHWA aim to have the NHFN replace the National Network from the 1982 Surface Transportation Act?

A: Ms. Bondzie said she did not think that was FHWA's intention. The National Truck Network has not been sunsetted and so remains current and ongoing. She acknowledged that FHWA has received a lot of feedback about the complexity of the number of existing networks and the similarity of the acronyms.

Q: When will the next notice of funding opportunity for the INFRA program be issued?

A: Ms. Bondzie did not know.

Q: Has either WSDOT or TPB planned to sequence their corridors to change to match completed projects?

A: Ms. Zhao said WSDOT has designated all their possible CUFCs and CRFCs and has allocated their formula funding through 2020. Because the FAST Act expires in that year, and therefore so does its funding, they have not thought about potential re-designation. Mr. Schermann said the North Capital Region's projects are also programmed for several years so their re-designations will also not happen any time soon.

Q: What is the average turnaround time for CUFC and CRFC approval by the state FHWA administrator and have there been any denials?

A: Ms. Bondzie the FHWA division in the State typically takes around a week to approve the designations. She has seen some questions going back and forth between the FHWA division offices and the MPO or state but they have been simple requests, like correcting errors or clarifying reasoning. After the state division approves the corridors, they have 10 days to send them to headquarters. So far, 23 states have designated some portion of their CUFCs and CRFCs.