Freight Needs

On Wednesday, September 25, the Freight Subcommittee, which included representatives from many area industries as well as GVMC, MDOT, the Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce and The Right Place, met to determine current issues in shipping and receiving freight.

The results of the meeting and the issues identified are below.

It was noted that the City of Grand Rapids has grown significantly in number of jobs versus residents, which has resulted in additional commuters in and out of the city and therefore more congestion. Currently, there are no secondary routes. **Areas where bottlenecks consistently occur causing driver delays and loss of profit include:**

- East Beltline/WB I-196/96 interchange backups due to construction
- I-96 between Cascade Road and I-196
- Northbound US-131 to Cedar Springs
- The need for a new bridge on Freeman Ave. over the CSX line/yard between Hall St. and Market Ave. (primarily for truck traffic)
- US-131 between 28th and the S-Curve (has the oldest pavement in Grand Rapids and the highest traffic volumes per day outside of Detroit); the Hall/Franklin/Wealthy area needs to be reconfigured due to closely placed interchanges and congestion issues
- Work may need to be done to accommodate the new Amazon Distribution Center in Gaines Twp. as bottlenecks may occur there in the future

**Safety and operational concerns included:**

- Sixty trucks/day travel from US-131 to Hall to Godfrey alongside an elementary school. The City of Grand Rapids is trying to redirect truck traffic away from Grandville Ave. in this area, way limits routing options
- Clearing incidents on US-131 can cause delays also
- Limitation on when refuse/waste trucks can access new residential areas in downtown Grand Rapids

**Freight rail issues included:**

- The Grand Elk railyard along Hynes Ave., east of US-131, is at capacity more often than not, and the railyard is landlocked by US-131 and businesses. Therefore, additional yard capacity is needed to accommodate growth.
- The Genesee Wyoming (Grand Rapids Eastern RR) line from Lowell to Grand Rapids is under new ownership and may result in service changes.
- There was a need for more intermodal rail service from Grand Rapids, vs Chicago or Ohio.
Proposed solutions:

- MDOT discussed some options for improving US-131 operation between Hall Street and the S-Curve area. There is currently an active Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) study, targeting this segment.
- Building peak use lanes/applying Active Traffic Management (ATM), which includes shoulders that are built to the standard of a lane and are opened up during peak periods along some freeway corridors. The benefit is that less space is needed (instead of a lane and a shoulder, which is how lanes are traditionally built, only a lane-width shoulder is needed), but ITS infrastructure is also involved.
- Expanding CSX rail yard, which impacts the potential bridge on Freeman Ave. between Hall St. and Market Ave. Conceptual plans are in the City’s engineering office, but it is costly. This bridge could take truck traffic away from the current routing along Hall Street to US-131, through neighborhoods and schools.
- Shifting toward a more intermodal system to ship and receive freight. There was significant interest from industry in taking trailers off the road and using rail to move goods. This would enhance safety, reduce congestion, and improve air quality. An intermodal facility could potentially be built on vacant land along existing rail lines.
- Developing a container rail service in the Grand Rapids area.
- Increasing connectivity and reducing congestion between Holland and Grand Rapids by using the West Michigan Express.
- Reacting more quickly to clear incidents and crashes to reduce traffic congestion.
- Increasing the use of weave/merge lanes on area freeways.
- Add interchange at M-6/48th St. and east end of the GRF airport.

Challenges to resolving the issues identified above include:

- The US-131 freeway between 28th St. and the S-curve project is cost prohibitive at current funding levels.
- CSX is a large company and sees Grand Rapids as the end of a spoke versus a hub, which could make it difficult to enhance intermodal service options in Grand Rapids. The Committee expressed interest in reaching out to the intermodal department at CSX and speaking to them directly. The Chamber of Commerce is open to facilitating these conversations, but needs a strong case and buy-in from the business community. It was noted that CSX has 40 acres of property on Market Street that is not currently in use, and there may be opportunity there for an intermodal shipping terminal.
- The downside of vital streets (complete streets) is that they often result in road diets being used and a loss of lanes, which makes it difficult for bus and truck traffic to navigate, especially when a bus and truck are traveling the same segment at the same time. The result is pushing the truck traffic to highways, which can lead to congestion and more travel time delays for all traffic.
• Waste haulers start at 3:00 am for garbage pickup to reduce congestion from vehicles traveling behind them. However, some locations have noise ordinances in place that restrict operating times, which can make it difficult for waste haulers to avoid hauling trash at peak times.