

ERPC Freight Plan

Public Sector Stakeholder Outreach

Prepared for:
Erie Regional Planning Commission
Metropolitan Planning Organization

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Outreach Findings

During Phase 1 of the ERPC Freight Plan, the consultant interviewed public sector stakeholders for an initial identification of freight planning issues and opportunities. Representatives of Erie County, City of Sandusky, Perkins Township, City of Huron, City of Vermilion, and Oxford Township participated. Interviews were documented, as attached.

This report identifies the common themes or perspectives from the public sector interviews. The ideas have been organized into three categories:

- Identified Freight Problems and Issues in the Erie Region.
- Freight and Other Regional Opportunities.
- Potential Freight Related Projects in the Erie Region.

The results of the stakeholder interviews will be incorporated as a starting point into the freight plan's development during Phase 2 and considered along with the findings of the regional freight profile. Further analysis will be conducted to identify current freight planning issues and obstacles in the Erie Region as well as future opportunities. The private sector stakeholders will be engaged in a freight summit during Phase 2. The summit will help steer the plan, its goals and strategies, and recommendations, and identify opportunities for partnerships with the public sector.

Identified Freight Issues and Problems in the Region

Safety and Rail-Freight Connectivity, among all Modes of Transportation

- Safety concerns are related to blind curves and sight lines at intersections on roadways and rail crossways. Conflicts and crashes in the region are often related to driver performance.
- Improve northern and southern freight rail and truck connectivity and coordinate traffic flow.
- Clarify and designate freight routes along railways, highways, and waterways and designate transition areas.

Government Fragmentation and Economic Impacts within the Freight Industry

- The Chamber of Commerce and other economic development agencies need to be involved in rail freight planning initiatives through a common point of contact.
- Due to the pandemic, there are employee shortages and increasing fuel prices, which is impacting manufacturing and distribution activity.
- There are funding shortages in freight planning, a lack of truck drivers, and other employee shortages affecting projects and timely deliveries.

Public Sector Interviews

Erie County
City of Huron
City of Sandusky
City of Vermilion
Oxford Township
Perkins Township

Inconsistent Land Uses and Needed Infrastructure Investments

- Land use planning/zoning and freight access to commercial and industrial areas are uncoordinated.
- Similarly, land use and freight access around waterways and ports needs to be compatible with economic, environmental, and recreational interests.
- There is no regional land use plan for locating manufacturing and distribution centers along freight corridors and serving the corridors with reliable water and sewer infrastructure.

Freight and Other Regional Opportunities in the Region

Designate Growth Areas and Consistent Land Uses along Freight Corridors and Target Economic Development

- Support opportunities for growth through better access to designated areas. Coordinate the land use controls for preferred types of development at specific locations. Incorporate environmentally sensitive guidelines and design standards.
- Target water and sewer infrastructure improvements to designated growth areas that are designated for freight economic development.
- Consider the feasibility of designating quiet zones in neighborhoods, cities, and towns that have rail or truck freight traffic.
- Foster public-private partnerships in the freight industry and look for opportunities for coordination between government agencies and private industries.
- Develop methods to share information among freight planning agencies and private companies in support of informed and equitable decisions.
- Integrate and communicate freight planning initiatives with rural communities to support economic development.

Encourage Smart Transportation Improvements and Investments

- Synchronize freight deliveries to help minimize traffic and to be more efficient and improve real data sharing and technology between agency partners.
- Improve multi-modal connectivity at targeted locations to help with coordinated freight traffic flow.
- There is interest in exploring the value of a congestion management system and intelligent transportation system for freight and coordinate with all modes of transportation.

Potential Freight-related Projects in the Region

Listed by mode but not necessarily exclusive

Rail

- Vermilion's freight train loop detector systems sometimes fail due to cold temperatures and other issues. When the loop system breaks, it blocks rail traffic as well as vehicular traffic in

town. There is interest in converting the loop system to a radar system to be more efficient, safer, and quieter.

- There is a rail connector for the northern and southern tracks west of the City of Vermilion. At the connector area, there is often confusion and lack of coordination causing a backlog of rail traffic. As a result, the rail cars block the vehicular traffic at the crossways.
- Coordinate the different rail lines and traffic flow, specifically at the connector area west of the City of Vermilion.
- There are railroad crossing delays on SR 99 just south of SR 113. There is a need for a warning light and advance travel notifications when the gates are down at the crossway.

Trucks/Roads

- The location of the two Ohio Turnpike interchanges limits access and connectivity to the City of Cleveland.
- At the Sunnyside Exit on Highway 90, there is only a southbound exit. A northbound exit is needed for easier access to Vermilion.
- Assess traffic volumes on SR 4 North of Perkins Avenue in Sandusky and identify an alternative freight route(s).
- Butler Street and Superior Street are the most heavily traveled truck routes in Sandusky and are in poor condition. They need to be improved.
- Widen SR 98 to three lanes to give Erie County a solid north/south truck route.
- Assess and improve roadway intersections.
 - Widen SR 4 at various intersections, particularly between Perkins Avenue and Bucyrus.
 - Improvements are needed at the intersection of SR 4 and SR 99. Many crashes have occurred at this location. A traffic circle is planned for this location.
 - Improve sight lines at the intersection of SR 4 and SR 113. There are road pitches and obtuse angles impeding sight lines.
 - Improve sight lines at the intersection of SR 269 and Strecker Road. There is a steep elevation in the road with high-speed traffic and it is a safety concern.
 - The SR 269 and Portland Road intersection has visibility concerns.
 - The intersection of SR 99 and Harris Road is a problem location near the turnpike overpass.
 - The intersection of SR 99 and Wood Road has a lot of agricultural traffic. There are deep ditches on the sides of the roads.
 - The intersection of SR 99 and Strecker Road is narrow, which creates difficult turning radii for trucks.
 - The trucks often run through the stop sign at the intersection of SR 269 and Strecker Road, which is a freight route.
- Drivers are blindly using GPS.
- Designate connectors to major arterial roadways to aid in access management.

Ports

- Improve private shipping and intermodal connectivity at the Port in Sandusky Bay.
- Designate land uses clearly along the waterfront near Sandusky and other waterfront areas and incorporate environmentally sensitive standards as well as aesthetic and design standards.
- Create clear and safe wayfinding signage for freight traffic and identify the port areas that would benefit from good signage. Make sure land uses are consistent and coordinated.
- The City of Sandusky has two unused docks; they need to be upgraded to safely accommodate active freight service, e.g., for coal and salt.

Intermodal

- The Former Triple Crown Intermodal area is unused, and there is an opportunity for a new multi-modal facility at this location. This could provide greater connectivity between Ohio, Canada, and New York.
- Create a new intermodal facility near Lake Erie providing better access to Columbus.

Stakeholder Perspectives

What perspectives or ideas would you like to be considered through the freight plan's development?

"Greater allocation of funds specific to repairing truck routes and industrial park drives, as road damage from truck traffic is far greater than passenger vehicles." Josh Snyder, City of Sandusky

What do you see as the major freight transportation problems and opportunities for our region?

"There is a lot of noise going through the City of Huron due to freight transportation. Consider Railroad Quiet Zones through the neighborhoods, towns, and smaller cities." Erik Engle, City of Huron

What are the critical issues and trends impacting freight transportation now and into the future?

"Some of the issues impacting freight transportation include supply shortages, energy and sustainability concerns, congestion, public health and safety, system performance and management, funding shortfalls, resiliency and security threats and decreasing rail freight." Erik Engle, City of Huron

What transportation improvements do you think would most benefit our region and why?

"There is a north track and a southern track that runs through Vermilion and a connector west of the City. There is some confusion between the two rail lines at the connector area, which causes blocking, slows train traffic, and blocks the rail crossways." Tony Valerius, City of Vermilion

"The price of fuel is the major impacting issue now in our economy." Tony Valerius, City of Vermilion

Implications for the Freight Plan

Freight Infrastructure

- Retailers, manufacturing companies, and freight industries are seeking safe, quick, and quality freight transportation movement from one destination to another, especially as e-commerce continues to grow, requiring close coordination and communication.
- The trucking industry requires reliable highway travel, clearly designated routes, and intermodal connections to transport goods from one mode to another. Clearly defined routes and signage are needed to create safer routes of travel, including to ports.
- Information sharing through technology and congestion management integrated within the freight industry will enhance and support efficient and safe transport of freight goods.
- Federal, state, and local funding sources and other resources are needed to assist in implementing the region's freight plan, projects, and strategies.

Freight-oriented Economic Development

- The Erie MPO region is geographically located to support logistics coordination, freight industries, and intermodal movement of goods between Canada, the United States, Cleveland, Columbus, and Pittsburgh.
- Collaborative strategies among the public and private sectors are needed to effectively develop manufacturing and other industrial opportunities.
- Community land use and environmental regulations should be coordinated for infrastructure ready sites along freight corridors.

Attachments – Public Sector Interviews

Erie County Engineer's Office

City of Huron

City of Sandusky

City of Vermilion

Oxford Township

Perkins Township

Erie County Engineer's Office

Matt Rogers, Project Engineer

March 16, 2022

1. **What do you see as the major freight transportation problems and opportunities for our region?**
 - County highway system engineers and townships too
 - Little involvement in freight transportation
 - Consider truck traffic as bridge design etc.
 - Uniquely placed viz Ohio turnpike and the two interchanges
 - Route 2 also as major limited access with connections to CLE and beyond
 - Opportunity to foster growth through easy access
 - Plenty of land for development (notwithstanding land use preferences)
 - Government private sector relations need to improve especially from the perspective of the private sector perceptions (relationship building to get beyond the broad-brush perceptions)
 - Easy to fall into trap of thinking of area as tourism only or to an extent of not focusing on other sectors for growth and opportunities for growth (Cedar Point, etc. including greater awareness of how destinations like Cedar Point get their deliveries)
 - Fragmentation of government viz townships, County and the varied functions, regional planning, hurdles to overcome potential for one stop points of contact and to have all players sit around the table

2. **What transportation improvements do you think would most benefit our region and why?**
 - Coordination of infrastructure and interchange improvements
 - Greater dialogue and exchange among infrastructure planners and providers
 - Sanitary sewers and facilities to some of the locations for increased growth in freight industry, Route 4 for example
 - Roads throughout the county should be able to serve freight well local all the way up to state

3. **What are the critical issues and trends impacting freight transportation now and into the future?**
 - Truck drivers related topics
 - Crashes as related to the driver performance
 - Drivers more "blindly" relying on GPS (overreliance)
 - Bridge that gets hit that is GPS directed
 - The need for trucking and rail counterparts needs to come to the table

4. **In what ways can freight mobility be improved through greater collaboration between the freight industry and the public sector, specifically transportation planning agencies?**
 - Promote the willingness to communicate
 - Communicate the value of doing so

- Possible role for the Chambers and other business associations to promote collaboration, compare plans, discuss how regional planning can support these efforts, how to earmark some areas for development
 - Information sharing
5. **What other perspectives or ideas would you like to be considered through the freight plan's development?**
- Not discussed/no notable response

City of Huron

Erik Engle, Planning Director; Russ Critelli, Engineer

March 30, 2022

1. **What do you see as the major freight transportation problems and opportunities for our region?**
- There is a lot of noise going through the City of Huron due to freight transportation. Consider Railroad Quiet Zones through the neighborhoods/smaller cities. There needs to be better coordination of incoming and outgoing rail freight and consideration of pedestrian connectivity and crossings. Sometimes there are bottle neck situations with both incoming and outgoing rail freight running simultaneously.
 - Lack of direct North/South freight connectivity and limited access for trucks; only served by Rt. 4/250 as direct connection.
2. **What transportation improvements do you think would most benefit our region and why?**
- These are some smart transportation improvements that are needed in the Erie Region. Many coordinated infrastructure improvements should be considered including bridges, sidewalks, and pedestrian crossings over railroad right of ways incorporating pedestrian crossing guard gates.
 - Connectors to major arterials to aid in access management.
3. **What are the critical issues and trends impacting freight transportation now and into the future?**
- Some of the issues impacting freight transportation include supply shortages, energy and sustainability concerns, congestion, public health/safety, system performance and management, funding shortfalls, resiliency/security threats, and decreasing rail freight. Some of the current trends in rail freight include: innovation in AV/drone technology, energy innovations, integrated seamless travel, street design and aesthetic enhancements, and intelligent transport systems considerations for congestion management.
 - Transportation hub connections/Transit oriented development (better consideration of land use planning with mobility/freight); connected vehicle technology.

4. **In what ways can freight mobility be improved through greater collaboration between the freight industry and the public sector, specifically transportation planning agencies?**
 - There should be increased transparency with data sharing where feasible to make better informed decisions especially from a qualitative and equity perspective. The region needs to improve integration of safety through data collaboration and outreach initiatives. The region needs to expand and integrate the needs of rural communities through collaboration with the freight industry. Agencies should incorporate best outreach and public involvement strategies in planning initiatives with the freight industry and be transparent with their contacts.
 - Improvement of real time data sharing; better usage of tech/data between partners.
5. **What other perspectives or ideas would you like to be considered through the freight plan's development?**
 - Most has been covered in the Erie Region LRTP. A challenge or negative in our region is a shortage of truck drivers due to the pandemic and other economic issues.

City of Sandusky

Josh Snyder, City Engineer

March 25, 2022

1. **What do you see as the major freight transportation problems and opportunities for our region?**
 - Former (Triple Crown truck) Inter-modal on Old Railroad Road is unused, unsure why. Inter-modal from Lake Erie would seem to be an opportunity, like activating a new multi-modal facility location on the lake. This could open the area up for transporting bulk products to and from Canada, and New York. Currently we have Coal and Road (rock) Salt dedicated docks, nothing otherwise.
 - Two unused docks are adjacent to the active coal dock, overgrown but acceptable with roadways that need to be upgraded.
 - Coal is brought in and distributed via train car.
 - The City of Sandusky is the landowner.
2. **What transportation improvements do you think would most benefit our region and why?**
 - SR 4 widening at intersections, the entire length from Perkins Ave. to Bucyrus.
 - SR 98 with 3-lanes to give Erie County a solid North/South truck route. Inter-modal from Lake Erie. Activating a new multi-modal facility location on the lake. Columbus – Sandusky North South Corridor, direct route.
 - Deep open ditches apply to SR 4, rural in many areas—ditches need to be filled, widening for quicker routes, faster speeds to expedite moves north and south and from Erie County to Columbus.

3. What are the critical issues and trends impacting freight transportation now and into the future?

- Not “critical,” but in the city, we have poorly conditioned industrial park roads and truck routes.
 - Superior Street
 - Other dead end cul-de-sac concrete streets, hard to justify
- The conditions of these roads deter businesses from using them and they end up driving on non-truck routes or looking to move to invest in properties and Cities with better roads.
- Funding for industrial roads is costly with concrete roads, etc. Reconstruction is expensive with removal and rebuilding from the surface.
- Keep a focus on the condition of the industrial routes or else trucks will be using residential streets. Keep industrial roads in good condition and identify a funding source to upgrade this road.
- Huron had a proposed tenant if the road were to be upgraded. They were viewed favorably because Erie County Development Corporation supported this proposal because of approximately 100 proposed jobs in the region.

4. In what ways can freight mobility be improved through greater collaboration between the freight industry and the public sector, specifically transportation planning agencies?

- Address public relations for designated truck routes and advertising of designated truck routes county-wide. For the benefit of truck drivers and the trucking industry.
- There is a greater understanding of the impacts of truck weights and their impacts for elected officials.

5. What other perspectives or ideas would you like to be considered through the freight plan's development?

- Allocation of funds specific to repair truck routes and industrial park drives, as road damage from truck traffic is far greater than passenger vehicles. This requires beefier pavement designs and more costly construction.
- We have Butler Street and Superior Street here, both heavily truck travelled and our roughest riding and poorest condition concrete roadways by far.

City of Vermilion

Tony Valerius, Services Director

April 5, 2022

1. What do you see as the major freight transportation problems and opportunities for our region?

- The City of Vermilion's main issues deal with the trains and freight transportation. They have two sets of tracks that run through the City and a high volume with approximately over 150 trains that run daily on Norfolk Southern northern track. There is not nearly as much train rail freight volume on southern track (was not sure of that track's name/owner). The City of Vermilion has designated quiet zones. The City has had to close a couple rail crossings at various times due to problems with the loop detectors. The loop detector system goes under the asphalt and when there is a problem, they have to dig up asphalt and sometimes they hit loop detectors, which becomes a problem. It can take a long time to fix and be costly. They are looking into the radar detectors and would like to have a grant or additional funding for them. The City workers are well trained to install the loop system. The radar would be much better and more cost effective and better overall. Loop detectors malfunction sometime. These are at the three street and pedestrian crossings in town. Cold temperatures also effect the loop system. They want more radar detectors to help with the quiet zones, safety, and to leverage the funding to convert the three loop systems at the crossings in Vermilion.

2. What transportation improvements do you think would most benefit our region and why?

- There is a north track and a southern track that runs through Vermilion and a connector west of the City. There is some confusion between the two rail lines at the connector area, which causes blocking, slows train traffic, and blocks the rail crossways. As a result, the vehicular crossways become blocked, and it slows the vehicular traffic as well. This connector area affects the flow of train traffic and vehicular traffic.

3. What are the critical issues and trends impacting freight transportation now and into the future?

- Fuel prices right now are a major issue. They do not see a lot of truck traffic in Vermilion. Highway 90 to the south of Vermilion gets a little truck traffic, which is south of the City. It is a rural exit. You can only go south off the exit – one ramp. They need a northern bound exit and ramp to provide easier access to Vermilion at the Sunnyside Exit.

4. In what ways can freight mobility be improved through greater collaboration between the freight industry and the public sector, specifically transportation planning agencies?

- Vermilion is a small city and does not have a freight planning committee. The largest issue is rail freight which just passes through the City (There are no manufacturing plants located there. Ford closed years ago).

5. What other perspectives or ideas would you like to be considered through the freight plan's development?
- It would be great to have radar detectors. It would help the noise issue in the City. It would also be helpful to add a northern ramp at the Sunnyside Exit and would help the City economically.

Oxford Township

Dennis Schreiner, Township Trustee

March 18, 2022

1. What do you see as the major freight transportation problems and opportunities for our region?
- Railroad crossing delays on SR 99 just south of SR113. – trains for more than 20 minutes, heading s on 99 once passed Streaker Rod ½ mile down 99 traffic has long back -ups with no turn around option – need for a light or warning that RR gates are down, advance travel information to detour. Warning device in enough time to detour.
 - Intersection of SR 269 and Portland Road—elevation in the road with high-speed traffic, major problem of sight lines
 - Intersection of SR 269 and Strecker Road—stop sign running on Strecker and do not see traffic –269 is a freight route out of Bellevue to Castalia—Ag traffic to grain mills and packing houses
 - Intersection of SR 4 and SR 113 (in Huron County, Lyme Township) just south of the Groton Twp Line—road headed south near Erie County line, road pitches at obtuse angles, tilted road, turns of less than 90 degrees accelerating down the abyss. Sight line issues...not many fatalities – near Erie County line
 - Intersection of SR 4 and Strecker Road—stop sign running with bad crashes – mostly trucks that can't stop when there is a car running
 - Intersection of SR 4 and SR 99 (Traffic Circle planned for 2023 start)—obtuse angle, crashes, and T-bones, and head-ons. Slow crashes at bad intersections, Truck can't make turn and fall off road. Traffic circle planned to start at end of 23. Dennis lives about a mile from it.
 - Intersection of SR 99 and Harris Road (both north and south of the Turnpike Overpass)—major problem, Harris Road intersects with 99 n and s of the turnpike overpass. Turnpike is elevated about 25 feet, very narrow overpass. Traffic sight line problems with stone trucks from the Quarry and stopping problems for the trucks. Lifeline helicopters frequent landings.
 - Intersection of SR 99 and Wood Road—at other end of Wood Road, Agricultural supplies business, Ag traffic, farmers picking up at Wensic Farm and difficulty negotiating the narrow intersections with deep ditches on 3 of the sides, with traffic stoppages. Head on including semis.
 - Intersection of SR 99 and Strecker—similar narrow intersection difficult to negotiate the intersection, stopped at RR crossing, left and right turn problems with tight intersections.

- Amount of traffic on SR 4—volume of traffic on SR 4 with Cedar Point North of Sandusky—turnpike Traffic accessing Cedar Point—4 as an alternative to traffic to SR 250 (which is an awesome road).
2. **What transportation improvements do you think would most benefit our region and why?**
 - Widen SR 4 – entire length between turnpike and SR 2 – 5 miles
 - Short term—widen intersections 113 and 4 and Strecker Road and SR 4
 - Problem intersections with multiple stop signs and some stop lights with visibility problems – 269 and Portland (shave the elevation north of 269 or elevate the intersection)
 3. **What are the critical issues and trends impacting freight transportation now and into the future?**
 - Zoning and widening of Portland Road and SR 4 has occurred as a big help with light and turn lanes—helps big stone trucks
 4. **In what ways can freight mobility be improved through greater collaboration between the freight industry and the public sector, specifically transportation planning agencies?**
 - Not discussed/no notable response
 5. **What other perspectives or ideas would you like to be considered through the freight plan's development?**
 - Not discussed/no notable response

Perkins Township

Angela Byington, Community Development Director

March 22, 2022

1. **What do you see as the major freight transportation problems and opportunities for our region?**
 - Making sure freight has access to commercial corridors/big box outlets
 - 250, Perkins Ave
 - Route 4
 - All as important freight assets
 - Location opportunity yet no present freight issues
2. **What transportation improvements do you think would most benefit our region and why?**
 - Route 4 as a possibility for more improvements, ditches and utilities, capacity may be ok
 - Reduction of other traffic to keep highway open
 - No seen need for capacity adds now such as interchanges, etc.
 - If rail increases and Old RR would get greater use, it might need to be improved

3. **What are the critical issues and trends impacting freight transportation now and into the future?**
 - Employee shortages and associated backlogs impact on companies manufacturing and distribution activity
 - Post Covid and full capacity may have impacts to monitor

4. **In what ways can freight mobility be improved through greater collaboration between the freight industry and the public sector, specifically transportation planning agencies?**
 - Local – private shipping through port at Sandusky Bay—associated routing for local jurisdictions to more accommodating
 - Drop off back to highway location, signing, etc.
 - Understanding the routes and possibility for better routing
 - Land use issues on the water, may be different locations for storing coal, etc. To continue to redevelop the waterfront in Sandusky

5. **What other perspectives or ideas would you like to be considered through the freight plan's development?**
 - Overall, no issues, logistics seem to be working well in Perkins or traffic issues, etc.