

12/6/23 HTAC/Multimodal Freight (Targeted Stakeholder Consultation)

Description: AECOM staff facilitated a discussion at the regularly-scheduled Harbor Technical Advisory Committee (HTAC) meeting about transportation issues and opportunities related to the port, harbor issues and multimodal freight in and through the MIC area.

What We Heard – Comments:

Transportation Issues

- It is important for the economic vitality goals to be met, viable regional partnerships and networks must be created, across states and including Canada, far beyond the Duluth-Superior area. Regarding the port, this means all the way through the Seaway to the Atlantic Ocean. Doing this would vastly increase economic vitality and better use the water-based transportation system.
- Related to that point, the system has choke points throughout that affect freight movement and thus need to be considered in the Minnesota State Freight Plan.
- Concerns were expressed over how much crude oil is being moved via rail and the risk associated with this given numerous rail accidents across the country.
- Important to ensure tribal rights are maintained.
- Consider how traffic patterns in both Duluth and Superior will be significantly disrupted for several years during Blatnik Bridge construction.
- The condition of the docks in the port is a key issue; many of the docks are very old and not up to current standards and need rehabilitation.

Solutions and Opportunities

- Strategies we can consider to better develop these partnerships? Suggestions included:
 - Develop a “short seas shipping” network within the Great Lakes that could alleviate tonnage (and thus wear and tear) on the highway network. Nearly all the freight leaving this port is bulk items, such as taconite; we could utilize the waters to move far more types of items, but this needs coordination.
 - A related objective in the plan could be to develop an integrated freight movement system.
 - Another strategy would be to make the gross tonnage hauled by truck consistent across states. The new Blatnik Bridge should be able to support weight limits that enable transport of heavy loads into and out of the port terminal.
 - A related idea would be to include overweight and high-load corridors to transport the heavy components of the freight system, along economic development corridors, and connected to intermodal terminals.
- It was noted that a good plan needs to have measurable steps to demonstrate whether or not we are making progress towards meeting the goals. We want and need to have measurables that show we are making progress, identify future needs more clearly, and give us things to celebrate and promote.

Key Takeaway:

- Establishing regional partnerships must be created, across states and internationally (including Canada), is considered key to economic growth of the Duluth-Superior port.