



**Visualize 2050**  
**Planning and**  
**Programming Process**

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## **Freight Planning**

**Part 10 of 27**



National Capital Region  
**Transportation Planning Board**

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# OVERVIEW OF FREIGHT PLANNING

The National Capital Region's multimodal transportation system is vital to the economy of the region and to the quality of life of its residents. It connects people and businesses to important regional activity centers and to major domestic and international markets. Each year hundreds of millions of tons of freight valued in billions of dollars move over the region's roadways and railways and pass through its airports. The region's service-based economy, with its growing employment and population, drives demand for freight in the region.

Evolving logistics practices, changes in where goods are produced and how they are distributed, and increasing urbanization are but a few of the factors that will impact how freight will move across the region in the future. The National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board (TPB) has long recognized the importance of freight which continues in Visualize 2050 as guided by the TPB's Synthesized Policy Framework. The TPB's regional transportation goals of reliability, maintenance, and efficient system operations are directly tied to freight movements. Providing options for travel and goods movement, design and use of technologies is highlighted in the framework to enable a resilient region. The TPB recognizes that in order to achieve livable and prosperous communities, a high-quality transportation system is necessary to support economic competitiveness and attract businesses to the region; and to this end, moving freight into, out of, and within the region is essential.

## TPB'S ROLE AND KEY STAFF

The TPB works to ensure that freight is integrated into metropolitan planning so that the transportation system continues to be responsive to freight demands and evolving practices. Since 2007, the TPB has included a regional freight planning task in its Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) with activities that provide a voice for freight in the transportation planning process, highlight freight's role in economic development, and recognize freight's integrated role in the multimodal economy.

The TPB's freight program consists of various elements including a Freight Subcommittee, a National Capital Region Freight Plan which is updated on regular intervals, and special freight forums and workshops. The TPB also responds to freight-related federal requirements for MPOs. Table 10.1 summarizes the key TPB staff who support the TPB's freight planning activities. Currently, the program has a staff member who focuses on freight planning part-time and is supported by consultant assistance as needed.

TABLE 10.1: KEY STAFF

TPB Staff	Title	Role
Kanti Srikanth	Executive Director	Staff Director for the Transportation Planning Board (TPB)
Andrew Meese	Program Director	Contributor
Janie Nham	Planning Manager	Contributor

## Role of TPB Freight Subcommittee

The TPB's Freight Subcommittee serves a key function in the freight program by providing a forum for information sharing and coordination on freight topics. Established in 2008, the subcommittee engages a diverse audience, including private sector freight shippers and industry representatives, and has actively invited private sector representatives to present and share their perspectives. The subcommittee's bi-monthly meetings feature presentations that center on specific freight themes, including truck parking, land use and its freight implications, curbside management, and supply chain disruptions, among others.

The subcommittee also makes recommendations on freight-related action items for consideration by the TPB Technical Committee and the Transportation Planning Board. Actions such as the designation of Critical Urban Freight Corridors or the adoption of the National Capital Region Freight Plan are first reviewed by the subcommittee before advancing to the TPB Technical Committee for review and the TPB for approval.

## ROLE OF KEY PLANNING AGENCIES

Because of the broad nature of freight networks, the TPB engages planning agencies at various levels of government. The TPB frequently coordinates with staff from the three state governments in the region, as they own and maintain much of the infrastructure on which freight travels. These state agencies include the District Department of Transportation (DDOT), Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT), Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT), and Virginia Office of Intermodal Planning and Investment (OIPI). Collaboration with state agencies is especially critical for TPB actions that satisfy federal reporting requirements, such as truck travel time target setting for performance-based planning and programming and designations for the National Highway Freight Network. Results from these activities are reported to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), which ensures that TPB actions comply with federal mandates while assisting regional decision-makers select investment strategies to meet performance targets. FHWA may also provide tools and data to inform TPB freight planning and analysis.

In addition to these stakeholders, the TPB collaborates with jurisdictional staff on freight issues that are relatively more local in nature, such as curbside management. Jurisdictional staff may contribute input or share best practices to TPB plans, workshops, or subcommittee meetings.

## PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

TPB's freight planning program incorporates public input received through regularly occurring TPB, Technical Committee, and Freight Subcommittee meetings. The TPB's Community Advisory Committee (CAC) also receives updates on freight activities and is provided with the opportunity to share feedback during briefings. In addition to these venues, the TPB occasionally holds special forums on freight topics, like the 2024 Curbside Management Forum, in which members of the CAC and TPB Access for All Advisory Committee are sometimes invited to participate. These events are also open to the public.

Unlike other transportation sectors, freight movement is highly dependent on private-sector partners such as railroad companies, parcel delivery services, and trucking companies. The TPB has worked to develop relationships with and involve private-sector stakeholders in program activities to foster greater public-private collaboration.

# TPB'S FREIGHT PROGRAM ELEMENTS

The TPB's freight program strives to achieve its goals of highlighting and integrating freight issues into the metropolitan planning process by creating technical resources to inform freight planning efforts and by fostering participation by interested stakeholders. The program also helps the region to meet federal planning and performance reporting requirements, which are sometimes a prerequisite for receiving federal transportation funding. Some of the key products of the TPB freight program are described below.

## National Capital Region Freight Plan

In 2010, the TPB developed the National Capital Region Freight Plan<sup>1</sup>, which serves as a technical reference on the region's freight network and trends for local jurisdictions and state partners. Staff developed the plan following an analysis of national and locally sourced data, and sought the advice of the Freight Subcommittee, TPB Technical Committee, and TPB. The plan was updated in 2016, to include 17 policies that guide freight planning and decision-making for jurisdictional members and state agencies. An additional update in 2023 incorporated new and emerging freight challenges such as supply chain changes due to the global pandemic.

The TPB's freight plan also informs the development of several TPB products to ensure the consideration of freight in planning. These products include Visualize 2050, and the biennial Congestion Management Process (CMP) Technical Reports. By highlighting regional freight flows, trends, and challenges, member agencies are able to identify investment strategies for improving the operation of the regional freight network and submit those to Visualize 2050 during the technical inputs solicitation process.

## Freight Forums

The TPB has highlighted specific freight issues through special forums, with the goal of convening freight stakeholders to recognize emerging regional issues and exchange best practices. In 2017, the TPB hosted a Freight Forum on the theme of "freight as an enabler of livability." The event touched on urban freight challenges specific to the National Capital Region and featured speakers from public agencies and a parcel delivery vendor. In 2020, an additional forum was held focused on issues specific to curbside management. The event gathered stakeholders to discuss curbside management issues around goods delivery, measuring mobility effectiveness at the curb, and accessibility design consideration at the curb. A follow-up to the 2020 curbside management event was held in 2024. The event discussed new and emerging curbside management issues since 2020, including new demands on curb space and new strategies. Each of these events for regional collaboration provide TPB member agencies with opportunities to identify new or better strategies to solve issues in the region. TPB members submitted investment strategies for Visualize 2050 which aim to enhance, support, or promote freight movements.

## Freight-Related Federal Requirements

The TPB's freight program additionally helps the region meet certain federal reporting requirements related to freight.

## Critical Urban Freight Corridors

The 2015 Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act created a freight-specific formula grant funding program—the National Highway Freight Program (NHFP)—in addition to other freight

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<sup>1</sup> National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board (July 18, 2023). *National Capital Region Freight Plan*. <https://www.mwcog.org/documents/2023/07/19/national-capital-region-freight-plan-freight/>

discretionary grant funding programs to ensure the condition and performance of highways deemed most critical to freight movement. The programs were established to increase U.S. competitiveness in the global economy, improve the efficiency and reliability of the freight network, and reduce the environmental impacts of freight.

Under the Act, the TPB was called upon to designate public roads within its urbanized areas as Critical Urban Freight Corridors (CUFCs). TPB staff collaborated with officials at MDOT, VDOT, and DDOT to identify CUFCs that met the criteria for designation as set forth under provisions of the FAST Act. The TPB subsequently adopted Resolution R6-2018 on November 15, 2017, which established the Critical Urban Freight Corridors for the National Capital Region. Following an increase in CUFC mileage allowed under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) of 2021, the TPB coordinated with DDOT to update its CUFC network in 2023 and with MDOT in 2024 to adjust its CUFC network. Having a road segment identified as part of the CUFC network enables it to be eligible for federal funding.

## **Travel Time Reliability and Truck Travel Time Reliability**

In 2017, the FHWA published the System Performance: Highway and Freight, Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) rule. The rule requires state DOTs to set targets for performance measures for Interstate Travel Time Reliability (TTR), National Highway System (NHS) TTR, and Freight Reliability, defined as Truck Travel Time Reliability (TTTR). The TPB adopts four-year targets for Interstates, non-Interstates, and truck travel times.

Targets enable TPB members to evaluate how well the region's highway network is performing and how reliable freight movements are along the regional network. If the region is not meeting its target, members have the opportunity to study the issues and identify how best to address them. Investment strategies are submitted for inclusion in Visualize 2050.