

CHAPTER 7: FREIGHT MOBILITY

Beginning in 1991, states and Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) were required to integrate freight into their overall planning effort. Specific factors to be considered included international border crossings and access to ports, airports, intermodal transportation facilities, and major freight distribution routes. Supporting technical efforts were required to provide an analysis of goods and services movement problem areas, as determined in cooperation with appropriate private sector involvement. Enhancement of efficient movement of freight was another factor to be explicitly considered. TEA 21 continued the importance of freight movement. AMATS has recognized freight mobility as an important element of transportation planning, and has more fully incorporated the consideration of freight into the planning process.

The 1997 update to the 1991 Anchorage Bowl Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) included a general description of freight movement in Anchorage. Truck traffic and constraints to the movement of trucks were addressed, and the anticipated effects of planned improvements on some of the problems were identified. Acknowledging that a more comprehensive analysis of freight mobility issues needed to be done, AMATS staff met with representatives of the freight industry to discuss general freight mobility issues. From that meeting it was determined that a more systematic approach was needed to address this subject and a study was proposed. Results of that effort are presented in the June 2001 Freight Mobility Study for the Anchorage Metropolitan Area. The study serves as an informational resource for updating plans, and for educating the public about the freight industry in the Anchorage area.

The study describes characteristics of the major modes of freight movement in Anchorage – water, rail, air, and truck transport --focusing on the motor freight industry as the mode that ties all other modes together. An important correlation between land use, zoning and development with freight generation and distribution centers is explained and depicted on a map, along with major freight corridors used by motor carriers. The regulatory environment is described, including a discussion of Municipal and State regulations. Deficiencies are identified in the existing transportation system that impede the efficient flow of goods, and recommendations are presented for improvements and possible modifications in maintenance, facility design, regulations and capital projects to resolve constraints to freight mobility.

All of the freight routes considered as “constrained” by motor carriers are located within the Anchorage Bowl. While little descriptive information was gathered about freight movements in the Chugiak-Eagle River study area, carriers within the area identified no problems.

No major international airport, port facility, or intermodal transportation facilities are within the Chugiak-Eagle River study area. Thus, there are no identified intermodal transportation problems to be addressed in the Chugiak-Eagle River Transportation Plan.

Issues and recommendations presented were generated through: 1) a review of the Urban Goods Movement Study conducted in 1986 for the Municipality of Anchorage Planning Department, 2) a Driver’s Survey conducted in the fall of 1998, 3) the Truck Model Carrier Survey also conducted in the fall of 1998, and 4) a work session with the Port of Anchorage and industry representatives to identify existing concerns on a map through a “dot exercise” to locate existing

issues and problems. Beyond current and planned improvements, the study makes recommendations intended to guide policy for freight, and comprehensive and strategic planning activities. Recommendations are grouped into six categories: policy, general, long and short-term capital improvements, maintenance, regulatory/enforcement, and further investigations.

While there are no intermodal transportation facilities within the Chugiak-Eagle River study area, the Glenn Highway is a major freight distribution route connecting Anchorage with a large part of Alaska, Canada, and the lower 48. According to Table 6, both the Glenn Highway and Old Glenn Highway accommodate some truck traffic, but the percentage of truck traffic has not increased since 1994 at the permanent traffic recorder stations. Although the Glenn Highway also connects Chugiak-Eagle River with the Anchorage International Airport, the Port of Anchorage, and Alaska Railroad depot in the Anchorage Bowl, the problems affecting freight distribution along the Chugiak-Eagle River truck routes are the same as those which affect general traffic. The recommendations contained in the 2003 LRTP Update pertaining to the Glenn Highway and the Old Glenn Highway (Downtown), which are primarily designed to solve auto-related congestion problems, would also have the effect of enhancing freight movement.

Table 6
Percent Traffic on Chugiak-Eagle River Roads

Roadway	Percent Single Trailer and Multi-Trailer Trucks
Glenn Hwy. north of Artillery Rd.	0.8 to 1.3
Glenn Hwy. north of Eklutna	1.0 to 2.0
Old Glenn Hwy. at Eagle River	1.3
Old Glenn Hwy. at Skyview	1.7 to 2.5
Eagle River Road east of Lee St.	0.4
Birchwood Loop at MP. 2.9	0.8

Source: "Central Region Traffic Volume Report," 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, prepared by Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities.

While carriers and drivers interviewed for the Freight Mobility Study did not identify any problems for freight mobility in the Chugiak/Eagle River area, residents and companies have since expressed concerns for gravel and concrete trucks pulling onto the Old Glenn Highway. Companies have expressed the need for a truck climbing lane addressing concentrated trucking near Klondike Concrete. While truck volumes do not currently warrant a truck climbing lane, any increase in truck traffic may warrant such a lane, and truck volumes should continue to be monitored. Improving Artillery Road and Hiland Road Interchanges to address oversize freight movements has been identified as a need, as well as identifying possible deficiencies along the entire length of the Glenn Highway for overheight / oversize trucks. The concern was also expressed that truck traffic along North Birchwood Loop Road may increase as a result of planned improvements to Birchwood Airport. Traffic should be monitored, particularly after the Birchwood Airport Master Plan is completed, to determine if the need for future improvements along North Birchwood Loop Road is indicated.