Importance of Freight Data For the Future

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TRB Committee Perspective

Committee on Freight Transportation Data, A1B09

Members are a cross section of academics, government agency employees, and private sector employees.

Many purposes of the committee will be addressed today including our responsibilities to:

• Identify and Publicize Data Sources and Needs
• Advise Data Collection Agencies on Meeting Data Needs
• Assist Analysts and Decision Makers in Data Use
Committee Millennium Paper

- A view of the importance of data for addressing the new freight transportation environment due to
  - technical and regulatory changes
  - increased global competition
  - energy and environmental issues
  - safety considerations
  - national security requirements, and
  - continuing pressure to do more with less.
Data Users Perspective on Needs

As regular users of freight data for forecasting, we serve 2 sets of customers: business & government.

- **Business** needs information for investment strategy, market planning and operations.
- **Government** needs information for policy making, infrastructure planning and operations.
- **Business** focus is short-run where the long-term can be 2-5 years; not 10 or 25 years like government.
- **Government and business** need data for decisions, with common elements so they can work together.
Demands on System Increasing

- Freight mobility is essential for continued U.S. economic growth and is at least as important as for people. Productivity growth, and therefore our standard of living increases, depend on it.

- With or without public sector help, the private sector continues its drive to improve service and reduce costs with logistics and supply chain management. Freight transport is at the core.

- More timely and accurate data are critical for the logistics technology investments to pay off. More activity details will be measured as a result.
Technology Increases Pace of Change

- Government’s long-term planning now has to provide for needed infrastructure capacity and efficient operations with shorter lead times.

- Businesses’ short-term profit making objectives take priority over helping with government planning or long-term public policy objectives, despite likely long-term pay off for business.

- Shorter times for decision making require more complete and detailed information sooner, and may encourage business to participate more.
Remaining Obstacles to Overcome

- **Split responsibilities for freight data**
  Public freight data is necessarily distributed across public agencies, making overall progress slower.

- **Respondent burden**
  Technology has the potential to reduce it, but we are a long way from eliminating the perceived burden.

- **Legal issues of liability, privacy and data rights**
  Uncertainty about the ultimate uses or impacts of providing data hinders collection and availability.

- **Freight data applications and research limited**
  Growing needs require more research into new tools.
Conclusions for Freight Data Needs

• Higher standards of living come from business productivity gains from technology and data investments, but are not guaranteed.
• Technology changes the freight data world, due to the competitive drive to increase service and lower costs.
• Business and government have different data needs yet common data must exist for our common benefit.
• Obstacles including respondent burden, legal, and research issues remain significant and unresolved.

We in the freight transportation community must work together to assure needed data availability.