Technical Working Session
Intermodal Operations in Capital District
March 4, 2004
NYSDOT Building 4, Classroom 1
Albany, New York

Meeting Summary

The meeting opened with introductions and an overview of the I-87 Multimodal Corridor Study and an update of its status by the project team. It was also explained that the purpose of the workshop was to receive input and guidance from participants on ways to improve intermodal freight operations in the Capital District and the corridor as a whole, and emphasized that the meeting would be an informal roundtable discussion rather than a formal presentation by the project team. The results of this workshop and the other five sessions scheduled for the same three-week period will feed into the final corridor study report that will be prepared during Phase 2 of the project.

After the group spoke briefly about existing conditions and intermodal markets in the corridor, the study team led a discussion of potential intermodal sites and the criteria used to identify these sites.

The following sections summarize key points of the group’s discussion and highlight issues to be explored more fully during Phase 2. An agenda for the meeting and sign-in sheets are included as Attachments A and B.

Existing Conditions

- Time sensitivity is an issue, and rail freight tied into import/export markets can’t compete within travel radius more conveniently covered by truck. In order for more fluid operations with fewer delays, the elements of the overall rail network that link to the corridor need more sidings, primarily between Scranton and Binghamton. Fiber optic improvements could upgrade signal reliability along the corridor as well. Furthermore, welded rail would increase the reliability of the roadbed and height restrictions need to be eliminated. This is particularly true along the single-track section between Albany and the Canadian border.

- CSX already has invested heavily in intermodal facilities in Springfield, MA and DeWitt, NY.

Potential Underserved Intermodal Markets in the Capital District

- What would be an intermodal system market for Albany?

  - The market for Albany consists mainly of importing consumer goods and warehousing for distribution to upstate New York and New England, which would
be railed in or brought in by truck. Exports out of Albany, however, will most likely remain at a minimum.

- Very little of the container traffic coming into Montreal and then to Northeastern US goes by rail, as truck is more convenient and rail network has a number of problems. Even if they were improved, rail competitiveness would be somewhat limited in that market (e.g., Montreal to Capital District area, and even to NYC, especially with very low-cost Canadian truckers).

- Many trucks are not capable of TOFC service. Also, the containers are non-specialized because it is short-haul.

- Economies of scale are important to consider. There was considerable discussion of domestic vs. import/export double-stacking, and how height clearances are needed to make it possible to service both markets to the north.

**What movements are intermodal?**

- Most of the intermodal traffic within the region is east/west, while there is very little north/south. However, the volume north/south is going to happen sooner or later as long as the infrastructure in place.

**Which mode is better for port inland distribution, barge or rail?**

- Barge is generally the intermediate mode, not rail. Rail was chosen for the Buffalo distribution network, while the first cut from the port of New York has been barge. The demand seems to be creeping in the right directions, but can a supply (i.e., a modern intermodal facility) be created in the Capital district that will drive demand?

### Criteria for an Intermodal Facility

**What factors need to be considered for the intermodal facility?**

- The limitations of each existing facility need to be considered first; then a layout would be developed to handle a variety of operation types. Factors that need to be included in evaluation of each site include: distance to travel, handling costs, time sensitivity, commodity (weight), etc.

- To get the session focused, Bob Badger drew a prototype layout that was 250 to 300 feet wide and 4,000 to 5,000 feet long (parallel to the main track), which did not include the additional unspecified area that would be needed for truck parking/storage. It was concurred that this would be the most likely layout to be implemented.

**Is an intermodal site really feasible?**
This construction would be a public investment, so the creation of such a site must consider two things: economies of scale and joint access. Creating such a facility is only an option if the demand for an intermodal site is there. It’s also possible that an ideal site may not exist, and fixing up existing facilities may be the better option.

**Potential Intermodal Sites**

- **Site 1: Port of Albany**
  - The benefits of this site are its existing facilities and its potential for expansion. CP Rail would want to expand at this site because of its small intermodal operation. It’s also a terminal vs. a thru-track operation, with trains having to “back in” rather than just travel through. To be further considered is whether or not there can be a joint tandem/intermodal facility at this site, and whether the best location for intermodal expansion is at the southern end of the Port or closer to the existing main rail yard next to I-787. Albany County would like to develop this site in that manner. There is also potential for water connectivity. There is a 5% slope, however, which would make tandem access difficult; and there are also environmental justice concerns raised by residents of Albany’s South End that would need to be addressed before any significant industrial operation could advance. Finally, there was concern that expanding industrial facilities at the Port could limit the potential for other growth adjacent to the site.

- **Site 2: Selkirk Yard**
  - The main issues with this site is the minimal amount of room for expansion. The main purpose of this site is to switch railroad cars (there is rail-to-truck transfer of new autos at this location). Loading trucks would be difficult and only possible in a linear operation given space constraints. Joint access is also an issue (it’s a CSX facility). This site would not allow for the scale of operation that is necessary.

- **Site 3: Guilderland Center/Northeast Industrial Park**
  - There is an existing infrastructure at this site, as well as enough room for expansion. Joint access already exists at this site. It would be a run-through operation. The proximity of this site to the highway network is not great. It is set up with CSX and NS on opposite ends, and access for NS is poor. There are also other competitive proposals for this site being considered.

- **Site 4: I-88 (Exit 25A)**
  - Although somewhat constrained by wetlands, there would still be adequate space, and CP has expressed interest for development at this site, which has
excellent highway and local roadway access. Joint access does not yet exist at this site but would be possible. From an operational standpoint, this site looks good, and could be used as a prototype.

- Site 5: Mechanicville/Guilford Yard
  - Joint access is difficult at this site, as well as for CSX. Also the connection to the east that used to be present at this site is gone. Too many small roads are necessary to travel on, as it is not located near a major highway.

- Site 6: Saratoga yard, Quad Graphics (Industrial Park)
  - Although CP has looked at this site for other development projects in the past, there is no easy CSX joint access; it is a green facility. This site is not configured well for intermodal operations, as it is stub-ended between two tracks.

- Site 7: Saratoga (Exit 16, Wilton)
  - The joint access at this site is not as good as at some other sites. On the positive side, there are a few major distribution facilities in close proximity, although not sufficiently large to justify a yard on their own.

- Site 8: Moreau (Exit 17)
  - This site will not be considered at the next level because it is located in an urban area, is stub-ended, is a branch line, and needs rail access.

- Site 9: Corinth
  - This site cannot be further considered because of its poor access to I-87.

The following two new sites were added to the list even though they were not considered in the first round.

- Site 10: New Baltimore. This is being developed as a CSX facility, with no benefit to CP/NS.

- Site 11: GE-Schenectady
  - This site has existing joint access between CSX and CP. As it is not a “green site,” it is ripe for this kind of development. Truck access to this site is fairly good. Routes 890 and 90 are nearby, although route 890 is more of a commuter route; adding, trucks could cause problems. Also, there is a lot of room at this site and is on the way to Montreal.

Finally, three of the sites described above were identified as meriting further analysis:
Other Issues

- Is tandem truck access really necessary?
  - CP does not consider tandem access to be an issue. Can there be a joint tandem/intermodal facility? At the Port of Albany and at exit 25A tandem access could be added for extra benefit, but it does not make sense at the other sites.

- Is the outcome of this study going to answer the feasibility question?
  - The final three sites that were selected make sense on the supply side of the equation. The question still remains on the demand side: do we need it?
  - The study will be taking a look at demand potential, based on available data and discussion with railroads and others. While not a full-scale marketing study, it should inform the process sufficiently to identify whether a new facility is warranted as a priority transportation investment.

NEXT STEPS

The group determined that the following issues require further consideration:

- Do we really need this?
- What is the local benefit? What type of industrial spin-off opportunities would be created by public investment in this type of facility?
- Similarly, how would this action enhance the overall economic health of the corridor, even if local economic benefits were minimal?
- How can transportation infrastructure best stimulate that?

ATTACHMENTS
A. Workshop agenda
B. Sign-in sheets