



Building a Freight Professional Development (FPD) Program for the 21st Century

The Federal Highway Administration's Office of Freight Management and Operations launched the FPD Program in response to the growing need for freight transportation expertise in states and metropolitan areas. In recent years, the increase in freight traffic, fueled by the globalization of trade and just-in-time manufacturing, has strained our transportation network in some regions and exacerbated the struggle of accommodating both freight and passenger traffic. The problems promise to escalate in the future as domestic and international freight volumes are projected to increase by about 70 percent and 85 percent, respectively, between 1998 and 2020.

Industry and government are concerned about the capacity of the freight transportation system to handle the steadily increasing volumes of freight. The efficient movement of goods is dependent, in large part, on the people who build, maintain, and operate the system. *Educating and training a skilled and knowledgeable workforce is crucial to improving freight transportation productivity, safety, and security.*

Customer Needs

States and Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) have expressed a strong need for improved skills in addressing freight transportation issues. Several key factors have heightened the need for freight professional development at state and local levels. They are:

- An increased desire and need by state and local transportation agencies to develop freight programs within their agencies;
- An inadequate supply of publicly available courses and tools focusing on freight planning and operations for the public sector;
- Significant turnover in planning jobs combined with small number of staff devoted to freight has resulted in little or no mentoring; and

- Limited public-private sector engagement has led to a lack of understanding of private business practices by public sector officials and vice versa.

Goals and Objectives

The goal of the FPD Program is to integrate and mainstream freight infrastructure and operational improvements in the traditional transportation planning, programming, design, and implementation processes at state and MPO levels. The program has several objectives, including:

- Developing an institutional underpinning for freight at local, state, and corridor levels;
- Fostering intermodal approaches to advancing freight productivity and security;
- Engaging private sector stakeholders in the project development process; and
- Improving freight planning and decisionmaking at state and MPO levels.

Key Elements

The FPD Program consists of four key elements: 1) training, 2) education, 3) technical assistance, and 4) the resource library. Each of these elements is crucial in developing the skills and knowledge needed to meet the challenges of increasing freight flows on the Nation's transportation system.

- **Training:** The FPD Program provides training, including short courses and seminars, on a broad range of freight topics. A two-day FPD course on *Integrating Freight in the Transportation Planning Process* will be offered through the National Highway Institute (NHI) from November 2003 through October 2004. Another course on *Freight Forecasting* will also be offered through NHI in May 2004.

■ **Education:** The FPD Program works with the academic community to promote needed changes in transportation planning and logistics degree programs critical to ensuring the future availability of appropriately trained freight professionals. Many university-based freight and related degree programs are identified on the new FPD website located at www.ops.fhwa.dot.gov/fpd.

■ **Technical assistance:** The FPD Program provides assistance to states and MPOs engaged in transportation and freight planning. The ongoing “Talking Freight” Seminar Series offers a no-cost way for freight transportation professionals to broaden their knowledge and develop new skills. Seminars are held monthly and are open to all interested parties through <http://talkingfreight.webex.com>. The Freight Planning Peer Exchange LISTSERV, located at www.fhwa.dot.gov/freightplanning, also provides an effective forum for exchanging information.

■ **Resource library:** The FPD Program offers a web-based one-stop shop for current information and state-of-the-art practices pertaining to freight. The Resource Library is located on the FPD website at www.ops.fhwa.dot.gov/fpd.

Other FPD Program initiatives underway include the development of training curriculum through 2006 and outreach efforts to transportation and planning professional in both the public and private sectors.

The inclusion of freight professional capacity building in the Safe, Accountable, Flexible and Efficient Transportation Equity Act of 2003 (SAFETEA) confirms its importance as a way to improve freight transportation mobility and efficiency. Since education and training are the responsibilities of both the public and private sectors, partnerships between government and business are key to building freight professional capacity now and in the future.

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