

TOWER 55 POLICY BRIEFING NOTES
December 1, 2003, 1:30 p.m.
Intermodal Transportation Center
Fort Worth, Texas

Welcome, Introductions and Opening Remarks

Congressman Martin Frost and Tarrant County Commissioner/Regional Transportation Council (RTC) Chairman Glenn Whitley welcomed the guests and stressed the importance of Tower 55 to freight mobility, passenger rail service, the regional economy and national security.

Tower 55: International Crossroads, Questions and Answers

Michael Morris provided an overview of RTC activities related to Tower 55 and to goods movement planning in general. Mr. Morris also provided an overview of Tower 55's location and layout.

Mike Sims discussed the importance of solving the congestion at Tower 55 for seven key reasons: 1) current freight movements; 2) projected growth; 3) passenger rail access; 4) the North American Free Trade Agreement; 5) the Panama Canal; 6) military shipments; and 7) hazardous materials shipments.

Mr. Sims provided train traffic counts at Tower 55, a comparison of freight activity in the Dallas-Fort Worth (DFW) Metroplex to other major United States ports, and an inventory of issues related to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

Mr. Sims also provided an overview of the decision-making process related to Tower 55. He described the outreach that has occurred over the past year and a half as well as upcoming meetings related to Tower 55. He also described the timeline for proposing regional passenger rail improvements as part of the Regional Rail Corridor Study. He discussed the expected benefits of various potential solutions, including a do-nothing scenario, at-grade improvements, grade separation and rural bypass routes. Mr. Sims finished by providing a short inventory of other major rail projects throughout the United States and their costs and scopes.

Michael Morris reminded the group that freight rail mobility, air quality and homeland security are all affected by congestion at Tower 55. He indicated that local, state, and national partners need to be identified in order to keep up the momentum of searching for an appropriate solution to this freight bottleneck.

Stakeholder Input, Federal Partners Response, Open Discussion

Congressman Martin Frost opened the floor for input from stakeholders. In particular, he asked if previous presenters had identified the problem accurately.

While not intended to be comprehensive, the following table summarizes comments made at the meeting.

Name	Organization	Comments
Joe Adams	Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR)	<p>Mr. Adams indicated that 22% of all trips greater than 500 miles in length are made on rail, leaving 78% of freight trips in the United States on the highway system. He pointed out that railroads spend 20 cents of every revenue dollar on capital projects each year, or \$2 billion annually in the U.S. Despite this heavy level of capital investment, the railroads are still very capacity-constrained in the D-FW region and failure to keep up with freight traffic demand will result in the increase of truck traffic in the region. Trains emit one-sixth the pollution of trucks and are three times as efficient as trucks.</p> <p>UPRR has invested heavily in the route west of Tower 55 on the way to El Paso. Those improvements are likely to increase traffic through Tower 55. On a busy day the Tower already sees 120 trains and on an average day it is occupied 70% of the time.</p> <p>Mr. Adams indicated that it's possible that NCTCOG is under-reporting the forecasted growth in freight traffic in the D-FW region.</p> <p>Mr. Adams offered that UPRR is very interested in working with the North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCOG) and other partners to find a solution to Tower 55.</p>
Jeff Moreland	Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway (BNSF)	<p>Mr. Moreland indicated that when discussing Tower 55, BNSF's policy position is in agreement with UPRR's policy.</p>
Rollin Bredenberg	BNSF	<p>Mr. Bredenberg discussed the operational issues at Tower 55. He indicated that if no improvements are made at Tower 55, then the railroads will begin to choose more circuitous routes within the urban area and that this solution might be less palatable to the public than a joint solution might be.</p> <p>Mr. Bredenberg also indicated that an inventory of idle emissions might prove to be the key to solving the Tower 55 bottleneck.</p>

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Richard Greene	Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)	<p>Mr. Greene said that the regional environmental impacts of idling locomotives at Tower 55 are probably not known or easily quantified. He mentioned that if we place reduced idling in the State Implementation Plan then we might be able to attain compliance with federal air quality standards more easily.</p> <p>Mr. Greene and his colleague Mr. Tom Diggs are not aware of any air quality grants that are available from the federal government to support this program. He mentioned that it might be necessary to develop funding sources that are not already in place. He also suggested that funding used on similar projects throughout the country should be researched.</p> <p>He indicated that although no funding is available from EPA at this time, they are still interested in being involved as a partner in the project.</p>
Frank Mulvey	U.S. House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee	<p>Mr. Mulvey indicated that the lack of funds for major freight transportation projects is a problem throughout the United States. The introduction of several bills last year was aimed at addressing this problem.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As recently as last week a bill was introduced in the Senate, known as ARRIVE 21. • Congressman Lipinski from Illinois introduced the need for a Rail Trust Fund. • The national Railroad Rehabilitation and Improvement Financing (RRIF) Program has \$3.5 billion available as loan money. That pot of money may soon be expanded to \$35 billion. • The TEA-21 re-authorization does not yet have a rail chapter or allowances for projects of national significance, but both of those items may soon be changed.
Congressman Martin Frost	United States House of Representatives 24 th District of Texas	Congressman Frost remarked that Congressman Michael Burgess (Representative of the 26 th Congressional District of Texas) is involved in TEA-21 Re-Authorization and should be included on the list of partners.
Michael Morris	NCTCOG	Richard Greene with EPA asked Mr. Morris about the engineering feasibility of solving Tower 55. Mr. Morris responded that there are distinct phases in the process, including: planning, engineering, and construction. He indicated that these steps would ideally overlap but that no funds are yet identified for the study of the project's engineering feasibility.

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Joy Smith	Amtrak	<p>Ms. Smith indicated that capacity is an historic issue at Tower 55 that needs to be solved in order to allow us to move forward.</p> <p>She indicated that although there are no funds available from Amtrak, they are interested in being partners in the process.</p>
Rollin Bredenberg	BNSF	<p>Mr. Bredenberg pointed out that BNSF and UPRR are already self-funding projects in Fort Worth to facilitate directional running and improve efficiencies.</p> <p>He indicated that the existing capacity at Tower 55 needs to be improved for the sake of both railroads.</p>
Commissioner Glen Whitley	Tarrant County Regional Transportation Council	<p>Commissioner Whitley asked the representatives from the railroads if they had already discussed allowing commuter rail on their lines if the Tower 55 bottleneck is addressed. He was particularly interested to know if they had already discussed a mutually agreeable solution.</p> <p>He also asked if the railroads had already coordinated with the Fort Worth Transportation Authority (the T) and Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART) to discuss service options.</p>
Joe Adams	UPRR	<p>Mr. Adams indicated that if freight rail capacity were preserved on the Dallas subdivision (the UPRR main line between downtown Fort Worth and downtown Dallas), then passenger rail would certainly be evaluated as an investment.</p> <p>He explained that typically public entities bring their commuter rail plans to the railroads to initiate a study of the project's feasibility. The railroads and a consultant then work together to determine if the project can move forward. The railroads will release data to the consultants to use in the assessment of the problem. The railroads then comment on the plan and provide a cost estimate for the project.</p>
Frank Mulvey	U.S. House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee	<p>Mr. Mulvey indicated that the General Accounting Office recently commissioned a study of impediments to passenger rail access to freight facilities. That report should be released and publicly available in approximately one month.</p>
Michael Morris	NCTCOG	<p>Mr. Morris stressed the point that right now is the time to identify partners and agree if this is a problem on local, state, and / or national levels.</p>

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Captain Paul Paine	Naval Air Station (NAS) Joint Reserve Base (JRB) Fort Worth	<p>At Congressman Frost's request, Captain Paine suggested that a good Department of Defense contact person might be the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) director of terrorist threats or the Defense Logistics Agency's military transportation department.</p> <p>Captain Paine also indicated that increased traffic at Tower 55 would increase the threat level at that location. He suggested that idling traffic should be minimized to minimize risk, as well as diversifying the investment in the area.</p> <p>He also indicated that the rail service to the former Carswell Air Force Base has been terminated and the rails have been physically removed.</p>
Senator Kim Brimer	Texas State Legislature District 10	<p>Senator Brimer indicated that he plans to coordinate with the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) plans for Tower 55 improvements.</p> <p>He mentioned that the State had funded a \$22 million rail project to entice Toyota to locate in San Antonio.</p>
Dick Ruddell	The T	<p>Mr. Ruddell agreed that the discussion's focus on air quality issues and commuter rail feasibility was right on target. He also stressed the importance of getting other interests involved, such as smaller communities nearby.</p>
Councilmember Wendy Davis	Fort Worth City Council District 9	<p>Councilmember Davis stressed that when trains stop at Tower 55 they back up just north of downtown Fort Worth. In this poor neighborhood school children have been observed climbing through trains to get to and from school. Emergency vehicles have also been blocked from the east side of that neighborhood.</p> <p>Ms. Davis also mentioned that economic development is a significant issue to take into account when considering Tower 55, particularly as it affects congestion upstream in the Alliance area.</p>
Senator Kim Brimer	Texas State Legislature District 10	<p>Senator Brimer suggested that the commerce that has slowed due to Tower 55 needs to be quantified, along with local area emissions resulting from idling locomotives.</p>
Michael Morris	NCTCOG	<p>Mr. Morris noted that it is possible that the funding is available for the engineering but that we need to work on an institutional structure to cover full capital costs of such freight projects.</p> <p>He also agreed that TEA-21 re-authorization needs to include a rail title.</p>

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Senator Kim Brimer	Texas State Legislature District 10	Senator Brimer noted that there is a strong need to study the problem at Tower 55. He also pointed out that the State has an Enterprise Fund. Tower 55 improvements might be eligible for funding from this source.
Jeff Moreland	BNSF	Mr. Moreland noted that three of the four example projects from other regions (presented by Mike Sims) included participation by BNSF. He noted that in most of these projects the community initiates the project and that federal funding is available. He also noted that the rail initiatives in Chicago are very current and might provide some good insight into expected costs.
Frank Mulvey	U.S. House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee	Mr. Mulvey stated that the current effort in Chicago is a \$1.5 billion project that is funded by railroad contributions in addition to state and city funds. Because approximately 35% of the nation's freight passes through Chicago, the project does rank as one of "national significance" which might make it eligible for future federal funds. Mr. Mulvey also stated that \$2.5 of the \$3.5 billion available in the Railroad Rehabilitation and Improvement Financing (RRIF) Program is designated for Class I railroads. Current proposed legislation might expand the program to \$35 billion and make the loan funds more easily accessible for these types of projects.
Jeff Moreland	BNSF	In response to an inquiry from Commissioner Whitley, Mr. Moreland indicated that other similar projects vary in the cost of their engineering work. A cost estimate would also need to take into account public benefits so that a proper benefit-cost analysis can be performed.
Frank Mulvey	U.S. House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee	Mr. Mulvey indicated that it would be a good idea to resolve cost estimates early in the process to ensure that there are not major discrepancies from various entities (e.g. from different railroad companies).
Michael Morris	NCTCOG	Mr. Morris remarked that our region would need to ensure that more partners come on board. Citing the Trinity Railway Express (TRE) as an example, he noted that the region has a track record of being able to develop solutions, but that this location would be more complicated.

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Mario Medina	Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT, Multimodal Section, Transportation Planning and Programming Division)	In response to a question from Brandon Aghamalian (Fort Worth City Manager's Office), Mr. Medina replied that HB 3588 has two main chapters: one provides for rail infrastructure to be built, the other allows rail projects to be funded as part of the Trans Texas Corridor initiative. The rail infrastructure projects may use non-dedicated funds (not Fund 6), the Texas Mobility Fund, federal assistance, and other donations. Because of HB 3588, TxDOT is now eligible to partner with Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA) to use federal funds on such projects.
Senator Kim Brimer	Texas State Legislature District 10	Senator Brimer suggested that the list of partners should be expanded to include the Texas Department of Economic Development, which has access to some sources of funding.
Richard Greene	EPA	Mr. Greene suggested that the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) should also be added to the list of partners. He also stressed the importance of evaluating emissions benefits related to Tower 55 improvements.
Congressman Martin Frost	United States House of Representatives 24 th District of Texas	Congressman Frost noted that Representative Don Young, Chairman of the U.S. House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, will be in the region later this week and might have time to be briefed on this issue.
Michael Morris	NCTCOG	At the request of Senator Brimer, Mr. Morris provided an update on the status of Regional Mobility Authority (RMA) discussions in North Texas.
Commissioner Glen Whitley	Tarrant County Regional Transportation Council	Commissioner Whitley indicated that the process should also be sensitive to the existing authority held by the Regional Transportation Council as the region's Metropolitan Planning Organization.

The presentation given at the Policy Briefing is available online at: http://www.nctcog.org/trans/goods_movement/. It may be downloaded as a PowerPoint file or in portable document format (.pdf).

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