

MISSISSIPPI VALLEY FREIGHT COALITION

2010 CONFERENCE & ANNUAL MEETING

THE FUTURE OF INTERSTATE COALITIONS

by Ernie Wittwer, MVFC Facilitator

At the Transportation Research Board Annual Meeting in January 2010, I had the opportunity to take part in a panel on the future of interstate coalitions. Suzann Rhodes, of Wilbur Smith, moderated the sessions. The panelists included:

- Greg Nadeau, Deputy Administrator of FHWA
- Todd Kohr, Director of Highway Policy for the House Highway and Transit Subcommittee
- Jim Gosnell, Executive Director of the West Coast Corridor Coalition
- Eric Kalivoda, Assistant Secretary of the Louisiana Department of Transportation
- George Schoener, Executive Director of the I-95 Corridor Coalition
- Ernie Wittwer, Facilitator of the Mississippi Valley Freight Coalition

Greg and Todd began the discussion with an overview of the challenges facing the freight moving community and outlined the policy thrusts of the Oberstar Bill. The four panelists from coalitions then spoke about what we were doing and how the draft legislation might help or hinder these efforts.

Ninety minutes was not enough time to do much to clarify the future of coalitions, but the diversity of the existing coalitions and the manner in which the Oberstar Bill deals with coalitions is informative nonetheless.

West Coast Corridor

The West Coast Corridor encompasses I-5 from the Canadian to the Mexican borders, with Alaska appended via sea routes to the north. The coalition includes the four states, many MPOs, major ports, regional planning organizations, and major rail and trucking companies. The West Coast Corridor is unique in one aspect: the planning agencies have been the major drivers of the effort.

Since it's founding in 2001, this corridor has:

- Identified the bottlenecks across each of the states
- Applied for a short sea shipping corridor designation
- Contracted with a consultant to look at trade and transportation in the corridor to better define challenges
- Embraced and is fostering the ideas of clean and green, looking at best practices in these areas. As part of this effort,

they are sponsoring a conference on climate change and moving ahead with an alternative fuels corridor

I-10 Corridor

The I-10 corridor stretches from California to Florida across the southern tier of the US. These states have looked at the economic importance of the region, which is huge because it includes three of the largest states in the country. They have also defined the choke points along the corridor and forecasted future congestion. They are currently considering a range of options, including widening, intelligent transportation systems (ITS), and multi-modal solutions to the problems of the corridor.

I-95 Corridor

The I-95 corridor runs from north of the Canadian border through Florida. It is made up of all of the state and provincial agencies along the route, federal agencies, planning agencies, law enforcement, port authorities, and trucking and rail companies. The I-95 corridor is the oldest and most established of the corridors.

I-5 Corridor

The I-5 corridor has the most sophisticated governance structure, with dedicated staffing and consultant support, an executive board, and steering and program committees. They have identified bottlenecks across the region, implemented ITS programs, sought marine corridor designation, and conducted logistics training programs. They have also done three freight system plans for the major regions within the corridor.

Mississippi Valley Freight Coalition

The Mississippi Valley Freight Coalition (MVFC) is fundamentally different from the others coalitions because it does not focus solely on a corridor, but rather on an economic region. The MVFC consists of ten state departments of transportation, with staff support from the National Center for Freight and Infrastructure Research and Education (CFIRE) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. While many planning agencies and private sector companies have taken part in MVFC projects, they are not members in the same manner as in the I-5 or I-95 corridors.

From a regional perspective, the MVFC has done many of the same things as the corridor coalitions: identifying bottlenecks,



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cataloging truck parking issues, defining commodity flows, developing performance measures, and freight-related training.

The Oberstar Bill

With the framework of these four coalitions (though many more exist), it is interesting to review the treatment given corridor coalitions in the Oberstar Bill. This bill has not yet been introduced, but it gives insight into the thinking to the Chair of the House Committee responsible for drafting the next federal transportation bill.

The draft legislation allows the Secretary of the US DOT to designate and make grants to corridor coalitions that are composed of a minimum of the following:

- State departments of transportation
- Metropolitan planning organizations
- Each major mode of freight-related transportation operating in the corridor
- Any major port located in the corridor
- A representative cross-section of private sector stakeholders, shippers carriers, or freight-related associations

To be designated, an applicant must submit an application that outlines the major activities of the corridor and defines the purpose and structure of the coalition. The application must also demonstrate that coalition members have the legal and financial capacity and the support to be successful. It must also include a budget and staffing plan.

The Secretary of the US DOT may designate up to ten corridors. Each designation will require the consent of the governor of each state involved in the coalition. In reaching a decision on designations, the Secretary is to consider:

- The importance of the corridor to the national transportation system and economy
- The economic and environmental consequence of congestion in the corridor
- Whether improvements to the corridor will have significant national benefits
- Whether the applying organization has the legal, financial, and political support to be successful

The Secretary may also make grants to designated corridors to cover operating expenses. The federal share of these grants is 80 percent and the amount of the grants is unknown. Within one year of designation, the applicant will have to complete a plan that is multi-modal in nature, defines the freight assets and challenges of the corridor, and identifies and ranks specific projects. The plan must include project cost estimates and funding sources. It must also define the roles of the entities in the coalition in carrying out the plan, which has to be consistent with state and metropolitan plans.

In short, the Oberstar bill would allow the Secretary to make grants for planning in designated corridors. It would place specific requirements on the planning process, content, and outcomes, but it would not directly provide funding for implementation. It is likely that the national freight program, which the bill would also establish, would fund the implementation of these projects.

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