

Engagement

Kansas City Regional Freight
Study

CONNECTED FREIGHT KC 2050

A Plan in Action



Prepared for:

Mid-America Regional Council

In coordination with

**Lawrence-Douglas County
Metropolitan Planning
Organization**

And

**Pioneer Trails Regional Planning
Commission**

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

CPKC	Canadian Pacific Kansas City Railway
GMC	Goods Movement Committee
KCI	Kansas City International Airport
KCIC	Kansas City Industrial Council
LDCMPO	Lawrence-Douglas County Metropolitan Planning Organization
MARC	Mid-America Regional Council
OOIDA	Owner-Operated Independent Drivers Association
PSP	Planning Sustainable Places
PTRPC	Pioneer Trails Regional Planning Commission
SPPC	Sustainable Places Policy Committee
TTPC	Total Transportation Planning Committee

1. Introduction

As part of the process of developing Connected Freight KC 2050: A Plan in Action, the Mid-America Regional Council (MARC), in coordination with the Lawrence-Douglas County Metropolitan Planning Organization (LDCMPO) and Pioneer Trails Regional Planning Commission (PTRPC), along with assistance from CDM Smith and Vireo, engaged industry, community, and government stakeholders in a series of freight-focused conversations. They began during the spring of 2024 and continued through the spring of 2025. The engagement activities were organized into one of three themed conversations: The Situation Today, Proactive Planning Scenarios, and Future Freight Trends.

The stakeholder engagement process for the Connected Freight KC 2050 Plan played a crucial role in ensuring that the freight planning process was inclusive and effective. Engaging stakeholders such as government agencies, industry representatives, and community organizations allowed the planners to gather a broad range of perspectives, ensuring that the plan accounted for the diverse needs and challenges faced across the region. This outreach not only fostered dialogue on freight-related issues but also helped organizations understand their potential roles in the planning process. By involving diverse viewpoints, the engagement efforts encouraged collaboration and built a framework for integrating stakeholders into the decision-making process, thereby enhancing the overall effectiveness and applicability of the plan.

2. The Situation Today (Winter to Fall 2024)

The project team began discussions on The Situation Today during early 2024 and continued through the fall. They facilitated 12 stakeholder conversations to introduce Connected Freight KC 2050: A Plan in Action to participants and gather input that could inform potential proactive planning scenarios. Participants included:

- MARC Goods Movement Committee (GMC)
- MARC Total Transportation Policy Committee (TTPC)
- MARC Sustainable Places Policy Committee (SPPC)
- PTRPC leadership, trucking, and economic development
- Kansas City Industrial Council (KCIC)
- SmartPort KC
- PortKC

- Lawrence-Douglas County Food Policy Council (farmers, coop members, farmers market, grocery store, other business owners)
- Lawrence-Douglas County business and industry
- Owner-Operated Independent Drivers Association (OOIDA)
- Kansas City International (KCI) Airport
- Canadian Pacific Kansas City (CPKC) Railway

Each group discussed the following questions:

- **Issues:** What issues are encountered most when moving goods? How often do you encounter them?
- **Improvements:** If you could change the way goods are moved in the future, what would you change?
- **Considerations:** What is the most important thing to keep in mind about goods movement in the freight impact area (Lawrence to Sedalia)?
- **The Future:** What is on the horizon that keeps you up at night? How would you like it tackled by 2050?
- **GMC Role(s):** Considering the issues, potential improvements, considerations, and the future ahead, what should the GMC's role(s) be?
- **GMC Goals:** What goals should the GMC be working to achieve by 2050?

Overall, participants responses related to:

- The lack of freight-related infrastructure, job training, and knowledge of the industry's robust nature, needs, and opportunities.
- The length of time needed to complete long-range planning versus freight's much faster timelines.
- Seeking alternative funding sources to support freight growth and improvements to access; roadways; parking; communication; driver accommodations for food, rest, and timing of loading/unloading; weather and/or emergency response and preparedness; industrial development that responds to workers' needs for housing and services; and more.
- Greater use and impacts of technology, such as electrification, artificial intelligence, and drones.
- The GMC potentially acting as a liaison for freight planning, helping shape policy, engaging stakeholders in a way that brings everyone to the table, and pushing for legislative needs and financial investments.

3. Proactive Planning Scenarios (Fall 2024 to Winter 2025)

Building on The Situation Today conversations, the project team organized a series of Proactive Planning Scenarios discussions focused on the economic impacts of freight. The discussions occurred during the fall of 2024 with the potential to continue into the winter of 2025. The project team centered around big picture data findings for the Kansas City region, Kansas, and Missouri.

The Economic Development Corporation of Kansas City, Hispanic Economic Development Corporation, and Lawrence Chamber of Commerce representatives attended the meetings. Participants reviewed adopted policies and growth trends showing freight increasing in tonnage and value through 2050. Then they discussed incentivizes for freight in the region, provided suggestions for increasing freight competitiveness, and key characteristics of a successful freight economy. The comments they shared included:

- **Identification and prioritization for freight:** Meeting participants viewed location as key to the region's freight success but noted improvements are needed. Suggestions included multimodal transload points and facilities, holding/distribution centers, truck parking, land use and development guidance, job generation, workforce alignment, key issue awareness, and availability of truck drivers and vehicles. In addition, participants said railroad stakeholders and railways were central to the region's freight picture, although prices were noted as increasing and greater coordination necessary.
- **Long-term transportation needs:** Participants commented that transportation connections to distribution channels exist, but said more interconnectivity and access were needed. Improvements could attract larger businesses to the region. Additionally, they said bottlenecks and the relationship between local and regional planning would need to be addressed.
- **Elements for increased freight competitiveness:** Deeper industry clusters, local supply chains, a wide range of development options and approaches (greenfield, brownfield, infill, others), workforce development, minimal safety concerns and delays, rail lines interconnected with transload facilities for material transfer, modal choice, systems management, and more access options were among the elements listed for greater viability.
- **Characteristics of a successful freight economy:** Meeting participants included deep clusters, coordination, cross modal communication, emphasis on the range of jobs available in the freight industry, and leadership at the regional and state levels among the characteristics of an effective economic outlook for freight.

4. Future Freight Trends (Winter to Spring 2025)

Continuing to build on the outcomes of previous conversations, the project team began preparing to hold Future Freight Trends conversations connected to four scenarios:

- **Baseline:** Similar to “business as usual” (other scenarios could be compared to it).
- **Wild Wild West:** What happens when economic development, technology, and logistics growth are unchecked by regulations, land use, economics, minimal decarbonization policies—everything is possible.
- **Shifting Patterns:** Consumer expectations are high, decarbonization policies, logistic patterns change, redefining modal collaborations and partnerships, scale matters (size and area coverage), last mile partnerships, is it a thing of the past or part of the future. The scenarios should also include the “Amazon Effect.”
- **Show Me:** Focus on regional freight growth by implementing initiatives that promote the unique geographic, infrastructure, workforce, and socioeconomic conditions in the Kansas City region in the face of another pandemic, returning recessions, shortages in manpower, cost increases, markets decrease, stringent decarbonization policies, and supply chain bottlenecks.

They held one conversation in each of the freight impact area’s regions: Kansas City, Sedalia, and Lawrence-Douglas County, during the spring of 2025. At each meeting, participants reviewed the scenarios and applied tools from the sample proactive planning toolbox, rating their effectiveness for addressing:

- The “big picture” affecting freight:
 - Resiliency
 - E-commerce (Amazon Effect)
 - Just-in-time delivery
 - Land use and real estate
 - Artificial Intelligence
 - Workforce
 - Other (to be determined)
- Potential risks:
 - Aging infrastructure
 - Regulations and compliance
 - Natural hazards/disasters

- Cargo loss and cybersecurity
- Crashes and travel time reliability
- Changing fuel costs
- Carrier reliability
- Other (to be determined)

The sample tools they considered involved:

- Legislative advocacy.
- A freight destination layer tool with mapping, project selection criteria, and performance metrics via MARC Planning Sustainable Places (PSP).
- Methodology for and mapping of future port locations, intermodal and transload facilities, warehousing and distribution centers, farm-to-market routes, at-grade rail crossing and future spur locations, and anticipated freight areas.
- Resource guide with data sets, range of employment possibilities, etc., that express freight's meaning to the region and what impacts it.
- Checklist for context sensitive freight development, infill, and street design that addresses first and last mile considerations, truck parking, activity centers, land use, and mobility.
- Harvest season traffic counts.
- Public relations tools (freight resource guide with data sets, range of employment possibilities, etc.) that express freight's meaning to the region and what impacts it.
- GMC partnership, consisting of KC Metro, Lawrence-Douglas County, and PTRPC regions, that pursues funding opportunities, builds connections with businesses, and helps expand the workforce.
- Regional freight symposium (annual) for brokers, drivers, logistics, warehousing, distribution, agriculture, and government representatives.
- Freight-focused duties at each metropolitan planning organization/regional planning commission.
- Livability checklist for freight in terms of workforce and housing diversification, accessibility, services, amenities, and buffers.
- Enforcement for and education on weigh stations, permitting, truck parking, lane use, etc.
- Traffic Incident Management resources and communication via Kansas City Scout, 511, telephone, etc.

Participants also suggested the following additional tools to include within the toolbox:

- Signs for truck and alternative routes for when roads are closed.
- Maps of truck, detour, and flooding routes on Google maps along with existing and future rail spurs, criteria for expansion, and intermodal integration.
- Environmental mitigation and resiliency for flooding, extreme heat, selection of freight sites, fleet emissions, infrastructure guidance, and ecological preservation.
- Multimodal partner and transportation policy planning, between departments of transportation, metropolitan planning organizations, and regional planning commissions to address the unfunded needs list; non-fuel tax funding options; available resources and activities; average daily traffic thresholds for urbanized versus rural areas; communication of regional priorities and major events (emergency, game days); land development considerations connected to freight; updating planning documents and codes for access management; and more.
- Freight safety and security improvements for the Transportation Security Administration and Department of Homeland Security, tied to policy formation and logistics education.
- Workforce education on potential freight careers.
- Economic development and road projects targeted to key industrial sectors.
- A multistate automatic permalink for oversized and overweight vehicles.
- Emergency response equipment for traffic incidents.

Overall, when applying the tools to the scenarios, participants indicated many would be at least moderately affective. Across scenarios, they selected the following tools most:

- Kansas City region
 - Context sensitive freight development and design checklist
 - Enforcement and education
 - Harvest signs and traffic counts
 - Layer tool via MARC PSP
 - Livability checklist for workforce, housing, etc.
 - Mapping of future ports, transload, intermodal, farm-to-market, etc.
 - Regional freight symposium
 - Traffic incident management
- Sedalia region
 - Layer tool via MARC PSP

- Legislative advocacy
- Mapping of future ports, transload, intermodal, farm-to-market, etc.
- Resource guide for expected freight operations
- Traffic incident management
- Lawrence-Douglas County
 - Context sensitive freight development and design checklist
 - Enforcement and education
 - Freight-focused duties
 - GMC partnership
 - Harvest season traffic counts
 - Layer Tool via PSP
 - Legislative advocacy
 - Livability checklist for workforce, housing, etc.
 - Mapping of future ports, transload, intermodal, farm-to-market, etc.
 - Public relations tools
 - Regional freight symposium
 - Resource guide for expected freight operations
 - Traffic incident management

The project team concluded each meeting with a discussion of potential criteria for initiatives, policies, and funding. They placed each criterion into one of the following categories: positively impacting quality of life, resilient and efficient freight operations, availability of resources, and other. In response, participants included the following among their top four criteria:

- **Positively impacts quality of life:** Workforce
- **Resilient and efficient freight operations:** Preservation/improvement of the transportation system
- **Availability of resource:** Focused collaboration across agencies (departments of transportation, municipal and regional planning organizations, private sector)
- **Other:** Dedicated freight funding