

METRO-MOBILITY TALKS

Corpus Christi MPO Freight Study

MAJOR FREIGHT FACILITIES IMPACT STUDY

Changes to the region's freight transportation system are needed to maintain freight mobility and prepare for future growth, according to a study commissioned by the Corpus Christi Metropolitan Planning Organization (CCMPO).

The Major Freight Facilities Impact Study, published in February by Wilbur Smith Associates of Columbia, South Carolina, evaluated the Corpus Christi area's existing and planned logistics assets. The Corpus Christi region plays an important role in North American freight transportation, the study reported, and to continue and expand that role the region's logistics capabilities must be enhanced. The study by Wilbur Smith Associates is designed to guide area planners, including the CCMPO, in that process.

The study sought to answer several questions designed to determine the best use of existing assets, the best way to upgrade and expand them, and what priority they should be given. Many of the questions were related to La Quinta Terminal, a planned 188-acre multi-use facility in Ingleside on Corpus Christi Bay.

The 65-page study examined, among other things, existing rail service, Corpus Christi's highway network, La Quinta Terminal, rail access to the terminal, and a proposed Universal Freight System, which would use unmanned vehicles to move freight. The study recommended the following:

1. *Proposed improvements to rail connections in Odem and Sinton should be the highest priority in order to eliminate an existing bottleneck that will only worsen unless changes are made. These upgrades will provide significant improvements in rail efficiency as well as highway safety.*
2. *As development occurs at La Quinta or Ingleside, improvements should be made to a 30-mile section of track that begins in Sinton and extends through Ingleside. Improvements also will need to be made to the highway network in the area. These improvements will make the Ingleside area more attractive to industrial development.*
3. *Providing multiple rail carriers to serve La Quinta is desirable and probably a critical component in ensuring its success. A public-private partnership involving local and possibly state stakeholders should establish this as a common goal, determine the needed infrastructure and operational changes, and develop cost-sharing arrangements.*
4. *Short of any commitments by the major railroads to offer intermodal container service to Robstown, the proposed logistics facility there, known as the City of Robstown Trade Processing and Inland Center, should focus on improving the transportation of non-containerized freight.*

The recommended changes will improve safety for rail employees and reduce rail accidents, according to the report, and elimination of redundant rail movements over at-grade highway crossings will increase highway efficiency and reduce exposure to highway-rail incidents.

The study also found that implementation of the conclusions and recommendations will likely require a public-private partnership approach. This partnership should be based on the common goal of improving freight service to, from, and through the Corpus Christi region. Once this has been established, the next steps will include the infrastructure and operational improvement required, their prioritization, and, finally, cost sharing.

This will mean a financing plan that includes local, state, and federal participation.

The study is available for viewing/download at www.corpuschristi-mpo.org/MPO_Studies.html. The MPO also makes the study available on CD media upon request.

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