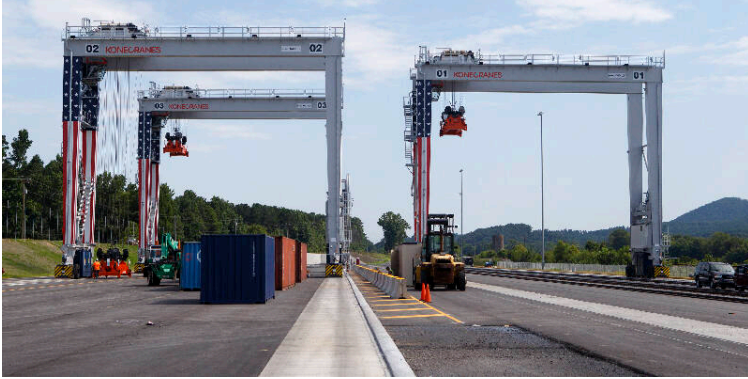


Federal, state funding for infrastructure could be key to freight, logistics sector in Georgia

October 15th, 2019 | by [Patrick Filbin](#)



Staff photo by C.B. Schmelter / The Appalachian Regional Port, a freight pickup and drop-off gateway for trucks and trains, is seen on Tuesday, July 10, 2018 in Crandall, Ga. The port, equipped with three state-of-the-art electric cranes, is set to open on Aug. 1

Without adequate funding from both the state and federal levels, the nation's growing freight industry could be in jeopardy, and Georgia is right in the middle of the situation.

A new [report](#) shows a lack of adequate funding is part of the problem when it comes to the country's freight industry.

The report — conducted by the national transportation nonprofit TRIP — showed that in order for the country's freight transportation system to continue to work in an efficient and safe way while keeping up with demand, states need to invest in projects that accommodate freight growth and logistics.

The report ranked Georgia No. 10 among states for the highest value of freight by all modes of transportation in 2016 with approximately \$843 billion worth of freight. It also marked Georgia No. 17 on a list of states with the largest annual projected increase in truck freight by value between 2016 and 2045.

Georgia also ranked No. 7 in total weight shipped by truck with more than 430,000 tons shipped in 2016.

From 2013 to 2017, Georgia ranked fourth in the country in average annual large truck fatalities with 179.

By the numbers

* \$843 billion — Value of freight shipped in Georgia, which ranks No. 17 among all states

* 430,000 tons - Weight of all shipments in Georgia, the seventh highest among the states.

* 179 - Number of traffic fatalities a year, on average, from 2013 to 2017 — the fourth highest of all states

Source: TRIP, a Washington D.C. nonprofit organization, "America's Rolling Warehouses."

Russell McMurry, the Georgia Department of Transportation commissioner, said GDOT strategically works within the state's budget to accommodate projects that could benefit the state while facilitating a growing freight and logistics sector.

"We look to leverage federal funds to address major mobility improvement projects that will help reduce congestion and significantly improve mobility for the growing freight and logistics industry," McMurry said.

The nation's freight system moves a daily average of about 51 million tons, valued at \$55 billion. Trucking accounted for the largest share of freight movement in 2016, carrying 72% of all freight.

With domestic shipments, trade, automation of driving and a number of other key factors, TRIP predicts the country only will become more reliant on freight and trucking.

The more reliant people are, the more roads and infrastructure be get used and the more they will need to be kept up.

The American Transportation Research Institute estimates traffic congestion on the nation's major highways resulted in the addition of \$74.5 billion in operational costs to the trucking industry in 2016, including 1.2 billion hours of lost productivity as a result of trucks being stuck in traffic.

For the freight and trucking industry to thrive in Georgia, money needs to be invested in infrastructure.

Chattanooga is known to many in the industry as "Freight Alley" for its proximity to so many freight hubs in the southeastern part of the nation. In Chattanooga, three local metropolitan and transportation planning organizations — the Chattanooga-Hamilton County/North Georgia TPO, the Cleveland Urban Area MPO and the Greater Dalton MPO — [said in April that they have budget shortfalls](#) for currently identified transportation projects totaling more than \$3 billion.

"Almost any jurisdiction would tell you there is a lot of unmet need in terms of building and maintaining transportation infrastructure," said Greg Thomas, planning director and coordinator with the Cleveland Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization.

"That being said, we appreciate the value that our elected officials place on these facilities in approving the funding that they provide," he added.

This spring, for just the Chattanooga-Hamilton County/North Georgia TPO, there was a combined funding shortfall of \$1.7 billion for 18 road capacity projects, 14 transit capacity projects and three bicycle/pedestrian projects in the 2045 Regional Transportation Plan. When the Hatchie Bridge in Tipton County, Tennessee, collapsed in 1989 and killed eight motorists, an investigation was opened into the state's failure to inspect and correct problems with the bridge a decade earlier.

After a bridge collapsed on Interstate 75 in Chattanooga and injured a motorist, Thrive Regional Partnership released a statement about the larger issue of needing to improve infrastructure in the region and across the country.

The nonprofit is focused on promoting responsible growth for the next 40 years through the tristate Chattanooga region, which includes working with 16 counties in three different states and the three different metropolitan planning organizations.

[With transportation and mobility a large focus of the organization](#), officials often cite how the intersection of I-24 and U.S. Highway 27 is listed in the top 100 freight bottlenecks by American Transportation Research Institute.

According to TRIP, Georgia has three of the top nine worst freight highway bottlenecks based on the number of trucks using a particular highway facility and the impact of congestion on the average speed of those vehicles.

Those areas, all in Atlanta, are Interstate 285 at I-85 North, I-75 at I-285 North and I-20 at I-285 West. The I-24/I-40 and I-440 East intersection in Nashville was rated the eighth worst.

McMurry represents GDOT on the [Georgia Commission on Freight and Logistics](#), a new group that was developed earlier this year.

The commission, with co-chairmen Sen. Brandon Beach and Rep. Kevin Tanner and comprised of elected officials, agency representatives and leaders from the private sector, is scheduled to meet in Dalton on Wednesday ahead of its report that will be given to the lieutenant governor and the speaker of the House of Representatives by Dec. 31.

One of the ways Georgia is looking at enhancing the transportation sector is with the Major Mobility Investment Program, a group of statewide improvement projects that was implemented to add capacity, improve mobility for motorists and freight, provide operational improvements and decrease travel times.

The state broke ground on the first program project last year: the widening of Interstate 85 to improve personal and freight mobility in Barrow, Gwinnett and Jackson counties.

TRIP also noted Georgia's plan to add 40 miles of truck-only lanes on a portion of I-75 as a step forward.

McMurry said that with Georgia expected to move from eighth in population among states to fifth by 2040, a long-term federal commitment to infrastructure funding will give GDOT the "ability to continue making strides in offering the smartest and most effective transportation solutions to keep people and freight moving."

"Georgia has made significant investments to upgrade and maintain our transportation network, but our work is not complete," he said.

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