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February 6, 2014

Docket Number FHWA-2013-0050  
United States Department of Transportation  
Federal Highway Administration  
1200 New Jersey Avenue SE  
Washington, D.C. 20590

Re: Designation of the Primary Freight Network – Docket Number FHWA-2013-0050

The American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) appreciates the opportunity to comment on the United States Department of Transportation (U.S. DOT) draft initial Designation of the Primary Freight Network (PFN), published for comment in the November 19, 2013, Federal Register.

As the association for highway and transportation departments in the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico, AASHTO represents all transportation modes. The State Departments of Transportation recognize that the efficient movement of freight and commercial goods across all modes of transportation is essential to the future economic growth and global competitiveness of states, regions, and the nation, and have for years taken considerable measures to plan and deliver transportation programs to meet essential freight transportation mobility needs.

We are encouraged by Congress' recognition of the significance of national freight transportation policy and mobility by its inclusion in MAP-21. States have long recognized this importance by engaging in impressive and extensive statewide freight planning, active engagement with statewide freight advisory councils, and delivery of multimodal freight transportation programs that directly benefit and enhance freight mobility and the economy in their respective jurisdictions.

AASHTO commends Congress for establishing a National Freight Network (NFN) "to assist States in strategically directing resources toward improved system performance for efficient movement of freight on highways," (23 USC 167 (c)). AASHTO believes that 23 USC 167 will offer many useful tools in addition to what already exists in Federal law to assist States in achieving the goal of national freight mobility.

### **General Comments**

We appreciate that U.S. DOT's proposed designation of the Primary Freight Network is consistent with the provisions of MAP-21 (23 USC 167 (c-e)) in its scope, but concur with U.S. DOT that "the multitude of factors combined with the [27,000 and up to an additional 3,000 centerline miles] mileage cap does not yield a network that is representative of the most critical highway elements of the national freight system that exists in the United States." With this in

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mind, AASHTO urges U.S. DOT to provide as much flexibility to the states as possible in working with U.S. DOT to designate the Primary Freight Network within the constraints of the freight provisions of MAP-21.

In general, we believe that to effectively develop the Primary Freight Network, U.S. DOT must provide a stronger consultative role for State DOTs to identify the critical individual state components of the Primary Freight Network. Recognizing the current limitations in the provisions of MAP-21, we recommend that U.S. DOT build as much flexibility into the designation process as possible, especially by providing the states with an opportunity to identify, for their own purposes, an alternative network of freight highway routes or corridors. Further, the states will be in the best position to regularly review the designated network for required updates and revisions.

We also understand the concerns of U.S. DOT regarding the scope of the Primary Freight Network, which MAP-21 limits to the highway network. However, we note that existing provisions of 23 USC currently require that States “enhance the integration and connectivity of the transportation system, across and between modes throughout the State, for people and freight” in their Scope of Planning Process (23 USC 135 (d)(1)(F)), as well as provide for the establishment of the Interstate Highway System, the National Highway System (NHS), and other road networks eligible for funding under the federal-aid highway program. Therefore, State DOTs are already required to consider and plan for an integrated, connected multimodal freight network within their individual States.

There is no question that there are multimodal issues regarding freight transportation beyond highways; AASHTO has and will continue to be active in addressing these. However, we recognize that under the applicable statute, the PFN is defined as a highway network only; therefore, this is the focus of this docket.

AASHTO also notes that MAP-21 directs U.S. DOT to redesignate the Primary Freight Network every ten years (23 USC 167 (d)(3)), however, we believe that nothing precludes U.S. DOT from network redesignation within a shorter time frame, especially as U.S. DOT continues to designate new interstate highway and NHS segments.

### **Specific Responses to the Proposed Designation of the Primary Freight Network**

We offer the following comments in response to the five areas for which U.S. DOT is seeking specific feedback:

#### **1. Specific route deletions, additions, or modifications to the draft initial designation of the highway PFN contained in this notice**

AASHTO believes that the factors for designation defined in MAP-21 are too limiting and urge Congress to provide additional flexibility to enable State DOTs to designate or include additional segments beyond the current mileage cap. We recognize U.S. DOT is compelled to apply these criteria. However, the proposed Primary Freight Network, in fact, cannot meet the “network connectivity” factor criteria. Therefore, we urge U.S. DOT to seek broad flexibility in the application of the factors in the network designation and

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allow the State DOTs discretion to designate state freight networks that meet the needs for access and connectivity of their diverse and dynamic freight networks.

2. **The methodology for achieving a 27,000-mile final designation**

We recognize that MAP-21 requires designation of a 27,000 mile Primary Freight Network based on centerline miles and the proposed designation reflects that requirement. We urge Congress to adopt a corridor-based approach which incorporates multiple highway facilities rather than highway center-line miles. After seeing the network that results from a strict application of MAP-21 designation criteria, it is apparent that a 27,000 mile network based on centerline miles is far too small.

We recommend that U.S. DOT give greater weight to factors that states suggest, including consideration of State Freight Plans that may be developed, and factors that address connectivity, including but not limited to, important freight origins and destinations, multimodal hubs, and connections to international borders. While U.S. DOT may be restricted by the mileage requirement, we urge them to be as flexible as possible in using the designation criteria. For example, an Average Annual Daily Truck Traffic (AADTT) count of 8,500 trucks per day is too high in most places to identify a primary freight network that will also yield network connectivity.

3. **How the NFN and its components could be used by freight stakeholders in the future**

Noting that state departments of transportation are critical members of the freight stakeholder community, AASHTO believes designation of a Primary Freight Network could be a useful resource to states for freight planning efforts including but not limited to: designation of Critical Rural Freight Corridors, the development and update of State Freight Plans, input to State Freight Advisory Councils, and other planning purposes.

However, State DOTs would strongly object to the use of the U.S. DOT designated Primary Freight Network to direct Federal funding. Also, any guidance and rule making that would establish a purpose of the NFN and the PFN should be made available for a new public comment period.

4. **How the NFN may fit into a multimodal National Freight System**

The Scope of Planning Process (23 USC 135 (d)(1)(F) currently requires States to “enhance the integration and connectivity of the transportation system, across and between modes throughout the State, for people and freight.” The National Highway System (NHS) (23 USC 103), which includes interstates, intermodal connectors, and the National Truck Network (NTN) (23 CFR 658), each comprise multimodal freight networks designated through state action approved by the federal government. Therefore, regardless of this designation of a Primary Freight Network as required by MAP-21, the State DOTs have been addressing, and will continue to address freight in the context of an integrated, multimodal network through their freight planning processes.

5. **Suggestions for an urban-area route designation process**

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Significant national and international trade flows originate or terminate in large and mid-sized urban areas across the country, and therefore, urban routes should be integral to the Primary Freight Network provided that the network is of a sufficient size. However, Congress did not provide for the specific designation of urban-area routes on the Primary Freight Network. Additionally, the 27,000 mile network limitation precludes the ability to adequately designate urban freight routes as part of the Primary Freight Network.

The State DOTs, in consultation with MPOs, may find it useful as a voluntary state activity to designate urban freight networks that meet their needs. State DOTs and MPOs have the necessary data sources and datasets to ensure that critical urban freight corridors are considered in their planning processes. AASHTO believes that the process Congress established for State DOTs to identify Critical Rural Freight Corridors (23 USC 167 (e)) is a useful model for the identification of critical urban freight corridors. AASHTO also believes that U.S. DOT should clarify the processes it uses for other existing federally-designated highway networks to ensure that a critical urban freight corridor identification process is complementary.

In addressing the urban components of the Primary Freight Network, consideration should be given not just to urban areas, but also to those metropolitan areas defined by U.S. Census as urbanized: urban areas with a population of 50,000 or more.

AASHTO appreciates the efforts of U.S. DOT in the designation of the Primary Freight Network within the constraints of the provisions of MAP-21. We look forward to continuing to work with U.S. DOT in advancing the designation of a National Freight Network that is integrated and consistent with the efforts of the states in their freight planning and freight network designations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael W. Hancock'.

Michael W. Hancock, P.E.  
President  
Secretary, Kentucky Transportation Cabinet

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bud Wright'.

Frederick G. "Bud" Wright  
Executive Director