

# Criteria for Government Involvement in Intermodal Freight Projects

## New TRB Report

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**F**reight transportation is critical for nearly every item and service purchased by U.S. consumers. The movement of goods transferred between truck and rail, or rail and water, known as "intermodal" freight transportation, plays a growing role in the nation's freight sector. Because intermodal freight competes with traditional single-mode freight, the intermodal option has spurred efficiency in a large segment of the freight industry overall. The growth of intermodal freight has helped to control the costs of operating highways and to reduce pollution, and has stimulated employment in some local areas.

State and local governments have become increasingly aware of the importance of freight transfer facilities—such as seaports; airports; and barge, truck, and rail terminals—for the efficient functioning of the transportation system and for regional economic development. But projects to build and improve access to these facilities pose special challenges. Successful projects require partnerships between government and the private sector that can involve complex, often innovative financing arrangements such as tolls, special taxes, and bonds.

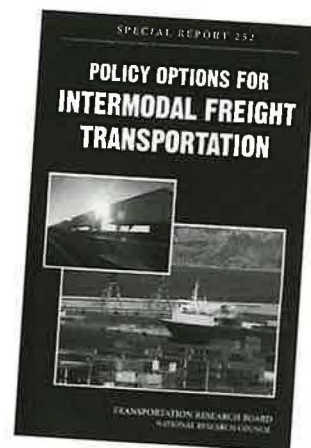
A new report from the Transportation Research Board, *Policy Options for Intermodal Freight Transportation* (Special Report 252), provides guidelines designed to help governments evaluate proposals for public investment in freight facility projects and select financing arrangements. The report also examines government policies beyond infrastructure investment that affect freight efficiency, including regulations and operating practices for public roads, ports, and waterways. Funding for the study was provided by the Federal Highway Administration and the Federal Railroad Administration,

U.S. Department of Transportation, and by TRB.

To warrant government participation, the report says, a proposed freight infrastructure project first must make sense economically—that is, have benefits that exceed its costs—and also must meet one or more of the following conditions:

- ◆ Reduce the external costs of transportation, such as pollution and traffic congestion, that are in addition to those borne directly by shippers and carriers.
- ◆ Yield economic development benefits beyond those to users of the facility, such as jobs created in a region of high unemployment.
- ◆ Redress an imbalance caused by subsidies to some class of carrier or competing freight facilities.
- ◆ Be necessary for national defense or public safety.
- ◆ Fall within the established government responsibility for parts of the infrastructure, such as government-owned highways, ports, waterways, and airports.

Government participation in a freight project does not necessarily mean project subsidies, the report notes. Governments may have a role as facilitators or brokers, for example, when multiple jurisdictions are involved. In such cases governments may be able to cut red tape, but still require that user fees charged by facilities cover project costs. If Congress and the states wish to attract more private-sector partners to public freight projects, they will need to expand the range of available financing options through increased funding for state infrastructure banks, changes in certain tax-exempt bond restrictions, and removal of state-level legal barriers to public-private joint development.



Special Report 252, *Policy Options for Intermodal Freight Transportation*, is available from the Transportation Research Board (see Publications Order Form in this issue).

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## Web Sites Related to Transportation Education

The following are just some of the many Web sites available to educators and students involved in transportation education and training. Many of these sites provide links to other, related sites.

**TRAC:** <http://www.trac.net/index.html>

TRAC is a hands-on transportation education program designed for use in science, math, and social science classes (see article by Shute in this issue). The Web site provides detailed information on TRAC, as well as links to university, summer employment, and career opportunities.

**Boomerang Box:** <http://www.apl.com/boomerangbox/preexplor.htm>

The Boomerang Box is an innovative public-private partnership designed to help students learn about international trade and transportation. Students decorate a 40-foot cargo container that carries freight throughout the world. They can then track the ship's travels on the Web site, thereby learning about intermodal transportation.

**Garrett A. Morgan Technology and Transportation Futures Program:**  
<http://education.dot.gov>

Links to educational resources for use from kindergarten through adult education are provided, including the education-related Web sites of the various modal administrations of the U.S. Department of Transportation and other government agencies. Information is also presented on partnership and volunteer opportunities connected with the program. (See article by Coyner in this issue.)

**Science and Math Initiatives (SAMI):** <http://www.learner.org/sami/>

A clearinghouse of resources, funding, and curriculum for rural math and science teachers, SAMI also provides links to a variety of math and science resources on the Web.

**Safety City:** <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/kids>

Offered through the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Safe City is designed to enhance transportation education for children. The site offers videos, coloring books, word games, and puzzles that feature transportation and safety information.

**Office of Transportation Technologies:**  
<http://www.ott.doe.gov/programs.html>

Information is provided on transportation-related programs available through the Office of Transportation Technologies, U.S. Department of Energy, including university programs, partnership opportunities, alternative-fuels training programs, and student competitions. The site also links to a Kids' Page that enables young children to learn about alternative-fuel cars and the environment.

**Education in Science, Technology, Energy, Engineering, and Math (ESTEEM):**  
<http://www.sandia.gov/ESTEEM>

ESTEEM is the name of the Web page maintained by Sandia National Laboratories. It links to a number of other sites (including the Department of Energy site). Information is offered on university research and internship opportunities; high school national competitions and special projects; middle school programs relating to energy and the environment; and elementary school projects, events, and programs. Also provided are links to related sites and a listing of various education partners. The site has a separate transportation component entitled Electric Bus.

**KidSat:** <http://kidsat.jpl.nasa.gov/>

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration has a 3-year pilot program to bring space exploration into classrooms around the nation. KidSat is operated by students who want to explore the earth from space. Through the Internet, students are involved in planning observations and using images from Shuttle-based cameras to study the earth's environment.