

OTHER MODAL CONNECTIONS

7.1) OVERVIEW

Transportation systems must be multimodal. Beyond the typical modes of travel, the region's transportation system must consider the movement of people and freight as well as airports and rail facilities. Existing and future intermodal connecting points are a vital part of the system MTP's goals, objectives and policies. Enhancing freight mobility improves regional economic development while simultaneously minimizing impacts to the neighborhoods and the environment. The growth of air cargo and its linkage to freight corridors will require new and existing road facilities to ensure appropriate transport of goods. Now that passenger rail is recognized as a viable option between Santa Fe and Albuquerque, this area could stand to benefit from a commuter rail connection from Farmington to Albuquerque. Establishing an equestrian trail network will maintain the rural nature of many parts of the county.

7.2) FREIGHT

With an expansive mineral extraction industry and the need to bring in finished products to support the expanding retail sector, freight movement is an important need throughout the Farmington MPO region. Now, as the movement of goods continues to grow, the result will be more trucks, and possibly an increase in air cargo transport traffic using the transportation system. More trucks on the region's state highways will require capacity improvements and route upgrades. Finally, intermodal exchanges, locally and regionally, will need to be enhanced to improve the efficiency of goods delivery.



The role of the Farmington MPO in freight planning is to develop a framework for facilitating and enhancing freight mobility and goods movement in the region, improving the region's economic competitiveness, and minimizing negative environmental and community impacts within the MPO region.

7.3) NMDOT FREIGHT STUDY

In 2008, NMDOT published a statewide Multimodal Freight Study. Although the focus was on the interstate corridors and the Albuquerque region, some highlights about the MPO region include:

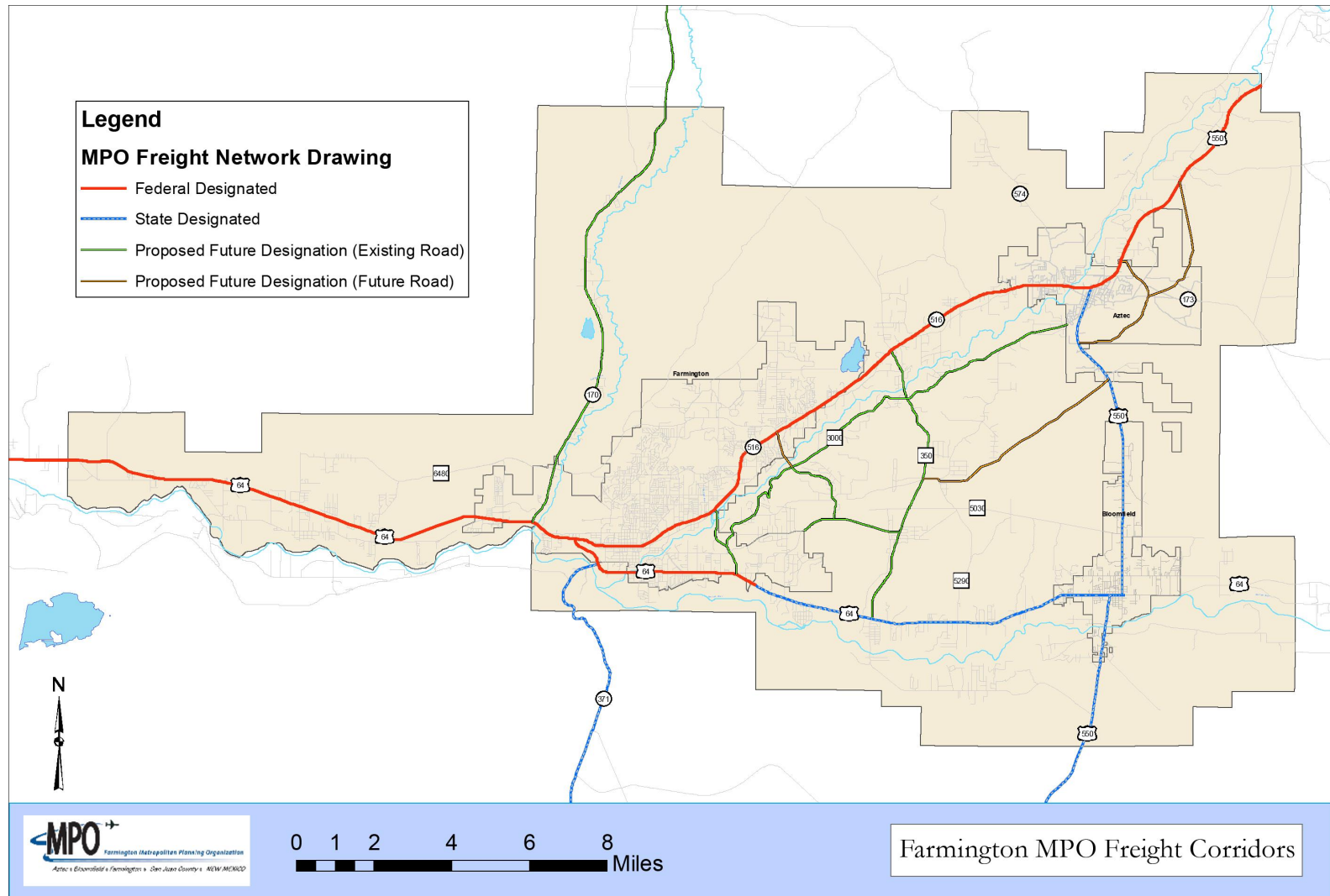
- US 550 is an identified freight corridor that links the Farmington area to regional, state, and national markets; US 550 is critical to the oil and gas industry.
- US 550 has a projected truck Average Annual Daily Traffic (AADT) of 3,000 to 7,000 in 2035.

- There is a strain on US 550 infrastructure conditions and there is concern that maintenance for these roads is deferred to other areas of the state.
- US 64 between Farmington and Bloomfield has a projected truck AADT of 7,000 to 15,000 in 2035.

Area truck routes, as stated in the Freight Study, are as follows:

Federally-Designated	State Designated
US 64 from Farmington west to Arizona	US 64 Farmington to Bloomfield
NM 516	US 550 from I-25 to Aztec
US 550 from Aztec to Colorado	NM 371 from Farmington south

MAP 7-1 – Truck Routes in the Farmington MPO



7.4) FUTURE FREIGHT CONSIDERATIONS

Future freight considerations for this area:

- What does Bloomfield plan for freight movement, given freight traffic to/from Colorado and Albuquerque as well as the proposed industrial park north of town? Will all truck traffic rely on US 550?
- How will the potential industrial corridor of CR 350 impact the area road network?
- How will future industrial expansion affect Farmington and Aztec?

In order to facilitate the development of a freight framework, the following considerations should be taken into account to support the vision of an accessible, safe, and efficient surface transportation system that integrates convenience, affordability and improved air quality:

- Increase the efficiency of the existing transportation system and decrease traffic congestion through coordination of traffic operations and development of strategies to reduce travel demand at both the regional and corridor levels.
- Develop and implement operational improvements for the management of traffic along major travel corridors, including incident management, intersection improvements, construction coordination, access management, signal re-timing programs, and freight management.
- Monitor freight travel patterns and identify preferred truck routes and the implementation of truck lanes.

7.5) AIR CARGO

The potential for growth of air cargo within the Farmington MPO either at the Farmington or Aztec airports is tied to the growth and movement of products within the Four Corners region. Most of the air cargo transported via the airport involves goods moving to or from regional sorting centers and warehouses in Albuquerque or within New Mexico. Mail and other products are shipped via air cargo to facilitate “just-in-time” arrivals. Improvements in area arterials, such as Piñon Hills Extension Bridge and the Aztec East Arterial, are needed to facilitate possible increases in air cargo.

Another improvement to the road network serving the airport which merits implementation is preserving the corridor and future construction of the Northern Route to allow establishment of a connection between both airports and facilities located in Southwest Colorado. The Northern Route would be a proposed relief route to NM 516 and would connect from the northeast part of Farmington to north and west parts of Aztec. Being in the vicinity of the Aztec Airport, this new route would provide convenient mobility for shipping freight and air cargo.

It is worthwhile to note that Aztec has considered an industrial park to be located near the Aztec Airport and currently has expanded industrial parks in the south part of the city along US 550. A market analysis and runway justification study may be needed if gradual increase in aircraft operations occurs over the next 20 years.

7.6) INTELLIGENT TRANSPORTATION SYSTEMS

Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) are integrated technologies that improve safety and mobility on roadways, coordinate emergency management procedures, and distribute regional traveler information. ITS Program Areas include Traffic Management, Traveler Information, Public Transportation Management, and Emergency Management.

The MPO adopted an ITS architecture for the area in November 2006 and renewed it in November 2008. An ITS architecture is a computer software program that an MPO uses to inventory the various ITS elements and stakeholders involved. The Farmington MPO architecture describes the stakeholders who are involved with ITS, the types of ITS technologies to implement, and the roles and responsibilities of the stakeholders. Initial ITS projects that could be implemented include:

- Dynamic Message Signs (DMS) along critical regional corridors such as US 64, NM 516, and US 550 that would provide traveler alerts, travel times, and roadway conditions
- Arterial Management through a Traffic Management Center that monitors traffic flows and adjusts traffic control devices to reduce congestion
- Signal Synchronization that improves traffic flow on principal arterials
- Information kiosks for communicating regional traveler information

7.7) COMMUTER RAIL/LIGHT RAIL

The RailRunner is the first commuter line in New Mexico, running from Santa Fe to Belen and serving Albuquerque. The rail line has been a great success in the past four years and has witnessed increasing ridership as new stops opened along the route. Possible expansion could see the RailRunner reaching as far south as Las Cruces. With a main rail corridor already in place, New Mexico has the potential for creating branch lines that serve various cities to the east and west of Albuquerque. As an idea for a long term, potential project the MPO and its entities should consider the costs and benefits of a spur route from the RailRunner to connect this area to the Albuquerque region.

On a more local scale, the MPO could stand to benefit from a light rail system that serves the three cities and other unincorporated communities such as Kirtland and Flora Vista. A light rail system would provide a fast and convenient mode choice. The system could parallel the existing roadways or be integrated into those corridors. Light rail would be an excellent opportunity for transit-oriented developments to occur and would strengthen the connection between transportation and land use planning.

At one time there was a freight rail line that transported goods between Farmington and Durango, CO. Although the line has been abandoned and many segments of the corridor have been sold to private ownership, reconnecting the Four Corners region with rail may be a viable option for transporting people and helping to generate economic

development. Moving goods by rail could alleviate future truck traffic which in turn helps reduce deterioration of current infrastructure.

7.8) EQUESTRIAN

Horseback riding is a popular activity which speaks to the agricultural history of this area. There are times when riders need to use public highways to reach remote trail destinations. Horseback riders must ride defensively, and always anticipate the unexpected. In identifying potential locations for equestrian trails, safety concerns are crucial. Different situations to be aware of include minimizing the potential for conflicts between equestrians and other modes of transportation (bridges, bike/pedestrian trail crossings, motorized and nonmotorized traffic). There are currently no specifically-designated equestrian trail systems within the MPO region; however, equestrians are permitted to use the riverwalk trail in Farmington and wide shoulders on state owned highways. The MPO should consider working with local equestrian stakeholders to identify key locations for equestrian trails. The trails could be mechanism for attracting future residents who enjoy this activity.