

Strategic Plan

Transportation Research Board Intermodal Freight Transport Committee

This document presents the strategic plan of the Transportation Research Board's Intermodal Freight Transport Committee, sometimes referenced by its TRB numeric code—AT045. The plan was developed in 2003 by an ad hoc subcommittee of the full committee, and follows an earlier strategic planning concept developed in the year 2000. The discussion below consists of the following:

- an overview of TRB and the Intermodal Freight Transport Committee,
- an itemization of the committee's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats, sometimes referenced as a "SWOT Analysis,"
- a discussion of a realigned committee structure, and
- the committee's mission, goals, strategies, and action agenda.

The committee's strategic plan is intended to be a "living document" that will be reviewed periodically and updated as needed. Comments about the strategic plan should be directed to the Committee's chair or to any of the committee's other officers.

Overview

The Transportation Research Board (TRB) is one of six major divisions of the National Research Council, a private, nonprofit institution that provides services to the government, public, and scientific and engineering communities. Established in 1920, the TRB is supported by state transportation departments and federal agencies, including the U.S. Department of Transportation and its component administrations.

The TRB is organized into five major divisions, one of which is "Technical Activities" (Division A). The Technical Activities Division is further divided into 11 groups comprised of approximately 200 standing committees and task forces, representing 4,000 volunteer members. Four of the 11 groups include standing committees that focus wholly or partially on freight-related activities. One of these four groups--Freight Systems—is comprised of 10 standing committees and two task forces.

The Intermodal Freight Transport Committee is one of the 10 standing committees in the TRB Freight System Group. The Intermodal Freight Transport Committee was established in 1984, a few years before passage of the federal Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act. In its nearly 20-year existence, the committee has focused on a wide variety of intermodal matters reflecting the increased visibility and importance of intermodal in general and freight in particular.

The scope of the committee includes all aspects of research pertaining to intermodal freight transport. The primary focus is on rail-water, rail-highway, highway-water, and highway-air modal combinations, but other combinations may be considered where appropriate. For purposes of the committee, intermodal freight transport includes all shipments that employ more than one mode in a single through movement from origin to destination; local pick-up and delivery by truck for other modes is not included. Research ideas and topics focus on a wide variety of activities that impact the movement of freight in intermodal transport, including rates, routes, services, transfer facilities, and containers.

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats

Many strategic planning efforts include an assessment of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, sometimes referenced as a SWOT analysis. The purpose of such an analysis is to identify a wide variety of factors and forces affecting the ability of an organizational entity to meet its goals and accomplish its objectives. Figure 1 provides a summary of the components of a SWOT analysis for the Intermodal Freight Transport Committee.

Figure 1

Intermodal Freight Transport Committee SWOT Analysis Overview

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Things the committee does well • Positive committee characteristics 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Things the committee does not do well • Negative committee characteristics
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Areas where the committee can add value • Potential for enhancing effectiveness 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issues that threaten committee effectiveness

Figure 2 provides a more detailed profile of the committee’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. These should be viewed as a “snapshot in time” and will change with changes in internal and external factors affecting the committee.

Figure 2

Intermodal Freight Committee SWOT Analysis Details

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong annual meeting attendance • Consistent paper reviews, session planning • Well attended annual meeting sessions • Successful committee co-sponsoring of annual meeting sessions • Good communications tools (e.g., Web site) • Extensive collective industry knowledge • Coordinated and documented strategic planning activity • Documented guidelines for committee membership • Energetic and dedicated “core” membership • Strong leadership, educated about TRB • Extensive initial list of research problem statements • Committed and helpful “friends” 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited member time and energy • No ready-made path to practical application of good ideas and best practices • Short and sometimes unpredictable timelines • Minimal new research ideas • Insufficient annual meeting time • Minimal participation by a few committee members • Insufficient coordination with other committees • Minimal participation in research activities • Infrequent meetings
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broad array of valid freight research needs • Increasing awareness of freight needs at TRB • Potentially greater emphasis on intermodal freight issues in TEA 21 reauthorization • Inclusion of new committee talent through periodic member rotation • Wider communications among stakeholders • Creation of an integrated freight research “agenda” supported by all committees • Updating of existing list of problem statements and developing new statements • Clarification of intermodal freight transport research needs and opportunities • Increasing number of state and metropolitan freight advisory councils/committees • Emerging AASHTO and National Freight Stakeholders Coalition support for a freight research program 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lagging economy, scant budgets • Insufficient member time and energy to accomplish committee and TRB objectives • Overlap between TRB freight-related committees • Different perspectives on the meaning and scope of major intermodal freight issues

Through the active involvement of a number of its members, the committee is characterized by an extensive set of strengths. These strengths, along with factors internal and external to TRB, enable the identification of a variety of potential opportunities, some of which are shown in Figure 2. Constraining the realization of the committee's work are a number of weaknesses and threats which should be realistically considered in identifying the substance and timing of what the committee can accomplish.

This strategic planning effort seeks to balance an understanding of the committee's strengths, weaknesses, and threats in assessing future opportunities. As noted above, the strategic plan is a living document that should be considered as a snapshot in time affected by numerous internal and external factors. As internal and external factors change, so too will the committee's understanding of what it can realistically seek to achieve.

Proposed Committee Structure

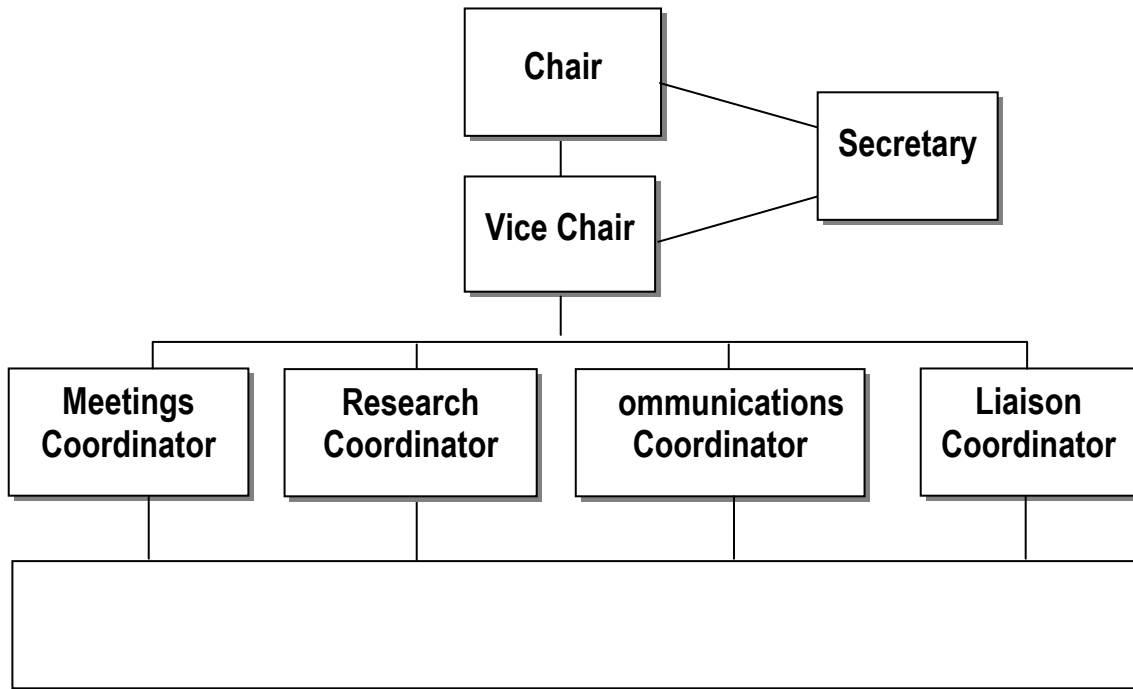
The committee's 2000 strategic planning concept identified five subcommittees within which to focus much of the committee's work. These were: Internal TRB Liaison, External Liaison, Communications, Research, and Membership. Experience in working with this structure suggests retaining the main components but organizing them differently based on a more informed understanding of what will work and what is needed. The proposed committee structure, shown in Figure 3, retains the positions of committee chair, vice chair, and secretary, and modifies the subcommittees to "activity areas," each of which having a coordinator to shape and guide liaison, communications, meetings, and research activities.

The Meetings activity area consists of seeing to the tasks associated with sponsoring and organizing sessions for annual and summer meetings. The subtasks include, but are not necessarily limited to, the following:

- identifying people to organize AT045 sponsored or co-sponsored sessions for the annual meeting, and working with session organizers to identify speakers and perform other work as needed,
- managing the process for reviewing papers submitted for the annual meeting,
- working with TRB staff and other committees to organize sessions and other activities for the summer meeting, and
- identifying opportunities to sponsor, co-sponsor, or otherwise participate in workshops, conferences, or meetings focusing on intermodal freight transport themes or topics.

Figure 3

The Proposed Committee Structure



The Research activity area represents the heart of the committee. The subtasks include, but are not necessarily limited to, the following:

- Working with TRB staff and others to identify opportunities to update existing intermodal freight research problem statements, develop new problem statements for TRB or other organizations, and serve on NCHRP or other research advisory panels,
- Encouraging AT045 members and friends to prepare and submit papers to be considered for presentation at the annual meeting and publication in the *Transportation Research Record*, and to prepare papers for other TRB publications (e.g., *TR News*) as well as publications of other organizations, and
- Providing input on intermodal freight transportation research ideas and needs to TRB management and staff, other TRB committees, and groups and organizations outside TRB.

The Communications activity area consists of maintaining and updating the committee Web page. Other tasks would be undertaken as needed.

The *Liaison* activity area combines internal and external liaison activities. This work consists of strengthening AT045 ties to other TRB freight committees, selected other TRB committees, and other organizations outside TRB.

Committee Mission, Goals, Strategies and Action Agenda

The following discussion provides specifics on the committee's overall mission, goals, strategies, and activities. The mission and goals are broad statements of what the committee seeks to accomplish. Strategies and activities are more specific and also more subject to change as internal and external considerations change. The strategies and activities presented herein will be supplemented with more specific work tasks that arise from time to time and are not specifically identified in this strategic planning document.

I. Mission

Promote innovation and progress in research on intermodal freight transportation.

II. Goals

1. Maintain and enhance TRB's role in fostering and contributing to the research, development and implementation of new technologies and innovative practices in the field of intermodal freight transport
2. Promote a research agenda that provides value to and encourages the participation and support of both the private and public sectors in research on intermodal freight transport
3. Contribute to TRB's goal of increasing its contributions to decision-making in national transportation policy issues related to intermodal freight transport
4. Contribute to improved communication and public awareness of issues in intermodal freight transport and more extensive dissemination of research findings
5. Actively engage practitioners, academics, students, and others in identifying intermodal freight research needs and conducting research to address the needs

III. Strategies to Support Goals

Goal 1: Maintain and enhance TRB's role in fostering and contributing to the research, development and implementation of new technologies and innovative practices in the field of intermodal freight transport

Strategies:

- Provide a forum for the advancement and communication of research on emerging intermodal freight transport issues and ideas
- Strengthen the committee's role as a catalyst for identifying and promoting the contribution of research on intermodal freight transport to overall transportation research and policy formulation
- Maintain strong ties and regular communication with TRB staff and officers to ensure that committee activities contribute to TRB priorities and activities
- Increase inter-group liaison between committee members and other TRB committees to ensure that research needs are being adequately addressed, and to leverage the participation of committee members into multiple activities
- Monitor the committee's progress through a set of performance measures
- Prepare a committee strategic plan review every three years

Goal 2: Promote a research agenda that provides value to and encourages the participation and support of both the private and public sectors in research on intermodal freight transport

Strategies:

- Prepare an annual set of intermodal freight research ideas that reflect current and future business, policy, and technical needs
- Develop NCHRP problem statements each year for submittal to TRB
- Contribute to TRB efforts to identify a consolidated freight research agenda
- Develop problem statements for research ideas that can be supported by outside organizations (AASHTO, USDOT, IANA, etc.)
- Encourage committee members to become actively engaged in efforts to promote opportunities to secure financial and organizational support for intermodal freight research

Goal 3: Contribute to TRB's goal of increasing its contributions to decision-making in national transportation policy issues related to intermodal freight transport

Strategies:

- Identify issues related to current and upcoming policy debates that require further research
- Improve the relevance and quality of submitted papers by developing calls for papers, encouraging paper review teams, and refining the current paper review process
- Promote more extensive committee member involvement in policy-related activities related to committee interests (legislative conferences, hearings, DOT outreach activities and listening sessions, etc.)
- Enhance opportunities for committee members to provide input into federal, state and local decision-making based on their "real-world" experience
- Recommend ways to engage intermodal stakeholders in testing trials of key ideas and best practices coming from research

Goal 4: Contribute to improved communication and public awareness of issues in intermodal freight transport and more extensive dissemination of research findings

Strategies:

- Create opportunities to incorporate the findings of TRB research projects into annual and summer meeting sessions
- Continue to organize significant policy or research sessions for each annual meeting
- Develop potential topics and sessions for specialty conferences
- Create opportunities to disseminate the results of intermodal freight transport research through other organizations or publications
- Develop an outreach and communication program that encourages more widespread awareness of and participation in committee activities by the broader transportation community, both nationally and internationally

Goal 5: Actively engage practitioners, academics, students, and others in identifying intermodal freight research needs and conducting research to address the needs

Strategies:

- Encourage and expand opportunities for participation and interaction by the committee's members, friends, and other interests in identifying research needs
- Maintain the diversity of the committee's membership to include members of public sector agencies (federal, state, local), private-sector groups, academic and research interests, and members from different geographic areas
- Provide a forum to publicize opportunities for academics, students, research institutes, or consultants to conduct intermodal freight research
- Reach out to the commercial freight industry and develop a conduit for collaboration on pressing business research needs regarding intermodal freight transport

IV. Action Agenda

Research

- Develop an annual research agenda for discussion and adoption during the annual meeting
- Explore opportunities to polish and refine a committee-generated working paper on freight research activities
- Periodically update and refine existing AT045 problem statements
- Develop at least 3 problem statements each year, including at least one research problem statement for an NCHRP synthesis project
- Revise and update the committee's millennium paper
- Develop at least one call for papers each year
- Work with TRB staff to appoint committee members to NCHRP research panels where appropriate
- Actively solicit input from committee members, friends and other transportation professionals on the committee research agenda

- Work with other committees of the TRB Freight Systems Group and modal groups on joint research initiatives
- Appoint “task forces” of committee members, friends, or members of other committees to address specific topics that require more detailed exploration for identification of specific research needs, on an as needed basis

Meetings

- Develop at least two annual meeting sessions on topics identified on the committee’s research agenda, working in partnership with other TRB committees or related organizations where possible
- Develop at least one summer meeting session on topics identified on the committee’s research agenda, working in partnership with other TRB committees or related organizations where possible
- Develop at least one paper or poster session for the annual meeting based on research conducted by TRB and/or papers submitted for review
- Organize at least one presentation on a research topic identified on the committee’s research agenda for presentation at the committee meeting during the TRB annual meeting
- Review and comment on intermodal freight transport papers that TRB staff assigns to the committee
- Develop potential topics and panel sessions for specialty conferences where appropriate
- Identify opportunities to sponsor, co-sponsor, or otherwise participate in workshops, conferences, or meetings focusing on intermodal freight transport themes or topics

Communications

- Maintain a committee Web site as a forum for exchanging information on research needs, current research findings, policy issues and member news, primarily oriented to committee members and friends but also to other transportation professionals engaged in intermodal freight transport
- Identify opportunities to disseminate information with links to the committee Web site from other relevant Web sites
- Identify opportunities inside and outside TRB to publish information on research results, calls for papers, or topics of interest to the committee

- Establish and maintain a communications channel with the intermodal freight transport business community through which research needs and results can be effectively communicated

Liaison

- Develop a list of TRB committees and other organizations with which the committee desires to maintain regular contact
- Identify members to perform liaison with those groups for the purposes of identifying common interests and reporting that information to AT045 members
- Participate in meetings of other TRB committees, the TRB Freight Systems Group, and other committees and organizations where appropriate
- Monitor Web sites and/or newsletters of other relevant committees and disseminate information of interest to AT045 members