# Policies for a 21st Century Freight Transportation System

Freight movement comes at a high price for the environment and local communities. The freight sector alone represents nearly a quarter of the transportation sector's greenhouse gas emissions, or approximately 8% of total US carbon dioxide emissions.[i] The fine particle pollution from U.S. diesel engines—the most common engines used in freight—is estimated to shorten the lives of nearly 21,000 people each year.[ii]

Freight transportation is an essential part of the global economy, and the U.S. freight sector is expected to grow dramatically in the coming years. By 2020, 90.1 million tons of freight **per day** are expected to move throughout the United States, a **70%** increase over 2002.[iii] The projected trade increases could place even greater strains on public health and the environment, and add more congestion to the already overburdened and deteriorating highway, rail, and waterway system.

The Federal Transportation Bill offers a chance to solve two critical problems at once. It can ensure that the country's freight system is modernized, while freight transportation's pollution is minimized.

## Goals for a 21st Century Freight Transportation System

America needs a comprehensive national freight policy to address simultaneously the projected increases in freight demand, congestion, greenhouse gas and air pollution, and community impacts. A national freight policy must focus on three bottom line issues:

- Reduce, prevent, and mitigate greenhouse gases, air pollution, and other negative community and health impacts;
- Foster an efficient freight transportation system sufficient to support our nation's commerce;
- Make the U.S. freight transportation system the most advanced, reliable, and environmentally sustainable in the world.

There are four ways to achieve these goals and respond to the challenges of freight transportation:

1. **Invest in existing infrastructure**. A focus on getting more value from existing infrastructure will improve efficiency and energy efficiency, put Americans to work now, reduce air pollution and greenhouse gases, and save money in the long run.
2. **Make ports and freight carriers more dependable and less polluting.** We can accomplish these goals by building green infrastructure at ports and rail yards, providing incentives to clean up existing vehicles and equipment, and supporting innovative projects and advanced technology.
3. **Develop new, sustainable revenues and distribute them in a way that recognizes the best environmental performance.**

4. **Hold the system accountable.** Monitor performance to ensure promised improvements are achieved and problems are fixed promptly.

## Federal Transportation Bill Authorization: A Tool to Improve Freight Transportation

The Federal Transportation Bill and its funding authority can help achieve the goals and objectives described above. Specifically, a freight title in the Federal Transportation Bill should do the following:

- **Marry freight infrastructure planning and investment to air quality impacts.** Infrastructure planning, development, and localized pollution impacts all must be addressed together. Funding should prioritize projects that will improve both freight and environmental performance, produce short- and long-term air quality and greenhouse gas benefits, encourage economic development, and use merit-based and quantitative criteria.
- **Establish a national approach to freight infrastructure financing and cleanup.** Establish a system of freight gateways and corridors of national importance, and require improvement plans that guarantee modernization and environmental cleanup. Plans should be created in consultation with environmental agencies and regional and local stakeholders. Funding should be prioritized to those corridors and gateways that lead in addressing environmental and community impacts.
- **Identify and dedicate sustainable and protected funding for freight transportation that will improve performance and reduce environmental impacts, including local and global pollution.** Sustainable funding is essential to achieve many of these objectives. New sources of funding need to be identified, and mechanisms to hold and appropriately administer that funding will need to be established.
- **Provide incentives to accelerate identification and adoption of best practices.** Include incentives to upgrade, retrofit and/or replace existing diesel equipment with cleaner equipment and fund innovative demonstrations of advanced technologies and best practices.
- **Establish technical assistance funds to help develop port, gateway, and corridor clean-up plans.** Make sure that the plans include monitoring and methods to mitigate unanticipated environmental setbacks.

## For More Information

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[i] "2009 U.S. Greenhouse Gas Inventory Report: Inventory of U.S. Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Sinks: 1990-2007." U.S. EPA, April 2009, http://www.epa.gov/climatechange/emissions/usinventoryreport.html (accessed February 2010).

[ii] Schneider, Conrad and L. Bruce Hill. "Diesel and Health in America: The Lingering Threat." Clean Air Task Force, February 2005, http://www.catf.us/publications/reports/Diesel_Health_in_America.pdf (accessed February 2010).

[iii] "Executive Summary- The Bottom Line," Research and Innovative Technology Administration, Bureau of Transportation Statistics, http://www.bts.gov/publications/freight_in_america/html/executive_summary.html (accessed March 2010) and Phillip R. Herr to Representatives Oberstar and DeFazio, "Approaches to Mitigate Freight Congestion," Government Accountability Office, November 20, 2008, http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d09163r.pdf (accessed October 2009).