Mr. Jim Doolin (ALDOT) opened the meeting with a welcome and individual introductions. Mr. Rod Wilburn, AICP (JRWA) then reminded the group that this was the second meeting of the FAC. As before, this meeting’s materials and notes will be distributed to FAC members and added to ALDOT’s Freight Plan webpage. The study team has recently distributed the draft Summary Report #2 and hopes FAC members will take some time to review the document and provide review comments. The draft Freight Plan is scheduled for completion by December 31 of this year. The team will distribute available information and/or documents as soon as we can so that FAC members have an opportunity to review and comment.

The team held a round of small group meetings in six regions of the state, mostly with stakeholders representing the MPOs and Port of Mobile, in August and September. As of the end of the month, the team will have completed modeling onto the network and, by early November, should begin to assess the implications on the infrastructure network, both current and potential future.

Mr. Bryan Fair (ALDOT) walked everyone through ALDOT’s latest Freight Planning webpage. Most of the completed mapping, as well as meeting summaries and materials and interim documentation, can be found under the appropriate drop-down options (categorized into “Modal Sections” and “Current Information” on the left and “Mapping” on the right), on that webpage. The link is: http://cpmsweb2.dot.state.al.us/TransPlan/FreightPlanning/Default.aspx

After today’s presentation and questions/suggestions, the team will provide an opportunity for each participant to tell us the key information from this effort that will be helpful to your program. It is a statewide effort, and we’ll continue to grapple with how to relate the findings to the MPOs. We don’t want to imply that we know everything; it’s important for us to integrate stakeholder data and information with what we use to guide us.

Mr. Wade Carroll then began at the “Overview of Freight Plan” slide. He reminded everyone that this plan’s purpose is to address freight needs and position Alabama to move forward, align with federal requirements and identify a Primary Freight Network. The draft performance measures (included in the handouts for review and comment) will ultimately tie the analysis to the final improvement strategy and ways to monitor freight. The Statewide Freight Model is the tool to identify deficiencies and chokepoints.

Dr. Michael Anderson (JRWA) provided a summary of the commodity flow analysis and preliminary findings. This information identifies what is actually moving and includes all modes. The material presented in the first FAC meeting was the “big picture”—total freight in 2012 and growth to 2040. The information presented now is in more detail, identifying which actual commodities are moving according to the 43 categories identified in the FAF. The summary slides do not show data for all 43 commodities but for the main ones and those with significant change. The data is provided in kilotons moved annually. It’s important to remember that we are presenting the information that we have from the FAF. Please provide comments if you have any questions or concerns about what you see.

Truck movements are presented first. It’s important to note this shows only those moving into and out of Alabama, not internal movements. The FAF projections do not show a drastic change. One important
topic of discussion involved coal. Although the FAF projections show movements increasing, it was noted from several stakeholders (most notably the Public Service Commission and the Port of Mobile) that their information indicates an actual decrease in coal in the future. Many coal plants will permanently close within the next five years. This is even more important with regard to the rail movements, which rail dominates now and is show to do even more so in the future.

An important point to note when looking at the air movements is that they represent much lower tonnage numbers than we saw with trucks and rail. Precision instruments and manufactured projects are the two largest commodities moved, and they a projected to have about a 5 times increase to 2040 on outbound movements and even more on inbound. As expected for air, these movements represent lower weight, higher value items.

The inland waterways, which does NOT include the Port of Mobile, shows that cereal grains will have the largest increase to 2040. For origins, base metals and chemical products both show an increase to 2040 while the others are projected to decrease. The Port of Mobile information is captured on the International Imports/Exports slide. As you can see, coal is the dominant commodity and is shown to increase very significantly (from about 9,000 KT to over 40,000 KT) to 2040. As mentioned previously, several stakeholders disagree with this data due to anticipated changes in the industry and environmental regulations. The consultant team will undertake a more aggressive literature search on coal. We ask stakeholders to send any suggestions on sources (local contacts or literature) so that we can insert that information into the findings and plan documentation.

With the exception of trucking, the data from FAF is not modeled, but instead collected and assessed to understand the implications and whether or not we agree with the findings. Trucking movements are included in a travel demand model and are therefore given a more detailed analysis. The data is disaggregated down to the Census tract level, then input into the modeling to identify tonnage on different roadways. Most of the data has been analyzed, both statewide and interstate, on FAF. The study team may want to do a variation of “what if” scenario for the future given different data to see the changes. If we extract that data from the disaggregation, we can do a better job of loading it on a kilotons basis. One final note is that although these slides only present the origins/destination information, internal movements WILL be included; however, this will NOT include delivery trucks and shorter range (local) movements.

The study team asked the FAC to think about their respective areas (by geography, model and/or commodity) and to tell us what you think the 2-3 things are that will significantly change over the next 25 years, along with anything you are hearing from your regular contacts. For example, we see an increase/decrease in X and Y commodities.

Wade Carroll then provided a brief overview of the regional meetings held primarily with the MPOs. There was good participation at the meetings, with only Dothan and Auburn not participating (the team is reaching out to them as well). Importantly, this was an opportunity to identify overall needs at the regional level, which adds to our knowledge from the model data. The meeting summaries are provided in your handout materials. Input and feedback included trends, chokepoints, and generators, as well as
the most critical improvements in coming years. They also helped to refine the Primary Freight Network by identifying key facilities. This information served to validate some of the model results (e.g., chokepoints). The study team asked the FAC members to review and comment/follow up on these meeting notes.

The Primary Freight Network is still in draft form as shown on the map from ALDOT. It is based on the generators and flow information, which can also be seen on other maps. Again, it provides a statewide perspective.

The draft Performance Measures are also included in the handouts. In the first FAC meeting, we noted the draft goals, which are shown along with the performance measures to ensure consistency, and therefore consistency with federal MAP-21 goals as well. You’ll see that the measures are both statewide and corridor specific.

Some additional items that were discussed in the questions period included:

- Delay information can be gained from the model, but remember the statewide perspective. Additional data is available for purchase from a variety of sources, but it’s important to make sure the data costs yield good benefits. The Texas Transportation Institute data now covers most cities and includes a large number of data sources. TTI’s information is more local MPO/city focused whereas our data is statewide.

- When looking at congestion, the chokepoint information doesn’t differentiate what is attributed to freight, but the type of improvement options may vary. For example, one strategy is to encourage traffic to move from congested interstates to nearby arterials with available capacity. Also, it often helps the public to understand the need for an improvement when you can tie the problem to the costs. Some of the MPO plans already have improvements identified for particular freight and/or chokepoint deficiencies, although they may be in the long term. The Freight Plan will look to identify the top chokepoints statewide, with particular emphasis on those that include large truck percentages as well as those that are most important to the state’s economy and growth.

- The trucks within MPO models is not a true truck factor. It might give capacity, but it requires another step for external-external movements.

- An important concern regarding freight truck volumes is the driver shortage, which is getting worse and will limit the growth of truck freight. ATRI has good numbers.

The study team’s next step is to disaggregate the data, looking at key generators, and then load it to the networks (including connectors for rail, etc.). We’re also reviewing the current CPMS to identify improvements that already exist for identified deficiencies. There are two important questions—what does it mean, and what can be done? The final improvement strategy will include policies as well as projects, and will look at operations and maintenance (including ITS) and not just capacity improvements. The team will also develop a “briefing paper” on how our work on the statewide level can give MPOs help in their regional freight planning efforts.

Finally, the study team wants to hear from you! PLEASE contact us with any comments or input!