



International Commerce & Mobility Forum

3 April 2025

ICM 9 Meeting Minutes

Meeting Minutes: ICM Forum #9 – Minnesota’s Role in Freight and Trade Modernization

Date: April 3, 2025

Format: Hybrid (Virtual and In-Person at SRF)

Attendees: Over 60 attendees including Bill Goins, Mark Berndt, Amar More, Charles Edwards, Dr. John Pournoor, Mayor Kim Norton, Tim Penny, Robin Hutcheson, Andy Mielke, John Tompkins, Mayor Jim Hovland, Jan Bauer, Ben Zietlow, and representatives from Expo 2031

Purpose of the Meeting:

To evaluate Minnesota’s current freight and trade infrastructure, discuss digital logistics strategies, and explore statewide and national transportation and economic opportunities.

Key Discussion Points:

- The historical and ongoing shift of international freight to Chicago and its economic implications for Minnesota
- Potential for a Minnesota Multimodal Trade Portal to reverse this trend
- Current freight studies and data findings presented by MAC and SRF
- Federal transportation funding shifts under the Trump administration
- Strategic infrastructure development for outstate cities like Rochester
- Trade and logistics planning for Expo 2031
- International trade connections via the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Seaway
- Updates on the Freight Network Optimization Tool (FNOT)

Notable Contributions:

- **Mark Berndt (SRF):** Described Minnesota’s freight leakage to Chicago and discussed multiple freight studies. Advocated for a Minnesota Multimodal Trade Portal and reviewed the feasibility challenges around MSP’s land constraints.
- **Amar More (Kale Industries):** Outlined a strategy to stem freight leakage by emphasizing economic impact, job protection, and improved freight transparency and accuracy.
- **Charles Edwards (SASI):** Supported the creation of a digital logistics platform, noting the challenges but also the potential for trade facilitation across the state.
- **Dr. John Pournoor (Government Analytica):** Provided a comprehensive analysis of changes in federal transportation funding, focusing on demand-driven strategies, block grants, and trade policies under the current administration.
- **Mayor Kim Norton (Rochester):** Advocated for improved infrastructure connecting outstate cities to the Twin Cities, emphasizing Rochester’s growth and desire for representation in transportation decisions.
- **Robin Hutcheson (Hutcheson Advisor):** Offered strategic support and insights to advance the multimodal platform concept and promote policy alignment.
- **Andy Mielke (SRF):** Expressed support for a collaborative initiative, recommending that an existing organization lead development of the freight platform.



- **Jan Bauer (UK Government, MN):** Highlighted new funding to support trade between the Great Lakes region and the UK, encouraging participation in an early-stage shipping strategy.
- **Ben Zietlow (Quetica):** Gave an update on the Freight Network Optimization Tool, with completion of the database and testing underway, and public release scheduled for June.
- **Wendy Meadley, Amanda Hallberg, David Loehr (Expo 2031 Team):** Shared updates via video and live commentary regarding Expo planning, a new task force for Expo-related infrastructure, and a call to action for professionals to participate.

Next Steps:

- Continue development and refinement of the Minnesota Multimodal Trade Portal concept
- Engage key stakeholders, including outstate cities and freight forwarders, in planning discussions
- Coordinate with MAC and SRF on freight study findings and policy implications
- Prepare for the June release and training for the Freight Network Optimization Tool (FNOT)
- Form the transportation/infrastructure task force for Expo 2031
- Follow up on the UK export initiative for 2026 and identify candidate exporters

Detailed information is attached.

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Next Meeting Details

Date: Wednesday, June 25, 2025

Time: 2-3 PM Networking – 3-5 PM Forum

Location: Hybrid format; details to be announced closer to the date

Closing Notes:

The Forum successfully brought together diverse voices from public, private, and academic sectors to align around a vision of smarter, more competitive freight logistics in Minnesota. Strong interest was expressed in developing digital tools and strategic partnerships to secure Minnesota's future as a key player in national and international trade.



Detailed Meeting Notes

ICM Forum number 9

April 3, 2025

Captured by Curtis Johnson, GWC Founding Leadership Team

Bill Goins opened the meeting and introduced Mark Berndt

Brief Introductions

Mark Berndt of SRF greeted the group and began his part of the program.

Business Transportation Needs and Where Are We Going?

Mark Berndt, SRF

Privileged to work with Charles Edwards of SASI and Amar More of Kale Industries. We have been working on supply chains and transportation links for the state. We go back 20 years to the changeover to Delta from Northwest and the movement that began with trucks taking goods to Chicago for international distribution to utilize their upper-deck, wide-body aircraft. The State of Minnesota was concerned that jobs would be lost and the state would suffer reputationally.

Now the MAC is doing its second study of freight movement, with the current data showing that MSP could accept a declining role in international trade. One alternative is to create a new Regional Distribution Center, one that matches the realistic needs of business firms in the state. Mark went through the several studies that have been done; none of which solves the land constraints at MSP airport. But the leakage to Chicago's O'Hare is serious. There are some 15 trucks going daily there and largely filled with medical devices. Chicago is host to trucks from all over the Upper Midwest, but especially Minnesota. Slides show volumes by weight and value. But its upward of 288,000 pounds per day, ranking the state as 41st in the nation by value. But the state numbers are growing faster than the competition.

The question becomes can technology reverse all this? Can we successfully establish a Minnesota Multimodal Trade Portal? A kind of "digital twin" of Minnesota's export economy.

Amar More :

More laid a strategy for stemming the "leakage" to Chicago. There are a lot of good jobs at stake (as one slide clearly notes). We can collect taxes, ensure security, and enter every item that is consigned (and reduce errors).

Charles Edwards of SASI:

Edwards added that the complex weave of all the logistics was possible but formidable. We can have trade facilitation through a digital platform.



Federal Assessment of Transportation Funding

John Pournoor, Government Analytica

Referring to the web page for the forums, Dr. Pournoor provided an excellent presentation about the potential changes under the Trump Administration, the OMB memo analysis on funding, the new US trade policy, barriers to tariffs and the April 3 announcements.

The essence of the changes under a Trump administration is prioritizing demand over policies and using technology to make gains on all fronts. And creating a Build America Bureau that makes block grants to states, so those closest to the problem make the decisions. As expected, the administration is insisting on alignment with presidential priorities.

The “America First Trade Policy” emphasizes what the administration calls national security and specifically works against adversaries worldwide.

This leads to examining the competitive impact in markets abroad. (The slides are on the web page).

Breakout Sessions: How can Minnesota Lead the nation in a new concept of Minnesota Multimodal Trade / Logistics Platform?

There were two groups -- one in the virtual space and another in SRF’s community in-person room. **Details of each session is at the end of this document for your consideration.**

General Discussion

Brian Peters provided an update on the second freight study by the MAC. We are chipping away at the proposition of whether Minnesota can pull off a reversal of fortune on trade.

Strategic Thoughts from our “Mayor’s corner” and guest Mayor, **Kim Norton** of Rochester
The main question is how can we improve our connectivity of the cities outside of the Twin Cities? Rochester is a very fast growing city and like Duluth, St. Cloud, Mankato and others, how do we ensure our transportation infrastructure for people and freight will meet our needs into our future? We are working with a foundation to get a study done. There are many centers of commerce that need the connectivity of our Minnesota cities with the Twin Cities. We want to be at the decision table.

Goins mentions that **Tim Penny** is here and introduced Tim as the first Chair of the Minnesota Freight Advisory Committee, (MFAC), over 25 years ago. He is most welcome to join our future Forums!

Mark Berndt assumed the microphone and asked whether it was feasible to build a platform as he proposed during his presentation on the concept of how Minnesota could lead the nation in developing a “Minnesota Multimodal Trade/Logistics Platform”?

Lee Munnich said this was very important and perhaps the Legislature should act on it.

Robin Hutcheson, of Hutcheson Advisor, provided some very strategic comments and plans to support this effort going forward.



Berndt said we don't know whether freight forwarders are getting a good deal from the trucking to Chicago strategies or not. Several years ago, the shipper community shared their passenger needs data with the airlines, through an effort called the Metropolitan Airports Commission, (MAC) and Greater MSP, utilizing a way to protect shipper data called the Regional Air Shippers Partnership, (RASP). Why not apply this logic to freight?

Andy Mielke of SRF said it would be good to be working together to do this. Maybe it should be spearheaded by an existing organization.

Other key points were made by John Tompkins and Mayor Jim Hovland on this subject.

Berndt said that the establishment of the Minnesota Freight Advisory Committee, (MFAC), was to address this issue so that a public agency would not be holding shipper data.

Expo 31 - **Wendy Meadley, Amanda Hallberg** and **David Loehr**, Expo 2031 Minnesota, USA
Wendy is not here today, attending to the passing of a member of her family. Wendy is joining virtually and has produced a video which she narrated. She mentions new members of the team and the establishment of the Horticultural Advisory Committee. There is a live update next Friday, April 11 at 9 am CST. There will be updates monthly. Bill Goins provided further details regarding a small transportation/infrastructure task force will be developed to ensure that the flow of people and commerce will work well both during the Expo and with business development following this prestigious event in Minnesota in 2031. This is a "call to action" for the right professionals to be a part of this task force.

Jan Bauer - Consul, Office of UK Government in Minnesota

Great Lakes - St Lawrence Seaway Trade Route

She reported that funding had been approved to bring exporters to the UK in February of 2026. We need to be resilient and redundant deliberately. We need to be an early adopter of a new strategy to the challenge of supply chains. Six to eight exporters would be enough to start, moving in ships through the 15 Great Lakes locks. She encouraged ideas and feedback.

Ben Zietlow - Quetica

Update on the Freight Network Optimization Tool

Database development has been completed and testing development is underway. The U of M has been working on the development of an Excel tool that will take outputs from the FNOT's optimization scenarios. Schedule wise, in-person and on-line training sessions are planned for June, and presently on-track to have the initial release of the FNOT to the public by the end of June.

ICM Forum #10 - set for Wednesday, June 25, 2025



Breakout Sessions: How can Minnesota Lead the nation in a new concept of Minnesota Multimodal Trade / Logistics Platform?

Breakout Group 1 (in-person) - Summary of Key Themes and Discussion Points

Captured by John Pournoor, Government Analytica

1. Strategic Opportunity for Minnesota

- Participants discussed the potential to develop a **state-level freight and trade intelligence platform**, modeled after digital twin technologies used in infrastructure planning.
- The group recognized growing uncertainty in the economic environment and emphasized the need for tools that help monitor freight flows and supply chains in real-time.
- **Public value proposition** : Better decision-making, economic forecasting, and industry support.

2. Role for the Legislature and Public Sector

- Strong agreement that the Minnesota Legislature and relevant state agencies (e.g., MnDOT, DEED) should be involved.
- Interest in leveraging past legislative support for trade data and digital infrastructure initiatives.
- Suggestions to frame the initiative as a **public policy moonshot** to gain bipartisan traction.

3. Pilot Site Suggestions

Several sites were identified as potential **pilot locations** due to their multimodal transport infrastructure:

- **Minneapolis–St. Paul (MSP)** : Major airport, rail, and interstate access.
- **Duluth**: Access to maritime shipping and Canadian trade routes.
- **Rochester**: Strong technology sector and airport/highway connectivity.
- **St. Cloud/I-94 Corridor** : Highway and rail linkages.
- **Moorhead/Fargo** : Rail and cross-border access into Canada.

4. Learning from the National FLOW Initiative

- Robin Hutson referenced the U.S. Department of Transportation's **FLOW platform** (Freight Logistics Optimization Works) as a model.
- Minnesota could localize this approach, integrating small-scale digital models (e.g., curb digitization) with freight flow analytics.
- FLOW started with maritime goods forecasting and has expanded to rail and trucking.

5. Industry Participation and Data Sharing

- Participants highlighted barriers to private sector data sharing, particularly from freight forwarders and shippers.
- Several stressed the need to **create a clear value proposition** for private sector stakeholders to engage.
- Ideas included non-disclosure guarantees, data trust intermediaries, or reviving a model like the ICM passenger data program.

6. Organizational Leadership

- Broad agreement that **cross-sector leadership** is essential.
- Potential champions:
 - Minnesota Chamber of Commerce
 - Greater MSP
 - Metropolitan Airports Commission
 - MnDOT



- Metropolitan Council
- University research centers and tech firms
- A **roundtable approach** involving these stakeholders was proposed as a first step.

7. Next Steps Ideas

- Define roles and value for key stakeholders, especially shippers and carriers.
- Launch exploratory roundtables to assess industry needs and potential use cases.
- Commission a **feasibility study** in a selected pilot site.
- Develop a policy strategy to engage both the **executive and legislative branches**.

Notable Quotes

- *"We need something like this. A way to monitor what is going on in freight and trade and use that to guide public and private action."*
- *"This could be our moonshot — a big public value project that unites state agencies, industry, and technology partners."*
- *"You need to give industry a reason to share data. That means showing them how it benefits their operations or market strategy."*

Follow-Up Items For future ICM's

- Assign a lead organization to coordinate stakeholder roundtables.
- Identify funding sources for feasibility study (state innovation grants, federal transportation dollars).
- Convene an internal team to draft a legislative proposal for 2026 session.
- Begin outreach to shipper organizations and major Minnesota exporters.

Breakout Group 2 (virtual) - Summary of Key Themes and Discussion Points

Captured Justin Scott, SRF

The breakout group was facilitated by *Charles Edwards*, who opened the session by framing the importance of the discussion around three key questions, including how these digital platforms can support domestic and international air cargo trade in Minnesota. Charles emphasized the value proposition for Minnesota's businesses and government agencies, and the broader relevance of advancing integrated air cargo freight technology systems.

Andrew Andrusko (MnDOT) expressed appreciation for the forum topic and highlighted the strategic opportunity to position Minnesota as a competitive multimodal freight hub. He reflected on MnDOT's experience with the FNOT tool and suggested that non-governmental stakeholders—including private sector stakeholders, academia, and non-profits—may be better positioned to advance a logistics and communications platform. He noted the importance of securing meaningful stakeholder participation.

John Reed (Rochester Airport) emphasized the importance of freight forwarders in managing just-in-time supply chains and suggested the group explore their role in shaping digital infrastructure. He referenced his experience in Texas and pointed to the potential relevance of freight forwarder practices to Minnesota. He also encouraged a closer look at developments in the Rockford, IL region



and their broader influence on central U.S. air cargo operations. Charles acknowledged John's points and noted that while traditional freight forwarders may have a slightly diminished role recently, ecommerce platforms and cargo community systems are now playing a greater role in data exchange and freight control.

Jan Bauer, reflecting on her prior role as Executive Director of the International Trade Center, discussed the challenges exporters—especially small and mid-sized firms—face in accessing comprehensive trade and logistics information. She highlighted the value of a centralized, user-friendly platform to support modal choice and international market access. *Charles* responded by affirming that future platforms would aim to be inclusive, linking approximately 110 airports and ports worldwide who are already using these systems/platforms, while protecting commercial confidentiality through systematic data sharing approaches.

Libby Ogard raised important questions regarding the technical implementation of such platforms, particularly concerns around data scraping, double data entry, and confidentiality. In response, *Charles and Amar* led a deeper dive discussion into air cargo facility operations, highlighting that digital cargo control technologies can significantly reduce wait times, eliminate redundant paperwork, and potentially double air cargo throughput. *Amar* addressed the common concerns about data security that *Libby* laid out by emphasizing the potential for user education and transparency, assuring that the platforms would only share data already being disclosed through other channels—now with enhanced security via cloud infrastructure. Questions about cost and value propositions were raised, and *Libby* plans to follow up with *Amar* to further explore implementation and cost considerations.

To close, *Charles* led a discussion on organizational involvement in advancing the platform. *Judy (Met Council)* suggested engaging regional partners such as Medical Alley, the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce, and smaller local chambers. She also emphasized the importance of trade associations in outreach and convening efforts. She concluded by commending the quality of the presentation and requesting a follow up to include the presentation materials.