



International Commerce & Mobility Forum

25 June 2025

ICM #10 Forum Minutes

Purpose of the Meeting: To convene stakeholders for exchange on freight transportation modalities, explore collaboration opportunities, and updates on the upcoming October 8th workshop and strategic initiatives.

Key Discussion Points:

- Welcome remarks, introductions, and reaffirmation of ICM's mission to foster "intellectual collisions."
- Announcement of joint "Unpacking Freight" half-day workshop on October 8 with MFAC at SRF.
- Need to clearly define "freight" within supply chain contexts.
- Inclusion of trucking topics (e.g., parking) and the role of AI innovations in transportation.
- Rail's role in freight, including Amtrak's Borealis and Empire Builder passenger services and related investment benefits in both freight and passenger rail.
- Impact of federal trade policy and tariffs on construction, farming projects, and contract escalation clauses.
- Creation of a centralized repository for past transportation studies and AI coordination/funding needs.
- Expo2031 progress: investor expansion, Osaka and State Fair outreach, and infrastructure planning.
- Competitive challenges highlighted by Abbott Medical's logistics move to Indianapolis.
- MSP air freight potential versus established hubs and data gathering on current freight flows.
- Opportunity to better utilize the Great Lakes waterway for containerized shipping.
- Preview of the Minnesota Freight Optimization Tool and upcoming public launch/webinar.

Notable Contributions:

- **Bill Goins (Moderator, ICM):** Opened the forum, moderated introductions, and emphasized intermodal innovation's role in addressing inefficiencies. Framed Expo2031 as a strategic opportunity for Minnesota's economic growth.
- **Andy Mielke (SRF):** Thanked attendees for braving the rain, covered logistics (restrooms, Zoom links), and reinforced the value of cross-disciplinary dialogue through our ICM efforts.
- **Gina Bass (Deputy Director, CTS):** Introduced the October 8 "Unpacking Freight" workshop theme, outlined objectives around supply chains and goods movement, and requested participant input and transcript preparation.
- **Robin Hutcheson (Senior Consultant, CTS):** Shared federal transportation insights, invited suggestions for workshop topics, and highlighted aviation's contributions to freight efficiency.
- **Tessa Enns (Quandel):** Discussed Minnesota's Amtrak services, linked passenger rail investment to freight capacity, and recommended three essential steps for prospective applicants.



- **Dr. John Pournoor (CEO, Government Analytica):** Analyzed trade policy effects on material costs, described common escalation clauses, and estimated a \$3.4 billion impact to Minnesota projects.
- **Wendy Meadley (Expo2031):** Reported near-final approval status, detailed investor outreach and upcoming meetings in Osaka and at the State Fair, and previewed SRF's logistics support role.
- **Michael Loney (Abbott Medical):** Announced Abbott's decision to relocate half of its logistics operations to Indianapolis, underscoring competitive infrastructure gaps for Minnesota.
- **Brian Peters (MAC):** Clarified MSP's passenger-focused air freight profile, outlined first-time airline solicitations for cargo, and committed to quantifying nightly freight routed via Chicago.
- **Jan Bauer (UK Consul):** Advocated for expanded use of the Great Lakes shipping route, noted Duluth and Cleveland containerization strengths, and described UK-funded shipper visits planned for next year.
- **Ben Zietlow (FNOT):** Demonstrated the prototype Freight Optimization Tool, illustrated county-level scenario analytics, and announced its public rollout this fall with an upcoming webinar.

Next Steps:

- Gather and incorporate feedback for the October 8 "Unpacking Freight" workshop agenda.
- Develop a clear definition of "freight" for consistent workshop framing.
- Plan dedicated sessions on trucking infrastructure and AI applications.
- Advance Expo2031 master planning, finalize investor commitments, and coordinate logistics.
- Conduct a competitive analysis of state freight incentives and infrastructure needs.
- Prepare for the Minnesota Freight Optimization Tool, (FNOT), webinar and public release.
- Identify target industry clusters for Great Lakes shipping promotion.

Closing Notes:

- The meeting concluded with a Q&A session, expressions of gratitude from Bill Goins, and a collective commitment to follow up on actionable items.

Detailed Notes

Curt Johnson NOTES - ICM Forum #10, 6-25-25

Bill Goins made a few remarks and then had a round of introductions — found out who was "in the room" and participating via Zoom.

Andy Mielke of SRF thanked everyone for coming in during the rain we are having. He covered the essentials such as where the restrooms are. He reaffirmed what we are doing here and emphasized that we welcome intellectual collisions that are part of ICM.

Gina Bass, deputy director of the Center for Transportation Studies, announced that a joint workshop will be held on October 8, along with the Minnesota Freight Advisory Committee, (MFAC), and ICM, from for a half day at SRF. "Unpacking Freight" is a theme for CTS this year. **Robin Hutcheson** is a major player in this event. We want to emphasize the advantages of different organizations, including



aviation which has much to contribute. Turning to Robin, who is a senior consultant to CTS, with a background in federal transportation including a stint as deputy assistant secretary. She welcomed feedback and suggestions. Gina Bass added that the meeting will focus on supply chains and the efficient movement of goods. And we will supply a transcript for participants. She asked for suggestions from the group. Bill Goins said he was interested in the discussion of AI, in the technology piece. **Frank Douma** from the University's Humphrey School echoed that remark. **John Tompkins** said we should define "what is freight?" Freight comes up in supply chain logistics. It certainly does at the Carlson School (at the University). Gina assured him that this will be covered in the October meeting.

Justin Scott who is with SRF hoped that there would be a place for trucking and topics such as truck parking in the conference and a serious discussion, not just an exchange of views; these are potentially riveting thoughts.

Goins then shifted the discussion to rail and its role in the movement of freight. **Tessa Enns** of Quandel asked what experience people in the room and the virtual participants had with the various modes of transportation. She said that the two Amtrak passenger rail systems with a presence in Minnesota are the Borealis and the Empire Builder. People in this state can take pride in that and they do believe it belongs here. In addition, any investment in passenger service is also an investment in freight capacity. There are projects being thought about in Minnesota and Wisconsin which are relevant. She provided the three steps that every applicant should take.

Goins said that he was struck with the notion that innovations in one mode can offset the inefficiencies in others. Andrew Andrusko of MnDOT complimented the previous presentation and said that MnDOT is working on all of it.

Goins then turned to **Dr. John Pournoor**, the CEO of Government Analytica. He said that the country's trade policy is vitally connected to everything we are talking about. Now that all of us are familiar with tariffs, John proposed to give only the high-level points today. Construction costs for example are priced upwards from the base number to reflect all this. Exemptions will be requested and granted — that's a given. Farming is another example where exceptions to tariffs maybe necessary. Many projects are delayed or even cancelled because of trade and supply chain problems. Almost all contracts have an "escalation" clause now, with risk sharing more common. The amount of loss to Minnesota is about 3.4 billion dollars. In general, the inland states are better off than the coastal ones. All contracts contemplate at least a 10 percent increase in material costs. Some companies are stocking up and certain products and some governments that can afford to, are doing the same.

Goins pointed out that Dr. Pournoor is much in demand around the country on this important subject matter and we are fortunate to have him in our Forum conversations.

Goins turned to **Mark Berndt** of SRF.

Mark focused on a few key topics. We have a lot of studies that have been done over the years, and we may have a repository that we can turn to for, as an example, how long does it take to get to a certain destination and what is the total cost? Minnesota has been sliding in the wrong direction for years. Job growth looks good, but most of the job growth is in the government or the health care sectors. Mark gave a shout-out to the Minnesota Chamber for many of the points he was making. Returning to the



conversation we had about AI . . . Minnesota is in the middle of midwestern states. We need to do a better job of engaging the people who know a lot about AI and what opportunities there are. What coordination is needed, and where will the funding come from?

Goins said he wanted to give **Wendy Meadley** a chance at this time, (a deviation from the agenda), to update our understanding of Expo2031. Meadley made it very clear that we are close to final approval. We are currently working on expanding the number of investors - check our Expo2031 website. Wendy and the Expo team are headed next to Osaka where we will meet with people doing similar work; they will also meet with several key potential suppliers. In addition, they are headed to the State Fair where we will find many horticultural people. Finally, **Todd Polum** (the CEO for SRF) will be on the stage with Meadley in Belgium. **Andy Mielke** said SRF is about a month into supporting the Expo efforts and they are starting to meet with key people regarding the necessary logistics and infrastructure in support of Expo and the years beyond. They are working toward a master plan and critical path to pulling this major strategic event off successfully. Wendy said this could be a big opportunity for the state to ignite attention to business development on the right agenda!

Goins said we should all feel really excited about this Expo effort. The opportunity, the jobs, the delegations that will visit Minnesota, the attendance — all of this.

Michael Loney — Senior Distribution Manager for Abbott Medical, Roseville, MN.

He announced that Abbot had decided and announced this week, to move about half its logistics and distribution work in Indianapolis for a variety of key reasons. Goins said this should be a wake-up call for the state. We need to compete a lot more as a state, competing on our strengths “to win”. Goins is concerned that the decision by Abbot to open a second distribution center in Indianapolis, not in Minneapolis, is parallel to what happened some years ago by both Medtronic, (moving their distribution center to Memphis), and Starkey Hearing Technologies, (moving distribution to Indianapolis). Indy even has non-stop, upper deck, air freight flights to Liege in Belgium for the movement of high value commerce, something that we have been working on for years and we need at MSP. This should truly be a call to action.

Brian Peters — Director of Air Service Development at the Metropolitan Airports Commission, (MAC), spoke next. Peters said we are different, and we have different goals than cities like Indianapolis and Memphis. We are never going to have as big of an air freight operation as Indianapolis or Memphis does for FedEx. We have passengers rather than freight. States have different talents. To pretend that we could compete with Indianapolis on freight is not possible. We will keep pursuing, but things won’t change overnight. We think that upper-deck, international air freight from this market is possible, and we are soliciting airline information at this present time. We have never done this; it’s a learning process for us. We will continue to try and answer this group’s central question: “Why are we trucking international air freight to Chicago and how much do we move like this nightly?”. Goins thanked him for the work that Brian and the MAC are doing.

Jan Bauer — the Consul for the UK to Minnesota.

Jan made the point, that the Great Lakes waterway is underutilized. There are already some goods shipments using this route, but still the route is underutilized. Duluth is ahead in the category of containerization, with Cleveland being the other key Great Lakes port with expansion capability. The UK Government is funding the travel expenses of potential shippers to visit the UK early next year and



we need to identify who these industry clusters are and talk with specific companies. We want to see people using this opportunity for maximum use. Goins stated that this is another opportunity we need to focus on, and this opportunity is another call to action. **Kate Ferguson** of the Duluth Port Authority provided further thoughts on this important subject.

Ben Zietlow, representing the Minnesota Freight Optimization Tool, (FNOT, assisted by **Andrew Andrusko** of MnDOT provided a current update on the tool. They demonstrated the tool in its form that today exists, with the hope of getting it into the public by this coming fall. The mission is to make all sectors in Minnesota more competitive than they are today; by answering questions and providing information/data that is not currently available to many. Ben ran through a fictitious scenario, to show what the tool does, even by county of the state. The users are going online to use the tool. This today is a “sneak preview”, Andrusko said. Tomorrow will be a big day, with a webinar to test out much of the tool. Goins said the tool will among other things, enable us to identify the firms we should be talking to.

Questions and discussion followed with thanks to all for their time and engagement in working to improve our transportation and supply chain options for our State/Region.