

Topic of the Month: Freight

The Dallas-Fort Worth region sits at the crossroads of some of the nation's busiest freight routes, where trains, trucks and distribution centers work together, around the clock, to keep products flowing. From moving food and medicine to construction materials and consumer goods, the region's freight network keeps daily life running smoothly – through the region and around the country.

For December's Topic of the Month, we take a closer look at the vast world of freight - and the North Central Texas Council of Governments' role in helping it move along.

Freight Within Dallas–Fort Worth

Positioned at the crossroads of the nation and supported by a vast highway system, Dallas-Fort Worth plays a pivotal role in regional and national goods movement. Anchored by four major interstate corridors – Interstate Highway 20, IH 35, IH 30 and IH 45 - North Texas has become a central hub for freight activity, connecting distributors, manufacturers and markets across the state and the country.

Every day, thousands of trucks transport consumer goods between warehouses, retailers and manufacturers, keeping store shelves stocked and supply chains running smoothly. With North Texas' population continuing to boom, these freight movements are expected to increase, placing even greater importance on ensuring trucks, passenger vehicles and infrastructure can all operate safely and reliably.

As freight activity continues to grow, so does the need to track on-time performance and efficiency of the freight network. The federal government uses **Truck Travel Time Reliability (TTTR)** to evaluate the level of predictability in travel times for trucks along interstate highways.

Many of the factors that affect TTTR are difficult to predict. Weather, roadway construction and congestion caused by special events can temporarily make travel times slower for trucks if alternate routes are unavailable.

To improve TTTR, NCTCOG is examining truck bottlenecks in the region and identifying opportunities to improve infrastructure, as well as deploying technological enhancements to improve first-and-last-mile connectivity for commercial vehicles.

Freight Safety

Trucks and passenger vehicles zoom along roadways together, raising the likelihood of serious crashes involving large commercial trucks and motorists. Since 2019, North Texas has seen an average of 338 crashes each month involving commercial trucks – a figure that has steadily risen year after year.

To promote safer driving behaviors and curb the number of these incidents, NCTCOG launched the Freight Safety Campaign, aimed at reducing freight-related collisions and educating the public on how to travel safely around commercial trucks. The campaign encourages drivers to follow simple practices that can greatly reduce crash risks, such as:

Be Aware of Truck Blind Spots

- Large trucks have significant blind spots, especially on either side and up to 200 feet behind them.
- Avoid lingering in those blind zones.
- Don't tailgate; stay back to give trucks space.

Allow Extra Stopping Distance

- Trucks take longer to stop. Heavy duty vehicles need about 40% more time than cars to come to a complete stop
- Give trucks enough room, especially during lane changes or at intersections.

Respect Truck Lane Restrictions

- There are specific truck lane restrictions in the DFW region. Trucks with three or more axles are generally not allowed in the inside (left) lane, except to pass.
- Most major limited access facilities (freeways) in the region have implemented Truck Lane Restrictions, which can vary depending on construction and current TxDOT implementation.
- Following these restrictions helps reduce congestion and crash risk.

For more information and freight safety tips, visit NCTCOG's Freight Safety [webpage](#).

Rail-Crossing Safety

Over the past 25 years, accidents at rail crossings have fallen dramatically. But 2024 saw a substantial spike across the 12-county Dallas-Fort Worth region, with 58 incidents reported at nearly 3,000 area at-grade crossings. Staying alert around railroad crossings remains essential for preventing crashes and keeping the roads safe. As part of a partnership with Operation Lifesaver, NCTCOG offers these key safety reminders for navigating at-grade crossings responsibly:

- Always expect a train. They can come from either direction at any time.
- Never stop on train tracks. Ensure there is enough space to fully clear the crossing before proceeding.
- Obey all warning signs, lights and gates.
- If signals activate while you're crossing, keep going. Never stop or back up on the tracks.
- If your vehicle stalls on the tracks, exit immediately and move away at a 45-degree angle toward the train's direction of travel.

- Stay alert at crossings with multiple tracks. Another train may be approaching on a different line.

For more information, visit the Freight Safety Campaign [webpage](#).

Rail Crossing Analysis

At-grade rail crossings remain a significant safety and mobility concern throughout the region, and NCTCOG treats rail safety as a top regional priority. To better understand where improvements are most needed, NCTCOG launched a series of rail crossing analyses, beginning in Fort Worth in 2023. Each study is designed to evaluate public at-grade crossings, identify those with the greatest safety needs and guide initiatives that will reduce delays and improve travel for residents and freight carriers alike.

The most recent effort focused on Dallas, where 224 public at-grade railroad crossings were reviewed. The analysis followed a structured, multi-step process. First, all public crossings were identified and entered into a database. Site visits took place from November 2024 through August 2025 to verify field conditions and document roadway layouts, signs, safety devices and other features affecting how travelers experience each crossing.

After completing the database, NCTCOG staff developed scoring formulas to evaluate each location and determine which crossings should be prioritized for recommended improvements.

Quantitative data - drawn from the Federal Railroad Administration - played an important role in the review. This information included traffic volumes, the number of trains passing through each day, train speeds, and the 10-year history of incidents at each crossing from 2014 to 2024. Field visits captured qualitative observations such as the presence and condition of active and static warning devices, supplemental safety features, and the physical layout and geometry of the crossing.

Using these elements, crossings were evaluated and placed into priority levels. High-priority locations were those with significant traffic volumes, notable incident histories or insufficient safety devices.

Medium-priority crossings showed mixed conditions while low-priority locations had lower traffic activity and adequate safety infrastructure. The analysis separated heavy rail and DART light rail crossings due to their operational differences.

The results identified two high-priority heavy rail crossings and 17 high-priority light rail crossings.

Several locations stood out as concerns, due to high numbers of incidents occurring at the crossing, geometric challenges, and high traffic volumes.

To complement the safety review, NCTCOG conducted a Crossing Gap Analysis to determine where long enough stretches of track exist to hold stationary trains without blocking a crossing. Forty potential gap segments were identified, ranging from one to more than three miles.

These findings will support future discussions about grade separations and help guide planning as the region continues working to reduce blocked crossings.

The analysis concluded with recommendations for both long-term and near-term improvements. Several crossings were highlighted as candidates for future grade-separation feasibility studies, should conditions continue to warrant them. Additional safety enhancements - such as upgraded pavement markings, improved signage and signal work - were recommended at various crossings throughout Dallas.

NCTCOG will continue expanding the rail crossing analysis to other cities across the region. Staff will work closely with local governments, TxDOT and railroad partners to evaluate next steps, pursue funding and support implementation of recommended improvements.

Ongoing efforts will remain focused on enhancing safety, reducing congestion at rail crossings and strengthening the reliability of the regional transportation network for both residents and freight users.

Connecting the Nation: Rail and Air Cargo

The Dallas-Fort Worth region is home to one of the most dynamic and interconnected freight networks in the nation. While trucks remain the most visible part of that system - carrying roughly 77% of all goods shipped into North Texas - the movement of freight relies on much more than just highways.

Rail, intermodal facilities, air cargo operations, pipelines and trucking all play vital roles in ensuring groceries reach store shelves, fuel arrives at service stations and consumer products are delivered efficiently across the region.

Rail is a major contributor to this transportation ecosystem, with three Class I railroads - Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway, Canadian Pacific Kansas City and Union Pacific - providing the North Texas area with direct connections to ports on both U.S. coasts as well as to Canada and Mexico.

The region's extensive intermodal hubs further strengthen these connections by enabling seamless transfers between rail and truck, helping divert long-haul freight from highways and reducing congestion.

To support this growing and increasingly complex freight environment, NCTCOG leads **Freight North Texas**, an ongoing planning initiative designed to enhance safety, mobility, efficiency and air quality. As one of the fastest-growing metropolitan areas in the country, Dallas-Fort Worth depends on reliable freight operations to keep pace with population and economic expansion.

Technology continues to guide and transform the freight industry, especially as online shopping and demand for rapid delivery expand. Intelligent traffic signal optimization - one of the program's central tools - helps reduce unnecessary stops, decrease idling and cut emissions, all while ensuring goods reach their destinations more quickly. These efforts improve daily operations and reinforce the region's leadership in fostering a forward-thinking, resilient and efficient freight network.

While ground-based freight forms the backbone of regional logistics, air cargo adds a powerful layer of speed and reach that strengthens North Texas' economic competitiveness. **Dallas Fort Worth International Airport** consistently ranks among the top cargo airports in the nation, serving as a gateway for high-value goods such as electronics, pharmaceuticals, medical devices and other time-sensitive products. In 2024 alone, approximately **818,000 tons of cargo** passed through DFW Airport, underscoring its importance as both a regional and international logistics powerhouse.

Complementing DFW's global reach is **Perot Field Fort Worth Alliance Airport**, recognized as the world's first industrial airport and a leader in freight-focused operations. Alliance is purpose-built for logistics, with seamless connections to air cargo, rail and highway infrastructure. In 2024, the airport handled roughly **314,000 tons of cargo**, reflecting its essential role in supporting North Texas' rapidly expanding distribution and manufacturing sectors.

Freight and the Environment

NCTCOG is at the forefront of reducing freight's environmental footprint across the region by actively supporting cleaner-fuel technologies and infrastructure. One of its leading efforts involves developing hydrogen fueling stations for medium and heavy-duty zero-emission vehicles, complementing the push to replace diesel freight trucks with hydrogen fuel cell or battery-electric alternatives. Under the North Texas Zero Emission Vehicle initiative, NCTCOG helps public and private fleets transition to low- and no-emission operations aligning with its regional Clean Fleet Policy.

Saving Money and Reducing Truck Emissions (SMARTE)

Through the Saving Money and Reducing Truck Emissions (SMARTE) program, NCTCOG provides education, technical assistance and outreach to the trucking industry with the goal of reducing emissions and operating costs. By promoting EPA SmartWay verified technologies, linking fleets with a directory of local vendors, sharing funding opportunities and explaining idling rules and other regulations, SMARTE helps operators and fleet managers adopt more efficient practices.

SMARTE also facilitates communication between regional partners, public agencies, and the trucking community to support coordinated freight mobility initiatives. In addition, it informs stakeholders of upcoming events through its webpage, located [here](#).