



This research initiative is funded under the auspices of the CFIRE Tier 1 University Transportation Center.

Title: Enhancing Rail Connectivity to Underserved Rural Communities

Description:

As Class I railroads have focused their operations on line-haul services, rural communities and industries throughout the country have experienced a decline in connectivity to the nation's rail network. Individual terminals, grain elevators, and industries dependent on rail cannot remain economically viable without reliable and cost-competitive rail service. When industries and support services leave rural communities, jobs are lost and people migrate from the area. Research is needed to determine what steps can be taken to ensure that rail service can continue to support these areas.

This research will identify the actions, practices, and policies needed to continue or expand adequate shortline or Class 1 and regional rail service to rural communities. Factors to be considered will include identification of the infrastructure needs for retaining or expanding viable rail operations, potential markets to support rail connectivity, operational barriers, institutional and policy barriers, and economic incentives required for rail service to continue.

This research will identify the actions, practices, and policies needed to continue or expand adequate shortline or Class 1 and regional rail service to rural communities. Factors to be considered will include identification of the infrastructure needs for retaining or expanding viable rail operations and communities in the CFIRE region that are facing declining service. This will be followed by conducting interviews with shortline rail operators and shippers to determine the key issues that affect the provision of rail service. The focus will be on evaluating the role of shortline railroads in retaining and attracting economic development in rural areas, the impacts if rail service is terminated, and successful models of government involvement.

Outcomes:

The research will explore the linkage between shortline rail service and economic competitiveness as well as livability of rural communities. It will describe investment strategies and policy issues that will support job creation in rural areas. Based on the analysis results, recommendations will be developed that can be used by government agencies and other stakeholders to evaluate and plan investments in shortline rail.

**Deliverables:**

A best practices document will be developed based on the cases studies conducted. In addition, recommendations will be developed that can be used by government agencies and other stakeholders to evaluate and plan programs, policies, and investments to attract and retain rail access to Class I railroads.

Industry Impact:

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The results of this study can be used by local communities and economic development agencies to support retention of rail access and job creation in rural areas. Both short line and Class I railroads can use the results of this investigation to evaluate the cost-effectiveness of providing service to rural communities.

Research Team:

- Martin Lipinski, University of Memphis (Executive Committee Representative & Project Co-coordinator)
- Mike Golias, University of Memphis (Project Co-coordinator)
- Mike Anderson, University of Alabama in Huntsville
- Chad Miller, University of Southern Mississippi
- Ernie Perry, University of Wisconsin-Madison
- Brian Richard, University of Southern Mississippi
- Richard Stewart, University of Wisconsin-Superior

Funding:

- Total: \$588,520
- UTC Funds: \$294,260

Duration:

- 16 months

Student Involvement

- University of Memphis: One graduate student for one semester
- University of Southern Mississippi: One graduate student
- University of Alabama in Huntsville: One student for three semesters