

2. Project Description

2.1 Setting

Existing rail activity in the proposed terminal area includes intermodal and conventional rail freight operations of NS, CSX and Conrail in the Livernois Yard location and intermodal operations of CP Expressway and Amtrak in the terminal located behind the Michigan Central Depot. Amtrak passes through the proposed terminal area on its route between Pontiac, Detroit and Chicago. Other freight railroads such as CN and CP also pass through the general area.

The area is served by I-75 along its south and east, and I-94 along its west and north, with ready access to I-96. Primary exits along I-75 that serve the area are Springwells (exit 45) and Livernois (exit 46). Primary exits along I-94 that serve the area are Wyoming (exit 210), Lonyo (exit 211), and Livernois (exit 212). Analysis of the roads serving the area were undertaken in the DIFT Feasibility Study² and found the road system to be adequate to serve the DIFT intermodal truck traffic. Nevertheless, a number of improvements are proposed to channel intermodal trucks directly to the terminal's gates (six) and away from residential streets/areas.

2.2 Project Area Characteristics

The Detroit Intermodal Freight Terminal Project study area is shown on Figure 1. Land uses in the study area are a blend of industrial, commercial, recreational, and residential functions.

The neighborhoods in the project area and some of the organizations that serve them include Mexicantown, Briggs Community Council, Bagley Housing Association, Corktown CDC, Hubbard-Richard CDC, LA SED, Southwest Business Owners Association, Southwest Detroit Improvement Association, Delray Community District Council and Southwest Detroit Business Association.

Presently about 80 train movements occur daily at some point within the area, with less than half being through movements.

International border crossings at the Ambassador Bridge, the Detroit-Windsor Tunnel, and the Detroit-Canada Rail Tunnel serve the area. The Wayne County waterport is within the DIFT study area. And, the GDA's airports are directly connected to the DIFT study area by the freeway system.

The Fisher Freeway (I-75) is a major north-south interstate highway that connects Miami, Fla., to the south and Sault Ste. Marie to the north in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. I-75 is a major economic corridor that is critical to Michigan's and the nation's economy.

²Detroit Intermodal Freight Terminal Feasibility Study, Technical Memorandum No. 4, The Corradino Group of Michigan, Inc., 2001.

The Edsel Ford Freeway (I-94) is a primary east-west connector linking Canada through Port Huron, Mich., to Chicago and points west. I-94 also links four regional airports in southeast Michigan. I-96 (Jeffries Freeway) originates at the Ambassador Bridge where it intersects with I-75 and I-94. It runs west through Lansing, Mich., and Grand Rapids before terminating near Grand Haven.

Michigan Avenue (U.S. 12) connects Downtown Detroit to Dearborn and to several suburbs to the west. Michigan Avenue is important to this area's neighborhoods and businesses for efficient movement of people and goods.

Dix Highway and Fort Street (M-85) are important arterials that connect Downriver communities to the area. Other streets which are critical to this area's transportation network include: Jefferson, Vernor, Toledo, John Kronk, Wyoming, Miller, Springwells, Lonyo, Central, West End, Green, Waterman, Livernois, Dagoon, Junction, Clark, Scotten, West Grand Boulevard, Rosa Parks Boulevard, 14th Street, and others.

There are two public transit systems presently serving this area of Detroit. The Detroit Department of Transportation (DDOT) has more than a half dozen routes that serve the area. Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation (SMART) offers service in and out of Detroit and the suburbs. It offers two lines that serve the study area including the Fort Street line and the Michigan Avenue line.

The transportation infrastructure within the DIFT study area is showing its age, due to its heavy use. Street pavement, railroad grade separations, and traffic control devices are part of the entire transportation system to be addressed for operations as well as safety considerations in the DIFT Project.

2.2.1 Demographics

Several neighborhoods in Detroit, Allen Park, Dearborn and Melvindale that will potentially be affected by the project are shown on Figure 1. The area covers 23 square miles, with approximately two-thirds in the city of Detroit. Wyoming Avenue is the approximate dividing line between Detroit and Dearborn.

Current Population

The total population of the study area in 1990 was about 97,000 people, with about 83 percent in Detroit, about nine percent in Dearborn, two to three percent in Allen Park and five percent in Melvindale. The overall population of the study area in 2000 was 98,100, or an increase of about one percent. During the period 1990 to 2000 the population of the study area that is in Detroit grew. This compares to a decline in the city of Detroit's population of about 7.5 percent in the 1990s.

The make-up of the study area by race indicates that the Allen Park, Melvindale and Dearborn portions of the study area are more than 90 percent white. Detroit's section of the area is less than half (48 percent) white. Twenty-five percent of the Detroit residents in the study area classify themselves as neither white nor black/African American. Ethnically, Detroit's portion of the study area is 47 percent Hispanic/Latino. Census data indicate seven percent of Allen Park, ten percent of Melvindale and about three percent of Dearborn is Hispanic/Latino. Environmental Justice, a federal order

designed to protect minority and low-income populations from absorbing disproportionate human health and environmental impacts, will be carefully accounted for in developing the DIFT Project in Southwest Detroit.

Current Employment

Data from SEMCOG's 2020 Regional Development Forecast indicate total employment in the study area was 63,062 in 1990 and 57,643 in 2000, an 8.6 percent loss. In 2000, SEMCOG data indicated the primary employment categories were manufacturing followed by service.

Population and Employment Forecasts

SEMCOG forecasts a population decline in the DIFT study area of approximately 23 percent by 2020. The first decade is expected to see a decline of about 18 percent. This likely reflects the aging of the current residents, with more deaths than births and little migration into the area. The decade of 2010 to 2020 reflects a more stable situation, with the forecast population decline slowing to five percent. However, the trends of the 1990s may require these forecasts to be revisited.

Total employment is forecast to decrease by about six to seven percent in each of the next two decades. This is lower than the almost nine percent decline of the 1990s. Retail and services employment are expected to remain stable over the next 20 years. The existence of a federally-designated Empowerment Zone may also require these forecasts to be updated.

2.3 Features of Proposed Project

An extensive analysis performed over a period of years has developed the proposal for the DIFT as a set of multiple intermodal terminals at a single site in Southwest Detroit/East Dearborn (Figure 1). The site is centered on the existing Detroit-Livernois rail yard operated by CSX and NS. DIFT development will be a public-private partnership. Public sector participation would include land acquisition/consolidation and road and rail access improvements to the site. Multiple railroads will operate independently on the expanded site.

The EIS will study the impacts associated with a refinement of Rail Strategy 3 (RS 3), originally developed in the Feasibility Study, in comparison to Rail Strategy 1 (RS 1). RS 1 is the No Action approach, acknowledging that some funding through MDOT (not FHWA) would continue for limited improvements to intermodal terminals located throughout the region. Rail Strategy 2 (RS 2) was proposed as a minor expansion of the intermodal terminal footprint at the Detroit-Livernois Yard, but that expansion would not meet expected intermodal demand, nor offer benefits such as site buffering that RS 3 would provide. Analyses of RS 1 (and Rail Strategy 2) presented in the Feasibility Study will be incorporated in the EIS as will the earlier work by Mercer Management Consulting that selected the Livernois-Junction Yard area as the location for intermodal consolidation. A discussion will accompany this information as it relates to the project's purpose and need.

With intermodal consolidation, the existing railroad-controlled property (approximately 500 acres) would be expanded to approximately 800 to 850 acres to meet the forecast demand of 2,000,000 annual lifts/loads in 2025. This acreage is determined by applying the industry guideline/experience of 2,000 to 3,000 lifts per acre of intermodal terminal, depending on the type of terminal operation

(conventional container, trailer on flatcar, or RoadRailer). Terminals would be situated around the mainline east-west tracks and truck traffic may be afforded exclusive access to the site through a truck-only road (TOR).

Refinements to Rail Strategy 3 are ongoing consistent with the Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS which was published in the Federal Register in March 2002. Further study of the size of the proposed terminal, its operating characteristics, number of gates, etc., will guide an understanding of its potential impacts and shape the final plan.

The Detroit-Livernois rail yard dates to the 1850s. The rail lines and yard(s) were established prior to other development, which filled in around the yard as the railroad era boomed. This included both manufacturing and residential uses. When the Ford Rouge plant opened south and west of the Livernois yard, the growth in Southwest Detroit accelerated. Some of this land is residential as housing developed for the rail and manufacturing workers, in a “company town”-type setting. The proposed DIFT would expand into some of this land.

For the DIFT any new track layout is optimized if it is organized longitudinally along mainline tracks. If new tracks parallel existing tracks, land acquisition is minimized. Storage of trailers and containers is less subject to this geometry and so can use more irregularly spaced parcels at the edges of the site.

Truck traffic will be routed to and from defined “gates.” These gates are typically at either end of a yard. Two truck-only roads (TORs) have been studied to carry DIFT traffic between the terminal and the freeway system in order to minimize truck use of local streets. One TOR was a part of RS 3 as originally proposed. It would connect the east end of the Livernois yard (gates C/D) with I-75 at Springwells. The concept is to use available railroad right-of-way to provide a grade-separated “driveway to the terminal” for trucks only. This TOR would be buffered from adjacent sensitive land uses by noise walls. No new right-of-way would be required and only one block of surface street (Springwells) would be used to get to I-75. A second truck driveway is now being studied based on community input. It would connect the west end of the proposed DIFT at Wyoming Avenue to Schaefer and Rotunda Roads. This connector (TOR) would be built along the south side of the main line east-west tracks from Schaefer over I-94 and east to Wyoming. Trucks would then use Wyoming to access proposed gate E (south side) and gates H/I (north side) and continue along the south edge of the DIFT to serve Gates C/D.

DIFT trucks would also connect the terminal to I-94: to the east side of the proposed DIFT, via Livernois, which is predominately commercial and has plenty of available capacity with its nine-lane width; and, at the Wyoming Avenue interchange to access the west side of the proposed terminal.

John Kronk Street now defines the north boundary of the Detroit-Livernois yard. With the DIFT, Kronk would become internal to the yard. In its place a new, north-side perimeter road would be developed on the outside of the terminal. This road would be designed to be a street for local traffic, not a street attractive to truck use. The perimeter road would be constructed with a berm/landscaping and/or noise wall to buffer the project from the local neighborhoods on the outside. About 60 single-family homes may be taken for terminal development. There may be an opportunity to relocate persons in those dwellings to a tract of land west of Cabot Street. A large parcel necessary for the project would have a remnant that extends north into the neighborhood. The tract is now manufacturing/warehouse and could be revitalized with infill housing. The parcel, if used, would meet state and federal environmental standards for residential use.

Besides the perimeter road there could be one other major change in local access. Today both Lonyo and Central cross the rail yard. Both are at-grade crossings, meaning that there is always a potential for crashes with trains. Earlier this year, there was a fatality when a motorist went around a lowered gate. Grade-separated crossings are proposed with the DIFT. Due to the high cost of such grade separations, consideration is being given to building only one such crossing, at Central. Lonyo would be closed. Pedestrians would be accommodated on sidewalks (over and/or under the railroad tracks) connecting each side of the terminal.

Drainage is an issue at a number of viaducts in the area. Where infrastructure improvements are put in place, in the vicinity of these key areas, the drainage would be improved at the same time. This is the case with the Springwells-to-terminal truck-only road. However, such drainage improvements would not be possible if the Schaefer-to-terminal TOR were chosen. Only one TOR is needed.

2.4 Related/Nearby Transportation Improvement Proposals

A number of projects in the region have varying relationships to the proposed DIFT as each could affect either truck and/or rail traffic to and through the proposed DIFT (Figure 3):

- I-75 is proposed to have a lane addition between 8 Mile Road and M-59.
- I-375 and Jefferson Avenue in downtown Detroit are planned for a major reconstruction with access modifications.
- I-94 is proposed for reconstruction between I-96 and Connor, north of Downtown.
- New access to the Ambassador Bridge from I-75 is proposed.
- A new border crossing is being studied, with candidate corridors including a crossing from the Southwest Detroit area to Windsor, Ontario, Canada.
- A reworking of an existing CP tunnel to Canada for truck traffic and building a new rail tunnel next to it are being studied by a private venture. The existing tunnel ends behind the Michigan Central Depot.
- “Speedlink” rapid transit is under consideration in the Woodward and Grand River corridors.
- Consideration of high-speed rail passenger service between Chicago and Detroit and commuter rail service between Lansing, Ann Arbor and Detroit.
- Light rail passenger service between Detroit Metropolitan Airport and downtown Detroit.

Of these projects, those with the greatest import to the DIFT are: 1) the potential border crossing, which could reorient a considerable volume of traffic, including truck traffic, on I-75 and I-94; 2) improving I-94 which will provide major freeway access from the east, the north via I-75 and the west via I-96; 3) the reworking of an existing tunnel to Canada to accommodate trucks; 4) the proposal for light rail passenger service through the terminal area, connecting the Detroit Metropolitan Airport with downtown Detroit; and, 5) proposed high-speed and commuter train service through



Figure 3
Concept Depiction of
Major Transportation Projects
Focused on Southeast Michigan

Preliminary for Discussion Purposes Only
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the terminal area. The last two proposals could have an impact on the DIFT as passenger and freight traffic would conflict in terms of scheduling, safety, incompatibility of signal systems separating movements, and the like. The high-speed and commuter train services will be dealt with through layout of the terminal. As a matter of fact, a new connection is being engineered in the northeast quadrant of the terminal area. It would use former railroad right-of-way and bridges. This routing would not only facilitate high-speed and commuter train service but connect CN to the proposed DIFT. On the other hand, the Detroit Metro Airport light rail passenger system is largely incompatible with the freight terminal. Other alternatives for placing this proposed line, like along Michigan Avenue, are recommended by the DIFT.