

State Rail Planning Best Practices

November 2009



AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF
STATE HIGHWAY AND
TRANSPORTATION OFFICIALS

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Reader's Note and Acknowledgements

This guidebook is the first of its kind—a concise resource to empower states with the information and strategy they need to develop effective and Federally-compliant state rail plans. The purpose of this guidebook is not to provide *all* the answers or to dictate formulaic approaches—but rather to serve as a resource to set the planning process on the correct trajectory to meet individual state needs. As future issues arise, AASHTO may provide updates to this guidebook and supporting materials, including a comprehensive list of existing state rail plans. Internet links, on its website:

<http://freight.transportation.org/rail/index.html>

The American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) acknowledges the leadership of Standing Committee on Rail Transportation (SCORT) in sponsoring the development of this publication. AASHTO also recognizes the contributions and guidance of members of SCORT and input from the U.S. Department of Transportation, and railroad partners. This guidebook was created for the states by consultant Cambridge Systematics, Inc. under the direction of Donald B. Ludlow, AICP. We hope this guidebook will serve as a timely resource of maximum value to state rail planning efforts.

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Introduction

Interest in rail planning is reaching new heights as state departments of transportation (DOTs) across the country rush to qualify for new Federal grants authorized through the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act (PRIIA). This new wave of state rail planning activity builds on the recent momentum and leadership of several states that have developed compelling freight and passenger rail planning programs and investments. This guidebook, prepared under the direction of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials' (AASHTO) Standing Committee on Rail Transportation (SCORT), serves as flexible guidance to states launching state rail plans for the first time or for veteran programs looking to renew older plans with an eye to the future—and new funding.

The overarching goal of this guidebook is to help states produce PRIIA-compliant state rail plans customized to the unique circumstances of each state.

This guidebook provides a framework for developing comprehensive state rail plans, but it does not substitute for any forthcoming regulatory guidance from the U.S. Department of Transportation. PRIIA stipulates that the U.S. Secretary of Transportation “prescribe procedures for states to submit state rail plans for review under this title, including standardized format and data requirements.” Official Federal regulations are expected from the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) by October 2010 to meet the two-year limit contained in the law. Because this guidebook and more than a dozen new or updated state rail plans will be completed before the release of Federal regulations, it is the Standing Committee on Rail Transportation’s hope that FRA will incorporate lessons learned from the states into the published regulations. An open dialogue between the states, FRA, and the railroads will aid in accomplishing this objective.

