

## 8 | Freight, Air & Rail

### 8.1 OVERVIEW

Transportation systems must serve many modes and functions. In the Farmington MPO area, these include airports and the potential for rail facilities, as well as freight. Existing and future intermodal connecting points are a vital part of the MTP's goals, objectives and policies. Enhancing freight mobility improves regional economic development and with careful planning and engineering can minimize impacts to neighborhoods and the environment. Growing air cargo or linkages to freight corridors may require new or existing road facilities to ensure appropriate transport of goods. Interest in rail service to the area is growing, and the proposition of freight rail from the BNSF rail line along Interstate 40 to the Farmington area is currently being studied. Commuter rail serves the Albuquerque metropolitan area and Santa Fe, and some residents have expressed a desire to see commuter rail from Farmington to Albuquerque.

### 8.2 PUBLIC INPUT

During public outreach, the MPO received input regarding the status of freight, rail and air service:

- The views of air service in Farmington often expressed in public meetings acknowledged the decline of commercial flight service to and from Four Corners Regional Airport in Farmington as compared with Durango or Albuquerque. Some see Four Corners Regional Airport to be more suited for general aviation, freight cargo, and military use. The single limiting factor for growth of the airport is the inability to expand the runway to handle commercial flights and increased cargo.
- In public meetings, some participants expressed interest in passenger rail service to Albuquerque.



- Participants in many meetings recognized the value of freight rail to the area's economy, both for exporting mining and extracted goods, agricultural products and other goods, as well as for imports.
- Citizens in public meetings acknowledged freight as an integral part of our communities and the movement of freight as an important function of the transportation system, but they wish to mitigate the impacts of large trucks by adherence to truck routes.

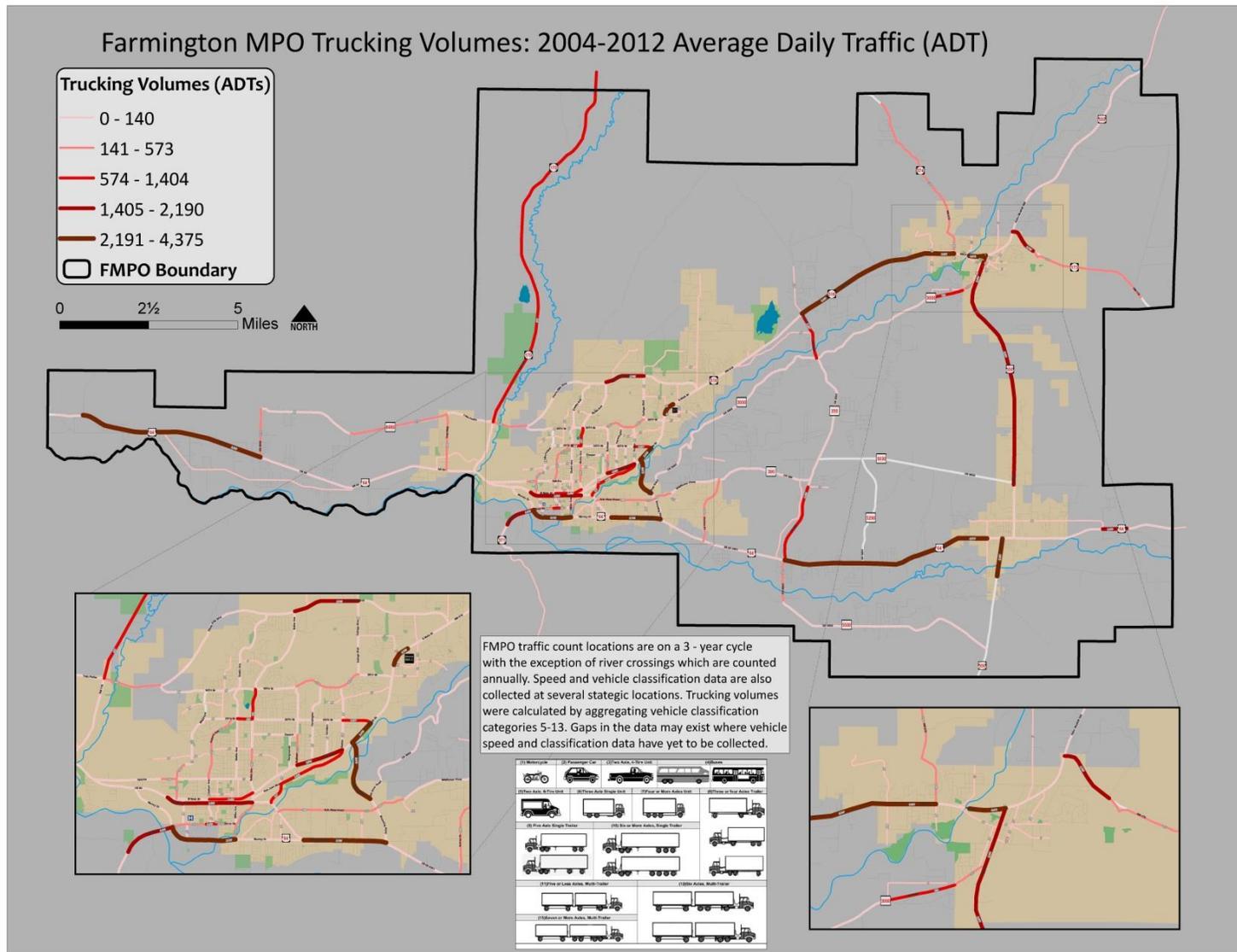
NMDOT is completing the state's Freight Plan concurrent with the New Mexico Transportation Plan. In September 2014, NMDOT hosted a meeting in Farmington on the topic of freight for Northwest New Mexico. While the study is still ongoing, the following input pertained to Northwest New Mexico:

- According to a regional working group convened by NMDOT, the top priorities for freight within Northwest New Mexico are a new rail line in the Farmington area and the movement of oil and gas, fly ash, and agricultural products.
- NMDOT would likely see a reduction in the truck traffic on NM 371 with construction of a parallel rail line and should consider supporting the rail line to save maintenance costs for that highway.
- Transportation infrastructure is the limiting factor in energy production in Northwest New Mexico.
- A rail-truck trans-loading facility and an intermodal yard at Thoreau are being studied by the Navajo Nation and other agencies.

### **8.3 FREIGHT**

With exports from an expansive mineral extraction industry, agricultural produce and other manufactured goods, plus the need to bring finished products to the region's retail sector, freight movement is an important need throughout the MPO region. The role of the Farmington MPO in freight planning is to develop a framework for facilitating and enhancing freight mobility and goods movement in the region, improving the region's economic competitiveness, and minimizing negative environmental and community impacts within the MPO region. Truck volumes are shown on Map 8-1.

MAP 8-1 – Trucking Volumes in the Farmington MPO, 2004-2012



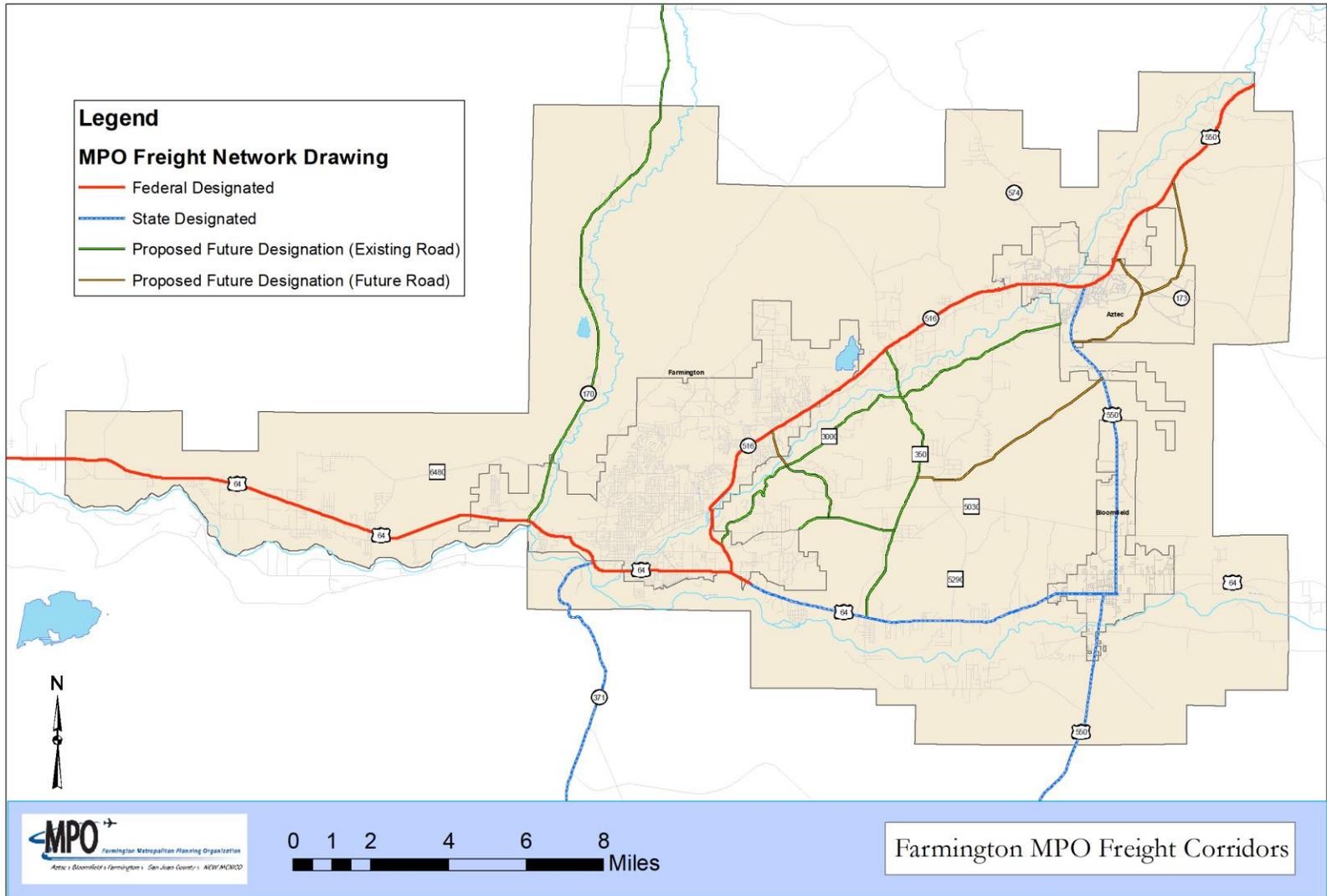
One of the issues identified through public outreach is the impact of freight trucks on the condition of roadways, and their impacts on surrounding land uses. While trucks need to make trips on other roads, federal, state and local facilities have been designated as truck routes to prevent negative impacts to the extent possible. For example, Aztec is proceeding with the East Arterial to provide a route which would allow trucks to avoid their downtown. Map 8-2 shows the truck routes designated in the most recent freight study from 2008. Although that study focused on the interstate corridors and the Albuquerque region, some highlights about the MPO region include:

- US 550 is an identified freight corridor that links the Farmington area to regional, state, and national markets; US 550 is critical to the oil and gas industry.
- US 550 has a projected truck Average Annual Daily Traffic (AADT) of 3,000 growing to 7,000 in 2035.
- US 64 between Farmington and Bloomfield has a projected truck AADT of 7,000 growing to 15,000 in 2035.
- There is a strain on US 550, and maintenance has been deferred on this and other roads.

Area truck routes from the Freight Study are listed below:

<b>Federally-Designated</b>
US 64 from Farmington west to Arizona
NM 516 from US 64 to US 550
US 550 from Aztec to Colorado
<b>State Designated</b>
US 64 Farmington to Bloomfield
US 550 from I-25 to Aztec
NM 371 from Farmington south

MAP 8-2 – Truck Routes in the Farmington MPO



## **8.4 FUTURE FREIGHT CONSIDERATIONS**

Future freight considerations for this area:

- What impacts on the transportation network would come from a rail connection?
- What does Bloomfield plan for freight movement, given freight traffic to/from Colorado and Albuquerque as well as the proposed industrial park north of town? Will all truck traffic rely on US 550 and US 64?
- How will the potential industrial corridor of CR 350 impact the area's road network?
- How will future industrial expansion affect Farmington and Aztec?
- What steps need to be taken to encourage freight trucks to abide by truck routes to the extent possible?
- What facilities and policies are needed to continue to accommodate the freight industry's needs?

In order to facilitate the development of a freight framework, the following considerations should be taken into account to support the vision of an accessible, safe, and efficient surface transportation system that integrates convenience, affordability and improved air quality:

- Increase the efficiency of the existing transportation system and decrease traffic congestion through coordination of traffic operations and development of strategies to reduce travel demand at both the regional and corridor levels.
- Develop and implement operational improvements for the management of traffic along major travel corridors, including incident management, intersection improvements, construction coordination, access management, signal re-timing programs, and freight management.
- Monitor freight travel patterns and identify preferred truck routes and the implementation of truck lanes.

## **8.5 AIR TRANSPORTATION AND CARGO**

The potential for growth of air cargo at either the Farmington or Aztec airports is tied to the potential growth and movement of products within the Four Corners region. Most of the air cargo transported via the airport involves goods moving to or from regional sorting centers and warehouses in Albuquerque or within New Mexico. Parcels and other products are shipped via air cargo to facilitate "just-in-time" arrivals.

The Four Corners Regional Airport in Farmington has commercial air service by one airline to four destinations in Arizona, California and Colorado. The City of Farmington developed a long-range plan for the airport in 2013, which forecasts slow growth in passenger counts over the next 20 years. The plan reviews the limitations of runway length for regional jets and larger commercial jets, and recommended scenarios for improvement options. The plan shows how new air cargo facilities could be located on the northern

portion of the airport's property. The plan also acknowledges general aviation activity. While the plan did not address air cargo specifically, it anticipates accommodating growth in cargo service in the future.

The City of Aztec does not have commercial air service, but serves general aviation. The airport is planning to expand its fuel station and has received a federal grant for the improvements. The airport is also planning to reconstruct the apron and one of its runways.

Roadway improvements and other modal connections may be needed to accompany future increased activity at either airport. The new facilities would need access to the north side of Four Corners Regional Airport, and a collector street has been identified to connect the airport to Piñon Hills Boulevard. Currently, the Red Apple Transit stop serving the Four Corners Regional Airport is an on-demand stop.

## **8.6 RAIL CONNECTION**

In recent years, interest has grown for returning rail to the MPO planning area to serve freight imports and exports. Four Corners Economic Development is working with Navajo Nation and New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology to study a possible alignment for a rail line from the area southwest of Farmington, along Highway NM 371 south to the Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) rail line in Thoreau. The distance is approximately 100 miles. An alignment from the Farmington area running west and then south following 491 to Gallup may also be studied. Depending on the alignment and location of the terminus in the Farmington area, there may be additional transportation facilities constructed to accommodate the new rail connection. The new rail line has been discussed as a private venture or public private partnership. The State's Rail Plan, completed in 2014, recommends further study of this rail connection. Map 8-3 shows the State's rail network relative to receipts from mining and extraction activities by county in 2011. This highlights the need for rail connections in support of extractive industries in San Juan County.

