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Business

Freight plan for Maryland unveiled

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A proposal to expand freight capacity on Maryland rails owned by CSX Corp. got high priority in a broad new state plan released Monday, though a separate move to ease a bottleneck caused by the Howard Street Tunnel in Baltimore is likely still a few years away.

The Maryland Department of Transportation came out with its first statewide freight plan, released at a forum for representatives from the air, maritime, rail and truck cargo industries. The plan identifies more than \$35 billion in improvements that the state needs to shore up its capacity for handling increasing shipping traffic to, from and through Maryland.

The report predicts a 75 percent increase in freight by 2030. It does not outline the costs of specific projects, or how they would be paid for. Some of the work is already planned in state transportation documents, while others could get money from federal, local or private sources.

Still, the report gives a good indication of the magnitude of the state's freight needs, said Transportation Secretary Beverley Swaim-Staley, and should be a guide for infrastructure planning.

"If you can imagine the mobility issues that we have today, you know the challenges that lie ahead," she said.

The report, which state officials anticipate will be required of all states within the next few years, points to several infrastructure issues that the state is facing, including a lack of "double-stack" rail capacity, a shortage of parking for tractor-trailer trucks, rising use of rural highways and bottlenecks at urban interchanges.

At the Port of Baltimore, the report places high priority on projects including a new, 50-foot berth at Seagirt Marine Terminal, as well as a new terminal development at Cox Creek. The Maryland Port Administration is working toward a public-private partnership to build the Seagirt addition.

CSX has been working since last year on a multi-state plan, called the National Gateway Project, to make it easier to move double-stacked containers around the mid-Atlantic and Midwest, by increasing railway clearances in many places. The overall project is expected to cost \$842 million for work between Ohio and North Carolina.

Double-stacked clearance allows trains with two shipping containers to pass through, effectively allowing trains to carry

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twice as much cargo. However, there are many areas around the region where double-stacked containers do not fit, and CSX is looking to fix that.

Maryland's component of the gateway project would cost \$192 million, said CSX Resident Vice President Sharon A. Daboin. The state and company would each pay \$75 million, and will ask the federal government to chip in \$42 million as well.

Daboin said the state's emphasis of the national gateway was "really important."

"One of the requirements to get federal funding is to get it included in a plan," she said.

One of the key choke points along the East Coast is the Howard Street Tunnel, which is not large enough to handle double-stacked cargo. That project is also listed as a high priority in the report. The state is studying what to do about the tunnel, and could make a decision within the next four years.

The report also lists as high priority several projects related to the portion of Amtrak's Northeast corridor that are in the state. Several of those projects were included in federal stimulus money requests that Maryland made late last month.

The state requested \$60 million in federal money for study and engineering, but not construction to the replace a 130-year-old passenger tunnel located near Baltimore's Penn Station. Its application also included a request for \$200 million to study the replacement of three two-track rail bridges — the Bush, Susquehanna and Gunpowder bridges — with three-track bridges to allow Amtrak, MARC and freight trains to travel at faster speeds.

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