

GNC SWOT Analysis:

Action Plan

Prepared by the Olsson Associates Team

Prepared for the Montana Department of Transportation

December 2014



**GREAT
NORTHERN**
CORRIDOR COALITION



TECHNICAL REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

1. Report No. 7 (Action Plan)	2. Government Accession No.	3. Recipient's Catalog No.
4. Title and Subtitle Great Northern Corridor Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats Analysis Final Report	5. Report Date December 26, 2014	
	6. Performing Organization Code	
7. Author(s) Olsson Associates Parsons Brinckerhoff The Beckett Group	8. Performing Organization Report No. 6 (Final Report)	
9. Performing Organization Name and Address Olsson Associates 2111 S. 67th Street, Suite 200 Omaha, NE 68106	10. Work Unit No.	
	11. Contract or Grant No.	
12. Sponsoring Agency Name and Address Research Programs Montana Department of Transportation 2701 Prospect Avenue P.O. Box 201001 Helena MT 59620-1001	13. Type of Report and Period Covered Type: Project Final Report Period Covered: January-November 2014	
	14. Sponsoring Agency Code 5401	
15. Supplementary Notes Research performed in cooperation with the Montana Department of Transportation and the U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration.		

16. Abstract

The GNC Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats Analysis Action Plan supplements the Final Report, which is the culmination of a ten-month study of the Great Northern Corridor as requested by the GNC Coalition. The Action Plan enumerates the steps recommended for the Coalition to take to further their goals and advance their strategic position as outlined in the Final Report and throughout the SWOT Analysis study.

17. Key Words		18. Distribution Statement Unrestricted. This document is available through the National Technical Information Service, Springfield, VA 21161.	
19. Security Classif. (of this report) Unclassified	20. Security Classif. (of this page) Unclassified	21. No. of Pages 4	22. Price

Disclaimer Statement

This document is disseminated under the sponsorship of the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) and the United States Department of Transportation (USDOT) in the interest of information exchange. The State of Montana and the United States assume no liability for the use or misuse of its contents.

The contents of this document reflect the views of the authors, who are solely responsible for the facts and accuracy of the data presented herein. The contents do not necessarily reflect the views or official policies of MDT or the USDOT.

The State of Montana and the United States do not endorse products or manufacturers.

This document does not constitute a standard, specification, policy, or regulation.

Action Plan

Introduction

This document presents action steps the Great Northern Corridor Coalition can take to move forward in pursuit of the Coalition's goals of increasing the national profile and visibility of the Corridor as well as strategically positioning it for collaborative policy support and increased investment from public and private sources. The Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) Analysis conducted for the GNC identified a number of long-term strategies the Coalition may also wish to pursue; however, this document focuses on short-term steps that can be taken in the next phase of the study during the next 12 to 18 months. These action steps are summarized below and elaborated upon in the narrative following the summary.

Summary

- **Review Coalition organizational structure and leadership vision:** The GNC Coalition organizational structure should be reviewed and a shared vision of the operating structure established among Coalition leadership;
- **Develop Coalition Advocacy and Marketing Program:** Awareness of the importance of the Corridor and the role of the Coalition as a catalyst for improvements needs to be more widespread to obtain support for proposed projects and initiatives;
- **Recognize the GNC as a Corridor of Strategic Importance:** The Coalition should take steps to have the Corridor formally recognized as an Essential/Strategic Public Facility of National Significance at the Local, State and Federal levels;
- **Develop a More Comprehensive Project List:** To make the evaluation process most effective, the Coalition should develop a comprehensive list of projects on the Corridor that is more inclusive of state and local projects within Corridor boundaries and areas of influence. This more inclusive list could then be re-evaluated using the methodology developed in Phase I.
- **Broadly Solicit Project Proposals:** The Coalition could do a "Call for Projects" to identify projects that may be submitted to the next round of TIGER grants, or similar funding programs. The goal is to identify Corridor projects that are "shovel ready" for the Coalition to champion for funding when special grant programs are published.
- **Evaluate and Prioritize Initiatives:** The Members of the Coalition should consider prioritizing the long-term sustained efforts for particular goals (referred to as 'initiatives') identified by the SWOT Analysis that the members would like to further define and develop a long-term plan in Phase II.

Action Items

Review Coalition Organizational Structure and Leadership Vision

The GNC Coalition organizational structure should be reviewed and a shared vision of the operating structure established among Corridor Coalition leadership. Similar exercises have been undertaken by Corridor organizations like the I-95 Corridor Coalition. The first step will be to utilize the Coalition's mission statement and goals to re-examine the organizational structure, and once reaching a decision, formalizing the GNC Coalition's organizational structure and succession plans. This structure would include the size, structure, and membership selection of the Coalition, through a Board of Advisors, a committee structure, or some other model. A formal, consistent process and list of requirements for Coalition membership will be important as well. A good first step should include a review of other similar successful organizations and assembling multiple options for consideration. This step is viewed as a priority that should be undertaken as soon as possible to establish the GNC as a recognized and sustainable organization. As an additional organizational action, the Coalition should consider creating an Executive Leadership Team whose purpose will be to increase visibility of the Coalition and facilitate a collaborative approach to decisions for top priority projects and initiatives of the Corridor. Creation of the Executive Leadership Team would include the identification and recruitment of senior executives of member organizations who are interested in supporting the Corridor and using their time and influence to advocate for Coalition initiatives. Solidifying the organizational structure of the GNC is viewed as an important step in fostering more active growth and influence of the Coalition.

Develop Coalition Advocacy and Marketing Program

Once the structure and near- and long-term initiatives are identified, active growth for the Coalition can begin. The following strategies should be considered and advanced:

- Corridor Advocacy Program – Working with local, state and federal stakeholders to obtain formal recognition and designation as an Essential/Strategic Public Facility of national significance from the perspective of social, economic and strategic defense. The Corridor Advocacy Program should include targeted strategies for local, state and federal outreach. The Corridor Advocacy Program needs to be coordinated across the entire membership and geographic areas served by the GNC.
 - Project Advocacy – As part of the Corridor Advocacy Program, the Coalition will advocate for specific projects on behalf of the Corridor and its stakeholders, ensuring project funders understand the value and importance of specific projects to the overall vitality of the Corridor.
- Corridor Coalition Marketing Program – Identify opportunities to market memberships and sponsorships to build the Coalition's support both financially and politically. Targets for funding and membership numbers need to be set and met and should be reviewed regularly by the Corridor Executive Leadership Team.
- Increased Education - Provide recommendations on how to develop a program(s) and materials that will build recognition of the GNC and its importance to the nation. These programs and materials can be utilized by the Advocacy Program and the Marketing Program to further promote the Corridor at the Local, State and Federal levels as well as with interested stakeholders.

Recognize the GNC as a Corridor of Strategic Importance

Though this action step can be viewed as part of a broader Coalition Advocacy Program (mentioned above), it is important enough to merit further explanation. The Coalition has taken initial steps to have the Corridor formally recognized as an Essential/Strategic Public Facility of National Significance at the Local, State and Federal levels. Recently, the Coalition submitted a preliminary program of near term projects, packaged as the Great Northern Corridor Multimodal Infrastructure Improvements, to the Federal Highway Administration at USDOT for consideration as a Project of National and Regional Significance (PNRS). Additional actions to support this recognition and similar activities should continue.

Though largely a symbolic action, local, state, regional and especially federal recognition as a critical component of the nation's multimodal transportation infrastructure increases the Corridor's profile and improves stakeholder and citizen knowledge of the Corridor. Recognition of the Corridor's importance will provide legitimacy and momentum for public (and potentially private) investments. A PNRS is defined by FHWA as a project that *improves the safe, secure, and efficient movement of people and goods through the U.S. to improve the national economy*. Twenty-five projects were designated in the previous federal transportation bill, SAFETEA-LU. Evaluation and rating guidelines have been established to determine future project funding. Under the provisions of MAP-21, \$500 million was authorized to be appropriated to carry out PNRS in fiscal year 2013. While no funds were appropriated in FY13, Section 1120 of MAP-21 required the USDOT to develop a report to Congress that contains a comprehensive list of each project of national and regional significance that has been compiled through a survey of State departments of transportation; transit agencies, tribal governments, and multi-state or multi-jurisdictional groups. This comprehensive list will enable the Secretary to classify projects of regional or national significance and to develop recommendations on financing for eligible project costs. PNRS project information was being collected through an online survey, originally administered in June of 2014; this survey was reopened to provide more opportunity for interested parties to respond. The final survey, to which the GNC Coalition responded, closed November 17, 2014.

Develop a Comprehensive Project List

To make the evaluation process most effective, the Coalition will need a strong and detailed yet flexible list of projects within the Corridor boundaries upon which to prepare evaluations and prioritizations. Currently, many states on the Corridor lack a cohesive list of projects that are ready for implementation funding. Using available data from previous plans and project funding applications, a preliminary project list was developed in the SWOT Analysis (Phase I); this list can be found in Appendix G of Tech Memo 5. Prior to the scenario planning workshop conducted in Vancouver, Washington during May of 2014, the consultant team collected projects from existing State Rail Plans. The initial matrix was populated, and the projects were plotted on the Corridor map. The resulting map suggested that existing projects were not well distributed along the Corridor. To supplement projects from existing plans, formal outreach was conducted with Coalition states to refine and update the potential project list with more recent planning activity. Though this initial list is a good start, rail and intermodal planning activities are not consistent among jurisdictions on the Corridor. In Phase II, the Coalition should consider conducting corridor planning and outreach activities across the length of the GNC to develop a more representative list of projects that can be included in project prioritization and development for improving overall funding prospects on the Corridor; additional data sources for this increased effort should include sources like statewide long-range transportation plans (LRTPs) and statewide transportation improvement plans. Using a consistent planning approach on the Corridor should result in a balanced portfolio of projects from rail, highway

and port transportation modes that are distributed geographically as best as practically possible. Once the full list has been developed, the Coalition should review the project evaluation criteria that have been developed in Phase I and agree upon a process by which projects can be evaluated and prioritized by their importance to the safety, mobility, economy and environmental health of the Corridor, while retaining flexibility as operation conditions and national trends change.

Broadly Solicit Project Proposals

The Coalition could do a “Call for Projects” to identify projects that are planning to apply in the next round of TIGER grants (or other application-based funding programs, federal or state). This would be beneficial to all parties as the Coalition could start to review and evaluate the proposed projects, so that when a Notice of Funding Availability is published work is already underway. This year was a good example of the Coalition’s desire to provide Corridor support to a select group of projects for TIGER 2014 but lacked the data and the time to accomplish such a coordinated effort. With coordinated effort, the Coalition could accomplish three things: one, provide timely feedback and assistance to the project applicants; two, have proper time to draft and submit letters of Coalition support; and three, expand the pool of applicant projects through outreach and/or support to those who are unsure about submitting a project for funding. This could be a yearly or biannual action, depending on the availability of funding, to best position Corridor projects for funding and keep the Coalition project list updated.

Evaluate and Prioritize Initiatives

While the above action steps are short-term actions that can be taken in the Phase II of the study during the next 12 to 18 months, the SWOT Analysis identified several long-term sustained efforts aimed at achieving particular goals—referred to here as ‘initiatives’—that require planning in advance. The members of the Coalition should consider prioritizing these initiatives in Phase II in order to develop a consensus as to what the activities of the Coalition should be after both phases of the study are complete. Further defining these initiatives and potentially creating long-term implementation plans will help the Coalition plan for the resources of time and money that may be required to carry out the initiatives. The initiatives identified by the SWOT Analysis in Phase I that have been recommended for consideration by the Coalition are as follows:

- Grade Crossing Safety and Mobility Initiative
 - Develop a programmatic, Corridor approach to identify, prioritize, and fund grade crossing improvements such as closures, consolidations, and separations.
- Corridor-Wide Environmental Planning Initiative
 - Explore and develop a strategy to develop a Corridor environmental planning strategy that would help expedite permitting for stakeholder projects along the Corridor.
- Unified Corridor Investment Program
 - Explore and develop a structured, comprehensive funding strategy to fund GNC projects.

Discussing and agreeing upon the relative priority of these initiatives, as well as fleshing out who in the Coalition will take the lead on them and how the group will pursue them will help organize the Coalition to follow a strategic plan for future development and success.