



TO: Northern Middlesex Metropolitan Planning Organization (NMMPO)
FROM: Kelly Lynema, AICP, Deputy Director
DATE: February 18, 2026
RE: Recommended Updates to NMMPO Rural and Urban Critical Freight Corridors

In accordance with guidance provided by the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) regarding Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) responsibilities for reviewing and proposing updates to the Commonwealth's designated Rural and Urban Critical Freight Corridors (CRFCs and CUFCs), NMMPO staff conducted a review of the region's existing corridor designations and eligibility for additional mileage.

This memorandum summarizes the staff process and presents recommended updates, including two proposed new corridor designations and revisions to several existing corridors.

Staff Review Process

NMMPO staff followed a structured review process consistent with federal freight program guidance and MassDOT's outlined MPO responsibilities:

- **Eligibility and Mileage Cap Review:** Staff reviewed current CRFC and CUFC designations within the NMMPO region and confirmed available mileage relative to the region's allowable mileage targets (1.8 miles rural; 6.83 miles urban).
- **Freight Network and Land Use Assessment:** Roadways were evaluated based on connectivity to the National Highway Freight Network (NHFN) and Interstate system, access to industrial and commercial land uses, proximity to distribution facilities and regional freight generators, first/last-mile freight connections, and traffic and truck volume analysis.

Additionally, staff reviewed recent traffic volume and truck percentage data to validate continued eligibility of existing designations, identify corridors with increased freight activity, and recommend adjustments to corridor termini where updated data support modification. See Figure 1 (page 4) for a map of the proposed Critical Freight Corridors, as well as those Critical Freight Corridors with minor updates.

All proposed new and updated Critical Rural Freight Corridor (CRFC) and Critical Urban Freight Corridor (CUFC) designations were evaluated against federal eligibility criteria established under the National Highway Freight Program and MassDOT guidance. Corridors were assessed for their role in connecting to the Primary Highway Freight System and Interstate network, providing access to industrial, commercial, and distribution land uses, supporting first- and last-mile freight movement, and accommodating demonstrated truck activity. Eligibility determinations reflect a combination of

roadway functional classification, freight network connectivity, land use context, and recent traffic volume and truck percentage data, as documented in a corridor review spreadsheet submitted to MassDOT.

Proposed New Designations

Based on the above analysis, staff developed recommended additions and updates for MPO consideration and transmittal to MassDOT.

1. Critical Rural Freight Corridor (CRFC): Pepperell – Route 119/South Road

This segment provides an important east-west freight connection serving industrial properties and regional truck traffic between Pepperell and Townsend. The segment supports last-mile access and regional freight continuity.

This segment meets CRFC eligibility as it provides access to regional freight generators and industrial land uses, connects local freight activity to the Primary Highway Freight System and Interstate network, and supports first- and last-mile freight movement critical to regional goods movement.

Segment details: Route 119 from Townsend Town Line (Proctor Road) to Townsend Street (Route 113)

Segment length: 0.95 miles

Change to NMMPO CRFC mileage: brings total mileage to 1.74 miles (under 1.8-mile target)

2. Critical Urban Freight Corridor (CUFC): Lowell – Lowell Connector

This segment functions as a primary freight access route linking regional highway infrastructure with industrial and commercial areas in Lowell. The corridor provides critical connectivity between the Route 3 interchange and key urban freight destinations.

This corridor meets CUFC eligibility criteria as it directly connects the Primary Highway Freight System to major urban freight generators, serves a high-volume urban freight route supporting industrial and commercial activity, and functions as a key connector between regional highway infrastructure and last-mile freight destinations within the City of Lowell.

Segment details: Lowell Connector from Route 3 Interchange to Gorham Street

Segment length: 2.78 miles

Change to NMMPO CUFC mileage: brings total mileage to 5.72 miles (under 6.83-mile target)

Updates and Observations on Existing Corridors

NMMPO staff also recommend updates to several existing Rural and Urban Critical Freight Corridors based on recently available traffic volume and truck percentage data. These updates include:

1. Route 113 in Pepperell from Bancroft Street to Prides Crossing: corridor length adjusted from 0.79 miles to 0.42 miles, as under MassDOT definitions the remainder of the corridor qualifies as urban, not rural. Urban versus rural designation was evaluated using MassDOT urbanized area boundaries and functional classification definitions.
2. East Street in Tewksbury from Whittemore Street (Market Basket Warehouse) to I-93 Interchange (Dascomb Road in Andover): Functional class changed from U3 (Urban Principal Arterial) to U4 (Urban Minor Arterial), based on the most recent MassDOT roadway functional classification dataset. Staff noted an increase in truck volume as a percentage of overall traffic volume from 6% in 2016 to 11% in 2025.¹
3. Route 129 in Chelmsford from UPS Center Entrance on Brick Kiln Road to the Route 3 Interchange: staff noted an increase in truck volume as a percentage of overall traffic volume from 6% in 2015 to 23% in 2025.²
4. Industrial Avenue in Lowell from Route 110 (Chelmsford Street) to Industrial Avenue East: Functional class changed from U3 (Urban Principal Arterial) to U4 (Urban Minor Arterial), based on the most recent MassDOT roadway functional classification dataset. Staff noted a minor increase in truck volume as a percentage of overall traffic volume from 6% in 2015 to 7% in 2024.³

These revisions ensure that designated corridors accurately represent current roadway classification, freight usage, and align with federal eligibility criteria.

Conclusion

Through a data-driven review consistent with MassDOT guidance, NMMPO staff evaluated existing designations, assessed regional freight activity, and developed recommendations to optimize use of available CRFC and CUFC mileage.

The proposed additions in Pepperell and Lowell, along with updates to existing corridors, maintain compliance with mileage targets while strengthening regional freight connectivity and supporting economic activity. A detailed corridor eligibility and mileage summary is provided in a spreadsheet submitted to MassDOT.

The NMMPO will be asked to vote to endorse these updates at their February 25, 2026 meeting, where staff will be available to respond to questions regarding methodology and recommendations.

¹ Truck percentage data were derived from NMMCOG and MassDOT traffic count data, with comparison years ranging from 2015–2016 to 2024–2025 depending on data availability.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

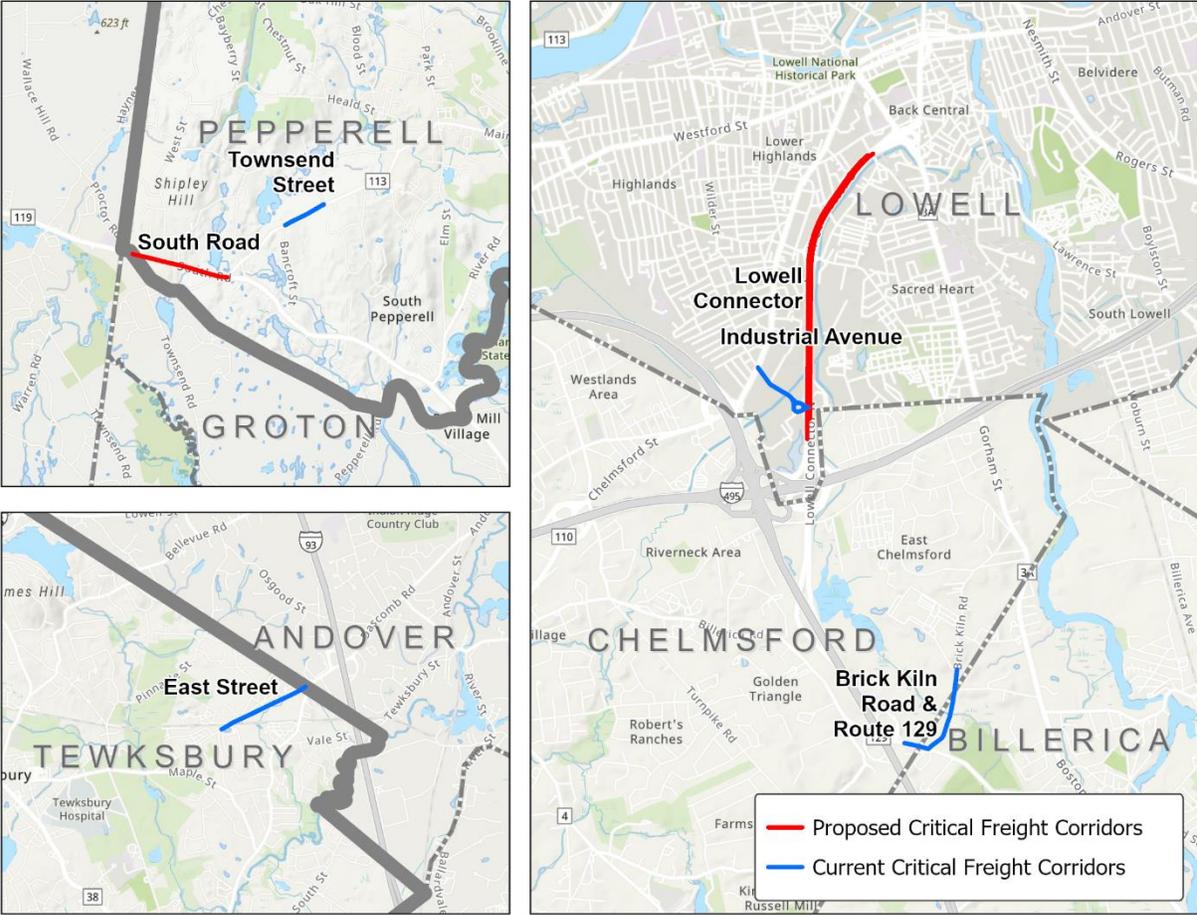


Fig. 1: Proposed new Critical Freight Corridors (shown in red) and current Critical Freight Corridors with minor updates.