

Project title

Economic Impact Analysis of Short Line Railroads

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Matching funds: \$58,727

Project description

The primary goal of this research project is to provide a detailed analysis of the economic role of short line rail operations in local communities using the State of Louisiana as a case study. Short line (Class III) rail is defined as those rail operations with revenues of \$31.9 million or less and those handling terminal and switching operations. Short line rail operations function in tandem with larger regional (Class II) and national (Class I) rail operations. Class III rail operations are generally responsible for moving commodities from manufacturing sites to interchange points with Class I rail operations where they can be transported to transnational locations.

To provide a comprehensive assessment of the economic role and impact of Class III rail operations, this research project will employ a mix-method analytical approach staggered across three core research phases: (1) identification of all Class III rail operations within the state, along with their direct customer base, indirect customer base and potential business interests coupled with the development of a Class III rail/customer base survey instrument which will be used to collect data on key performance metrics; (2) distribution of the survey to all identified customers and Class III rail operators and followed up by in-depth, qualitative interviews with operators, customers, and local community leaders; and (3) detailed analysis of collected survey and qualitative interview data, as well as the composition of the final project report.

Ultimately, the results of this research project will directly contribute to existing research on the scope and importance of short line rail in rural communities. Additionally, it is expected that this research project will serve as a worthwhile resource for local and state policymakers seeking to explore potential targets for economic development investments in rural communities.