



<https://doverkentmpo.delaware.gov/>

Expanded Rail Land Use Study

MPO Council - July 2026

Background

- As part of Dover Kent MPO's FY24 UPWP, this is one of the DelDOT-sponsored projects
- DelDOT is interested in compiling a technical identification of available land adjacent to rail corridors which could be designated and preserved for rail-supported industrial use
- This information would be intended to:
 - Show the importance of local government comprehensive plans and how these documents can support state and regional rail freight plan goals and objectives
 - Promote better coordination between local and state government
 - Better inform rail operators' land use decisions
 - Attract freight related manufacturing/employment centers to Central and Southern Delaware

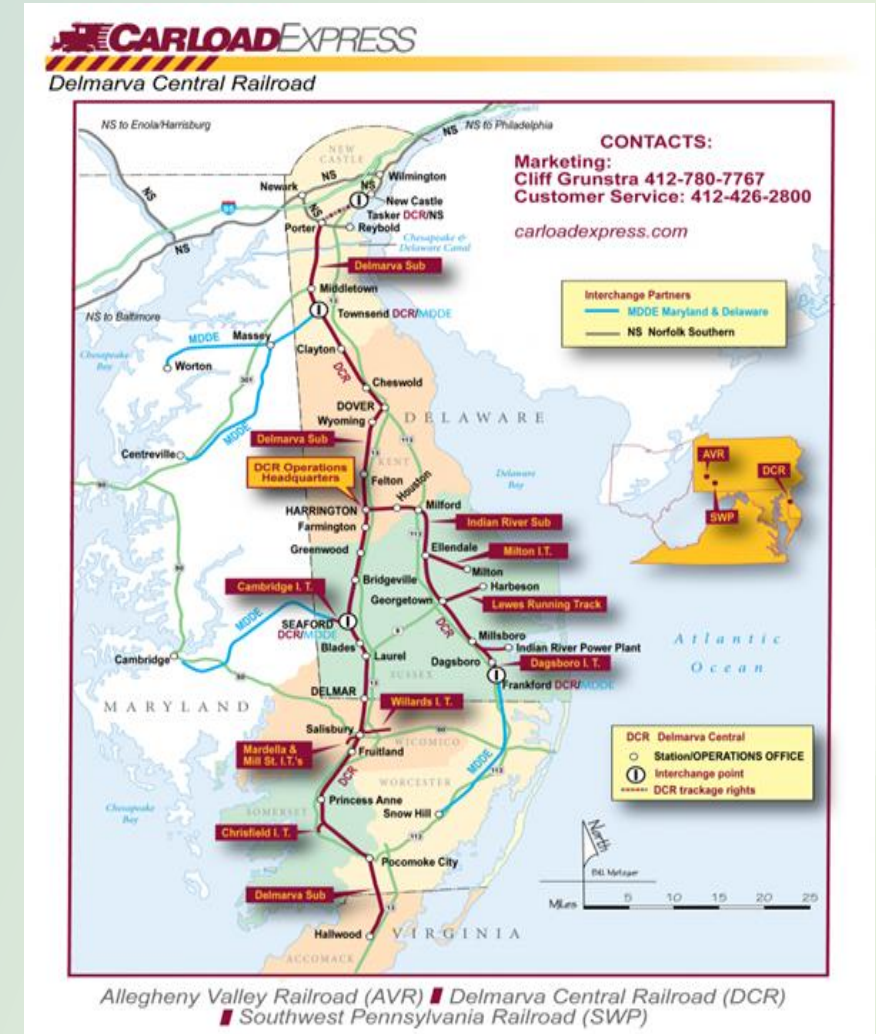
Why is Freight Rail Important?

- Recently, two large Kent County projects required rail
- For large loads, rail is more cost effective than trucking
- Industrial and manufacturing are key target sectors for economic development
- Large parcels adjacent to rail attract strong industrial and manufacturing companies
- Called out in the Statewide Freight Plan



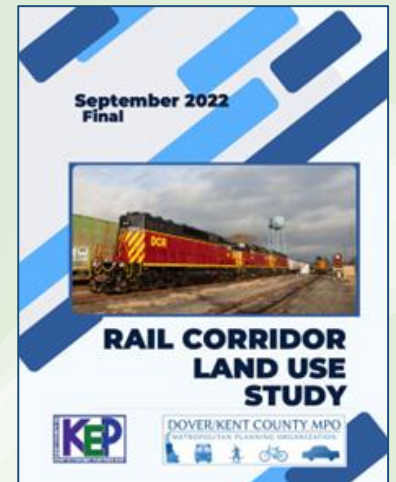
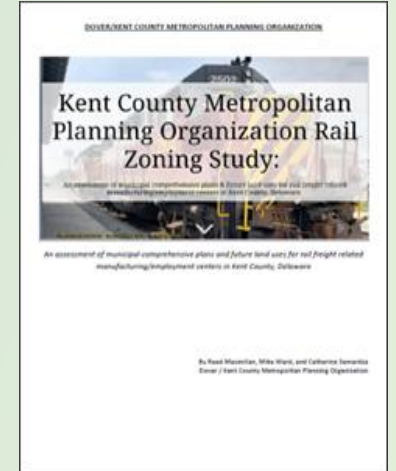
What has Changed in 20 Years?

- Delmarva Central Railroad becomes one of the short line railroads operating on the Norfolk Southern track in 2016
- Rail demand is on the rise
- Preserving land adjacent to rail for enterprises that require rail access contributes to compatible long-term land uses as well as secures opportunities for economic growth



Previous Studies

- **Dover Kent MPO - 2018 Rail Zoning Study**
 - The November 2018 study identified five recommendations to help support existing Federal, State, and Regional plan goals and objectives and identified future economic initiatives requiring additional study
- **Dover Kent MPO - 2022 Rail Corridor Land Use Study**
 - Identified large acreage parcels / parcel groupings adjacent to the rail line
 - Created an interactive mapping tool
 - Offered guidance to help communities work toward making the most of rail-adjacent properties while avoiding potential negative impacts



Ongoing Studies

- **DelDOT - 2026 Delaware State Freight Plan (in-progress)**
 - An update of the 2022 document
 - Reflects the changing landscape of the freight industry nationally and in Delaware, includes the most recent information on the topic
 - Expected to be completed sometime in 2026
- **DelDOT - 2027 Delaware State Rail Plan (in-progress)**
 - An update of the 2011 document
 - Provides information on the current state of rail corridors in Delaware
 - Expected to be completed in 2027
- **DelDOT - Diamond State Rail Line Corridor Study (in-progress)**
 - Part of the FRA Corridor Identification and Development (CID) Program
 - Investigating the feasibility of passenger rail on the Delmarva Peninsula between Newark/Wilmington and Salisbury/Berlin
 - Phase II will follow once the current study is completed



What's in the Study Document?

- **Study Area**
 - From Porter, in New Castle County, south to the Kent County line (approximately 75 miles), and the entire rail corridor in Sussex County (approximately 120 miles)
- **Comprehensive Plans Review**
 - Purpose of the review will be to ascertain if rail freight-related uses or proposed future uses are being considered, identify future land use zoning map changes regarding industrial zoning, identify potential areas where rail freight-related uses might be supported by rail spur lines
- **Process Used to Screen Parcels for Inclusion / Exclusion**
 - Large acreage with applicable frontage
 - Parcels that have the potential of being grouped into one larger parcel
 - Highly impacted with wetlands or other environmental concerns
 - Parcels in the Ag-Land Preservation program
 - Residential “Open Space” and various stand-alone residential properties
- **Map Series**
- **Summary & Recommendations**
- **Appendices**

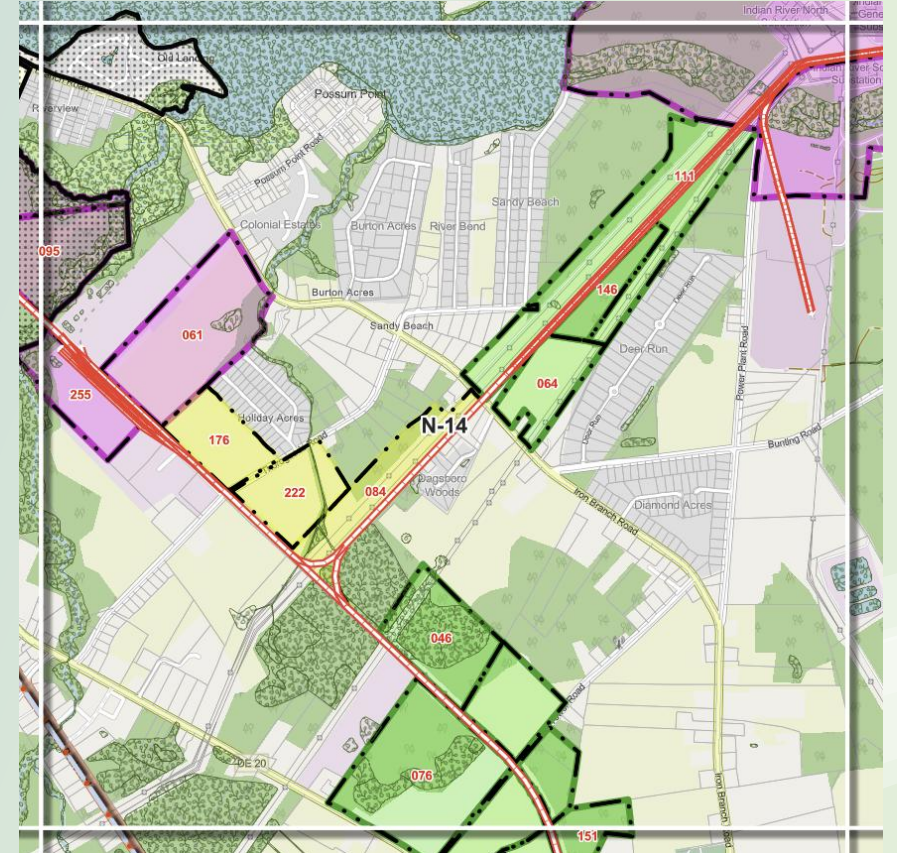
Sample from Previous Study

- Interactive Map, Study & Map Tiles
 - A dynamic web-based map can be found at:
<https://dkcmpo.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=62152bdabad24416aaa3d19819abf4fe>
 - Final version of the written report and map tile series are posted on the MPO website:
<https://doverkentmpo.delaware.gov/files/2023/01/Rail-Corridor-Land-Use-Study-Final-September-2022.pdf>



Updated Interactive Map

- Contains the same layers as previous version, including identified parcels, zoning categories, Aglands Preservation areas, wetland extent, etc.
- Several new features in this version, including zoning and acreage query
- New Castle County and Sussex County have challenges unique to their jurisdictions (for example, Sussex County uses “split zoning” categories)



Findings

- Some of the factors contributing to the loss of rail-adjacent parcels:
 - Incompatible zoning and future land use depicted in comprehensive plans, including areas listed for future annexation
 - The comprehensive plans talk about the rail in past-tense, do not describe local and regional economic importance or list steps to preserve the corridor
 - Parcels along rail have already been subdivided
 - Lack of coordination between State, municipalities, and other stakeholders







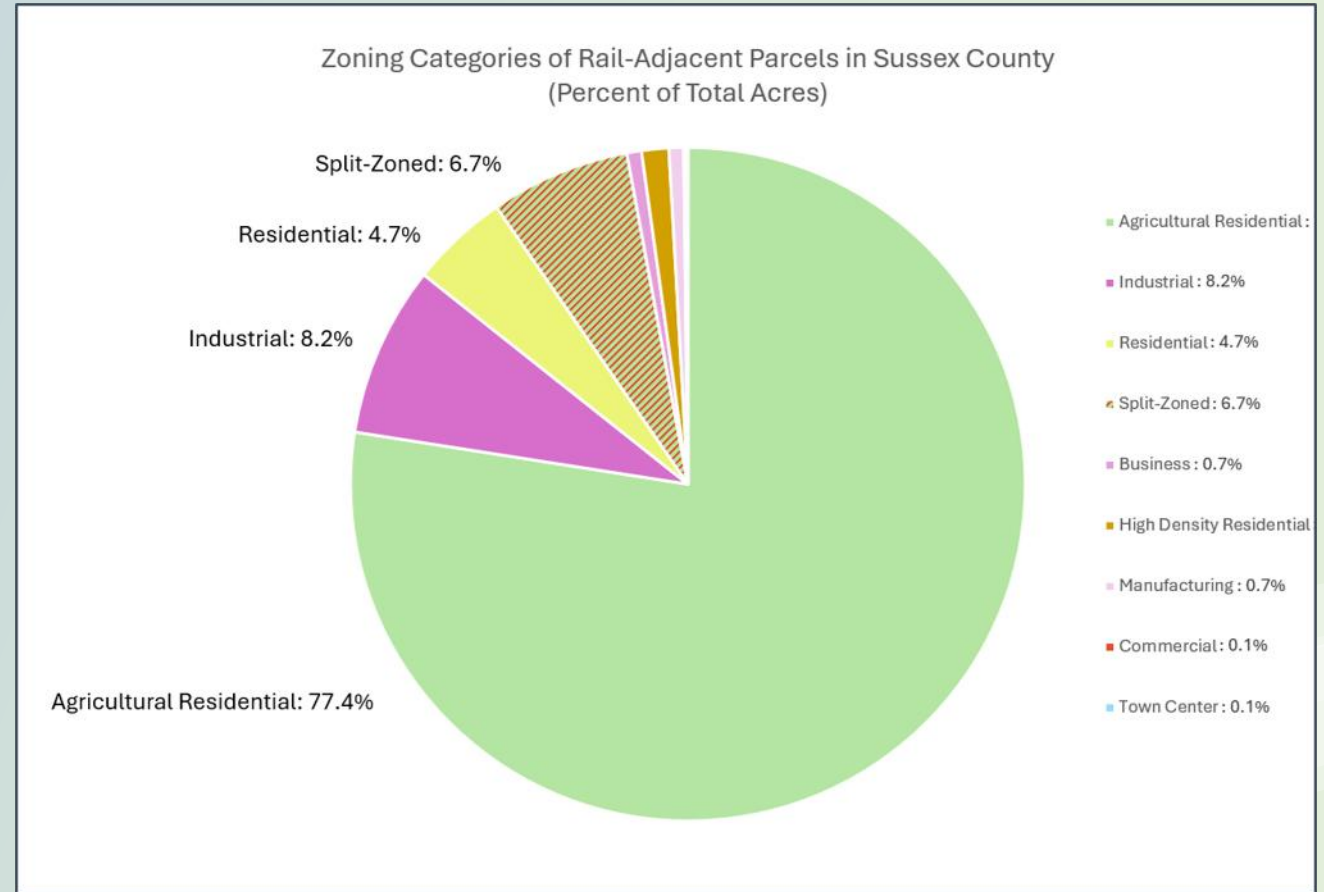


Let's Look at the Interactive Map!!!

<https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/603133f517314b909b5c2ae6c2c3029c>

Study Summary

- The purpose of the rail is to move freight
- Residential uses along the rail can cause interruptions
- Adjacent properties should accommodate rail and at best provide a place for those enterprises that need rail access
- If a municipality wants to encourage preservation of parcels along the rail for future commercial and industrial use, a process must be implemented to achieve that goal
- Resources and guidance that may be helpful -
Concepts to consider for rail-positive zoning,
sample process to facilitate a zoning change,
Sample Rail Overlay Districts



Policy Recommendations

- How does this study inform the Statewide Rail Plan? – *long-term vision for the role of rail in the state*
- Significant buffer requirements, especially for residential development
- Rail corridor preservation program with financial incentives, similar to Ag Preservation
- Rail corridor overlay zone, similar to airports/APZ
- Expand allowable conditional uses in ag residential to include specific rail-supported uses