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Expanded Rail Land Use Study

MPO PAC &TAC - August 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'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>





Let's Look at the Interactive Map!!!

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

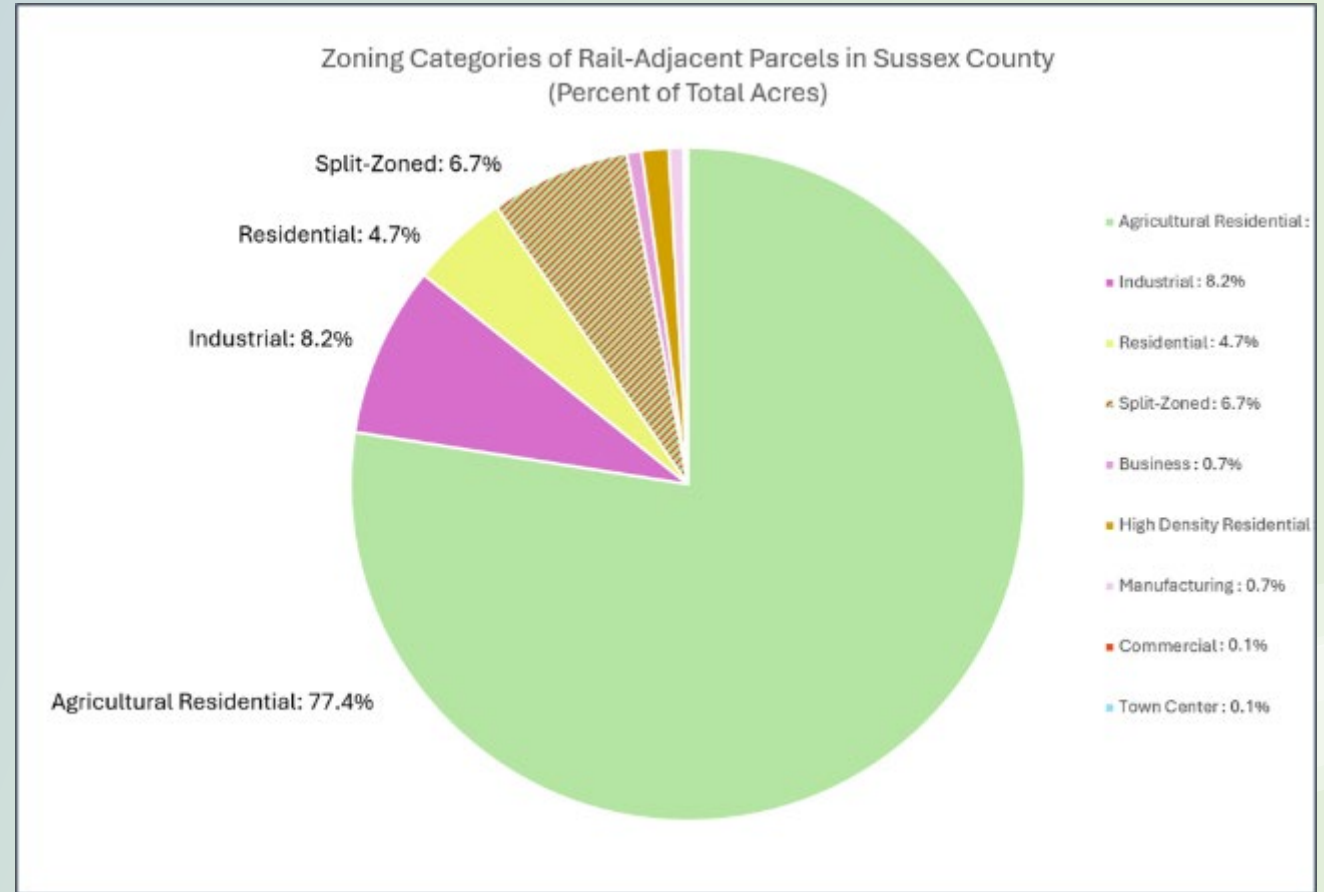
Findings

- 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



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

Inform the Statewide Rail Plan – *long-term vision for the role of rail in the state*

Policy Recommendations	Municipal Governments	County Governments	State of Delaware	Relevant Stakeholders
Update comprehensive plan to include rail corridor preservation as a specific, measurable goal	✓	✓	✓	Municipalities, Counties, OSPC, DelDOT and other State agencies
Update comprehensive plan to address land use of rail-adjacent parcels and avoid designing parcels for incompatible uses	✓	✓	✓	Municipalities, Counties, OSPC, DelDOT and other State agencies
Expand allowable conditional uses within Agricultural Residential or similar zoning to permit rail-supported industrial uses	✓	✓		Municipalities, Counties

Policy Recommendations	Municipal Governments	County Governments	State of Delaware	Relevant Stakeholders
Introduce local ordinances that create more stringent setbacks, buffer zones, and other local requirements for rail-adjacent development	✓	✓		Municipalities, Counties
Introduce local ordinances that require specific improvements such as barriers, trees, and noise abatement measures	✓	✓		Municipalities, Counties
Include Transit Oriented Development (TOD) in the local and state planning process, and set aside land for future TOD projects	✓	✓	✓	Municipalities, Counties, OSPC, DelDOT and other State agencies
Adopt freight planning checklists to go along with local and state ordinances and ensure site plans consider the needs of freight rail	✓	✓	✓	Municipalities, Counties, OSPC, DelDOT and other State agencies

Policy Recommendations	Municipal Governments	County Governments	State of Delaware	Relevant Stakeholders
Adopt statewide Rail Corridor Overlay Zones to regulate rail-adjacent development and prevent incompatible uses			✓	DeIDOT and other State agencies, Delaware General Assembly
Develop a rail corridor preservation program at the state level, or expand the existing Aglands Preservation program to permit rail-supported industrial uses			✓	DeIDOT and other State agencies, Delaware General Assembly
Revise the State Strategies program to include a category for rail corridor preservation and corresponding language within the document			✓	OSPC, DeIDOT and other State agencies, Delaware General Assembly
Collaborate with stakeholders as a task force or working group that will determine the best policy solutions for rail corridor preservation	✓	✓	✓	Municipalities, Counties, DeIDOT and other State agencies

Questions?

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