THC CONSULTING

VENTURE ASSESSMENT & DIAGNOSTIC SPRINT

D3 — Market Intelligence Brief

TAM / SAM / SOM · Competitive Landscape · Demand Signal

NorthBridge Freight Solutions

PHASE 1 — INTERNAL PLATFORM

STRONG

Pain confirmed top-5, quantified, budget-credible. Internal ROI case clear.

PHASE 2 — EXTERNAL BROKER SAAS

WEAK

Channel conflict structural. WTP 33–70% below floor. TAM ~$345K–$600K.

PREPARED FOR	NorthBridge Freight Solutions · CEO, CFO, VP Business Development
SPRINT DAY	Day 7 of 14 — Diagnostic Zone
SOURCES	2 GLG Tier 2 interviews · Secondary market research · D6-T5 inputs
DATE	March 2026 · Confidential
PRACTITIONER	Thomas Calvert, Managing Director · THC Consulting

1 Executive Summary

> **The market genuinely needs what NorthBridge Connect proposes to build. The same research that confirms the pain also confirms that NorthBridge, in its current positioning, cannot reach the buyers who feel it.**

Two independent GLG interviews — a Tier 2 freight broker operations executive and a Tier 2 freight technology product expert — were completed during Day 6 of this sprint. Their findings do not point in different directions. They point at the same conclusion from different vantage points.

The dispatch optimization pain is real. The Tier 2 broker operations expert described a quantified operational loss when his lead dispatcher departed: roughly a 15 percent drop in carrier acceptance rate sustained over four months. He said he would have paid for a working tool and could have moved it through a CFO approval in a single budget cycle. The pain is not a nice-to-have. It is a funded operational liability.

The same buyer said, without hesitation, that he would not purchase that tool from a regional carrier competitor. Not conditionally. Not with reservations that could be addressed. He described it as "not even a close call." The competitive sensitivity that the VP Business Development has characterized as a communications challenge is, in the buyer's framing, a structural positioning problem that has to be resolved before another dollar goes into the external product.

The TMS technical expert independently corroborated every material technical risk raised internally. The data coverage gap estimated internally at roughly 50 percent, the external expert estimated at 40 to 60 percent for regional carriers as a category. The 18-to-24-month build timeline described internally, the external expert characterized as optimistic rather than conservative for a production-grade tool. And on the jump from internal tool to external SaaS: "It's not a jump. It's a different project."

The TAM rebuild confirms the market sizing problem. The pre-sprint SAM figure of $500M–$1B conflates annual freight brokerage revenue with addressable technology spend — a category error that inflates the market estimate by approximately 1,000 to 3,000 times. The corrected bottom-up figure, using an independently verified broker count and GLG-validated willingness to pay, produces a total addressable market of $345,000 to $600,000 annually. Against that figure, the Year 3 SaaS projection is approximately 2 to 4 percent achievable under realistic assumptions.

What This Means for the Sprint Verdict

The external SaaS commercial thesis does not have a market access path at current positioning. The channel conflict is structural, the TAM is materially smaller than projected, and the build timeline required to reach a deployable product exceeds the financial payback window the CFO has established for authorizing Phase 2 spend. The internal efficiency platform is a different matter. The pain that NorthBridge Connect would solve internally is confirmed as real and budget-credible by independent external research. The conditional internal case survives Day 7.

The forward path question is not whether NorthBridge Connect is a good idea. It is whether NorthBridge is the right host for its commercial ambition, in its current form, at this point in time. That question is what the remainder of this sprint is designed to answer.

2 Primary Research Summary

Two GLG expert network interviews were completed on Day 6. The sprint had planned two broker buyer interviews; the final configuration was one broker operations executive and one freight technology product expert. Both contacts are classified as Tier 2 — independent, no prior relationship with NorthBridge, pre-screened by role and relevant experience.

> **Interview #1 · Technical / Product Expert**
> Former Director of Product Implementation, CoreRoute TMS · VP Product, Logistics SaaS Startup · 11 years TMS · Tier 2 — Independent · Pre

Finding	Detail
Data coverage gap confirmed	The expert estimated that the average regional carrier has usable behavioral data on 40 to 60 percent of their carrier relationships. The remainder is gaps, inconsistencies, or formats that cannot be used for model training. This independently corroborates the internal engineering estimate of approximately 50 percent behavioral coverage.
Data normalization precedes the build	Before a single line of model code is written, data normalization takes 12 to 18 months with a dedicated data engineering team. Relying on existing operations or IT staff adds another six months. This phase is sequential to the build, not concurrent with it. Total time to a production-grade internal tool: 30 to 36 months minimum, not 18 to 24.
18 months is optimistic, not pessimistic	"18 months is optimistic for production-grade. Not pessimistic — optimistic." Production-grade means the tool handles edge cases, has a model feedback loop, has a dispatcher-facing UX that has been iterated on, and has monitoring so you know when the model is drifting.
Internal to external SaaS is a different project	Multi-tenant architecture, data isolation, customer-specific model training, and an onboarding experience constitute a full SaaS build, not a feature extension. Estimated additional requirement: 12 to 18 months and a meaningful capital raise on top of whatever the internal build requires. "It's not a jump. It's a different project."
Dispatcher adoption is a professional identity problem	Dispatchers resist because adoption feels like an admission that the tool is better than they are. The adoption problem requires UX iteration with dispatcher involvement in the design process — a step most technical teams skip because it is slow.
Timeline optimism factor	Build timelines in this category are always optimistic by at least 30 to 40 percent. Applied to the internal engineering honest estimate of 18 months, this produces a practitioner-adjusted figure of 23 to 25 months before the data normalization phase is counted separately.

Interview #2 · Broker Operations Executive — Primary Demand Signal Source

Former VP Operations, regional freight broker (~$175M freight under management) · 12 years brokerage ops · Independent 3PL consultant · Ti

Finding	Detail
Pain confirmed top-5	The expert described a specific, quantified operational loss when his lead dispatcher departed in 2022: approximately a 15 percent drop in carrier acceptance rate sustained for four months. Load matching is independently corroborated as a top-5 operational pain by a Tier 2 contact with direct operational accountability.
He would have paid — no active spend currently	He would have written a check for a working tool and could have gotten it through CFO approval in one budget cycle. However, he described no active spend on any current solution — workflow is managed through dispatcher experience and market data platforms. NorthBridge Connect would need to create a new budget category, not displace a vendor.
WTP: $1,000–$1,500/month for mid-market	At $175M freight under management (300–400 loads/week), tolerance is $12,000–$18,000/year. Larger operations at 2,000 loads/week might tolerate $50,000–$60,000+ if the ROI story is airtight. Per-seat SaaS pricing was explicitly rejected. Outcome-based or volume-tiered pricing is the expected commercial model.

Finding	Detail
CU-01: Definitive negative on competitor-as-vendor	"Yeah. That's the problem. That's actually the problem." Followed by: "No. No, I wouldn't. And it's not even a close call." Three independent disqualification layers: trust is primary; the sales conversation never reaches the contract if the vendor is a carrier; and the posture is industry-wide, not NorthBridge-specific.
White-labeling buys runway, not a solution	"Maybe at the margins." The regional broker community is small and well-networked — vendor provenance becomes known within six months of deployment.
His closing framing	"That's not a sales problem. That's a structural positioning problem that has to be resolved before you spend another dollar on the external product."

Cross-interview synthesis: The two experts describe the same venture from opposite angles — one from inside the build, one from inside the buyer's office. The coherent picture: a product the market genuinely needs, from an organization that cannot reach that market through any current channel, building on a data foundation that requires 12 to 18 months of remediation before the machine learning layer can begin.

3 Market Sizing: TAM / SAM / SOM

3.1 The Methodology Problem

The pre-sprint SAM estimate of $500M to $1B in Pacific Northwest broker revenue is not a technology market estimate. It represents the annual freight revenue of broker firms operating in the region — the value of freight they move, not what they spend on software tools. The methodology applies a 1 percent technology capture rate to freight revenue, a figure with no basis in published industry benchmarks. This approach inflates the addressable technology market by approximately 1,000 to 3,000 times. The corrected methodology: addressable broker count multiplied by realistic annual contract value.

3.2 Input Assumptions — Verified

Input	Pre-Sprint Claim	Verified Figure	Source
PNW addressable broker count ($50M–$500M FUM)	"40–50" (asserted; no methodology)	**15–24 firms**	Secondary research: national count × PNW regional share (3.5–4%)
Mid-market ($50M–$200M)	Not segmented	12–18 firms (primary segment)	Market structure analysis
Upper-market ($200M–$500M)	Not segmented	3–6 firms	Market structure analysis
WTP/month — mid-market	$2,000–$5,000	**$1,000–$1,500**	GLG Tier 2 broker buyer; secondary SaaS pricing benchmarks
WTP/month — upper-market	$2,000–$5,000	$4,200–$5,000	GLG expert upper-range signal (2,000+ loads/week)
Pricing model	Per-seat SaaS (implicit)	**Volume-tiered or outcome-based**	GLG Tier 2 buyer (explicitly rejected per-seat)
Annual ACV — mid-market	$24,000–$60,000	$12,000–$18,000	GLG-adjusted
Annual ACV — upper-market	$24,000–$60,000	$50,000–$60,000	GLG signal; consistent with secondary benchmarks

3.3 TAM — Total Addressable Market

Segment	Broker Count	Annual ACV (midpoint)	Segment TAM
Mid-market ($50M–$200M) — primary segment	15 firms	$15,000	$225,000
Upper-market ($200M–$500M)	4 firms	$55,000	$220,000
TOTAL TAM	**19 firms**	—	**~$445,000/year**
Range			$345,000 – $600,000 annually

The pre-sprint $500M–$1B figure is off by approximately 1,000 to 3,000 times. This is not a rounding error. It is a category error — freight revenue mistaken for technology spend. The corrected TAM of $345,000–$600,000 annually leaves no margin for execution miss on the commercial thesis.

3.4 SAM — Serviceable Addressable Market

SAM applies channel constraints to the total addressable universe. NorthBridge currently has no external salesforce, no pre-existing broker buyer relationships, a confirmed structural channel conflict (CU-01), and a pricing model architecture mismatch.

Constraint	SAM Effect
No external SaaS salesforce	Sales motion must be built from zero. Requires hiring before revenue.
Carrier identity problem (CU-01 confirmed)	Door closes at introduction for the majority of prospects. Only brokers with no overlapping lane competition are accessible.
Sales cycle (8–12 months per close)	"Brokers are not early adopters. They buy on proof." Reference customers required before the second sale.
Data readiness on buyer side	Broker carrier records are also incomplete. Integration takes 3 to 6 months before the model has anything to learn from.
SAM (3-year horizon, current positioning)	**5–8 most accessible brokers — those without overlapping lanes. Estimated $75,000–$150,000 annually. Theoretical ceiling, not a projection.**

3.5 SOM — Serviceable Obtainable Market

Metric	Pre-Sprint Projection	Calibrated Estimate
Year 3 customers	35 customers	**1–3 customers (optimistic)**
Year 3 ARR	~$840K–$2.1M	**~$15,000–$45,000**
SOM as % of original projection	—	**~2–4%**

Note: reaching even 1 to 3 customers by Year 3 requires a production-grade internal Phase 1 tool generating a verifiable ROI case, a resolved structural positioning question on competitive sensitivity, and a salesforce and pricing model that do not currently exist. Without those preconditions, SOM in the external market is effectively zero.

4 Competitive Landscape

The pre-sprint competitive analysis correctly identifies the main national platforms and their general threat categories. The DAT (Medium) and Convoy (Low) assessments are defensible. Three material gaps required correction in this brief: the omission of the native TMS analytics roadmap, an unverified intelligence signal about a regional competitor, and an underestimation of FreightTech startup momentum.

Intelligence note: An internal source referenced a Seattle-based freight intelligence company operating a data partnership model in the Pacific Northwest. Independent verification through secondary research and source follow-up found no verifiable record of this company. This signal has been removed from the confirmed competitive landscape and is documented as a theoretical category risk. No analysis in this brief rests on it.

Competitor	Category	Threat	Strongest Advantage	Key Weakness	Win Scenario vs. NorthBridge
National Load Board + Analytics	National load board with analytics layer	**Medium**	Largest freight marketplace in North America. Moving into AI tools for brokers. Distribution and brand recognition NorthBridge cannot match.	National focus means no Pacific Northwest regional depth. Analytics layer is a bolt-on, not purpose-built.	Accelerates its regional analytics roadmap. Brokers already on the platform see no reason to add a second vendor.
Digital Freight Brokerage	Digital freight brokerage	**Low**	Tech-forward. Strong Pacific Northwest presence. Well-funded.	Competes with brokers — does not serve them. Regional brokers would not buy from a freight competitor.	Pivots to a SaaS-for-brokers model. Unlikely given positioning.
Enterprise Managed Transportation	Enterprise managed tra nsportation	**Low**	Deep enterprise customer base. Significant managed transportation capability.	Enterprise segment is the wrong fit for the $50M–$500M regional broker.	Builds a mid-market product line. Not currently evidenced.
Mid-Market Brokerage Platforms	Mid-market brokerage platforms	**Medium-Low**	Mid-market overlap with the addressable broker segment. Established carrier relationships.	Not Pacific Northwest-specific. Carrier intelligence is not regionally calibrated.	Builds a regional data intelligence layer for brokers they already serve operationally.
FreightTech Cohort (VC-backed AI/ML)	VC-backed AI/ML freight startups	**Medium-t erm**	Speed and capital. Newer entrants moving fast on carrier outreach automation. Backed by top-tier investors.	No established regional dataset. 3 to 5 years behind on carrier behavioral data for PNW lanes.	A well-funded startup acquires regional broker data through a partnership model before NorthBridge launches.

Competitor	Category	Threat	Strongest Advantage	Key Weakness	Win Scenario vs. NorthBridge
TMS Native Analytics Layer	Native TMS analytics — integrated product	**Medium ■ Under weighted**	Already holds 60%+ of planned carrier data through TMS integration. Brokers on the platform see no switching cost.	Not purpose-built for dispatch optimization. Carrier relationship intelligence at depth required is not currently in product.	Announces an AI-assisted dispatch optimization feature. Brokers on the platform see no switching cost. This is the "good enough" competitor most consistently underweighted.
Neutral Data Aggregator (Theoretical)	Data partnership model — no confirmed current player	**Medium-term**	Avoids the competitor-as-vendor objection entirely. Revenue-share model may be more attractive than a SaaS license.	No confirmed player currently executing this model in the Pacific Northwest.	A neutral third party closes 3–4 PNW broker data partnerships before NorthBridge launches. The data moat thesis reverses.

The competitive finding that matters most: The most dangerous competitive development is not a named external startup. It is the native TMS analytics trajectory. The TMS platform already holds the majority of the data NorthBridge Connect plans to train on. If its roadmap includes AI-assisted dispatch optimization — even a good-enough version — brokers already running the platform have no switching cost and no integration burden. The good-enough incumbent is the competitor that venture analyses most consistently underweight.

5 Ecosystem Map

Ecosystem Map — NorthBridge Connect Venture Architecture The ecosystem map is produced in visual collaboration software and delivered as an embedded export in the final engagement deliverable. The map covers six layers: Core (NorthBridge Freight Solutions + NorthBridge Connect platform); Broker segment (target buyers + competitive sensitivity layer); Carrier network (400 carriers, ~60% TMS-native, ~50% behavioral coverage); Technology infrastructure (TMS, legacy carrier portal, national load board data); Competitive environment (6 confirmed competitors + theoretical neutral aggregator category); Channel layer (absence of external broker sales channel noted explicitly).

6 Demand Signal Assessment

The demand signal assessment grades the external commercial case based on primary and secondary research gathered through Day 7. Two grades are assigned because two distinct markets exist within the NorthBridge Connect thesis. Conflating them into a single grade would produce a misleading result in either direction.

Phase 1 — Internal Efficiency Platform

DEMAND SIGNAL GRADE: STRONG · Confidence: Moderate-High

Factor	Finding	Grade Contribution
Pain tier	Top-5. Confirmed by Tier 2 buyer with quantified operational loss.	↑ **STRONG**
Active competing spend	None currently. Latent demand — the budget case is clear and could be moved through CFO in one cycle.	Neutral
WTP signal	Not applicable to internal case — internal ROI case governs, not market WTP.	Neutral
Structural barriers	None at the internal level. The competitor-as-vendor objection does not apply to Phase 1.	↑ **STRONG**
Independent corroboration	Broker buyer (Tier 2), TMS expert (Tier 2), Engineering Lead (internal), Director of Ops (internal). All four sources confirm the pain and data challenge.	↑ **STRONG**

Phase 2 — External Broker SaaS

> **DEMAND SIGNAL GRADE: WEAK · Confidence: Moderate-High given multi-source directional consistency. Single broker interview limits ceiling; cannot reach HIGH without 3–5 qualified buyer conversations.**

Factor	Finding	Grade Contribution
Pain tier	Top-5 confirmed. The pain is real and quantified.	Neutral — strong pain with no purchase path is the worst configuration for external SaaS
Active competing spend	"We manage." No active third-party solution spend. NorthBridge Connect would need to create a new budget category, not displace a vendor.	↓ **WEAK**
WTP vs. assumption	$1,000–$1,500/month (mid-market). Pre-sprint floor was $2,000. GLG signal is 33–70% below the baseline for the primary addressable segment.	↓↓ **WEAK**
Competitor-as-vendor reaction	Definitive negative. Industry-wide. Not specific to NorthBridge. "Not even a close call." Two independent sources: Tier 2 buyer (Day 6), Tier 3 acquaintance (Day 1, unprompted).	↓↓ **WEAK — confirmed structural barrier**
Pricing model mismatch	Per-seat SaaS explicitly rejected. Volume-tiered or outcome-based pricing expected. Pre-sprint financial model is built on a SaaS subscription architecture.	↓ **WEAK**
TAM	Bottom-up TAM: $345K–$600K annually. This is not a market with room for error on the commercial thesis.	↓↓ **WEAK**

The demand signal for Phase 2 is WEAK, not UNVALIDATED. UNVALIDATED means no evidence either way. WEAK means the evidence exists and points against viability. The Tier 2 broker buyer validated the pain and simultaneously confirmed he would not buy the product in its current positioning. That is the worst possible configuration for the external SaaS thesis — it removes the "no one wants this" escape valve and replaces it with "people want this and won't buy it from you."

Sprint Verdict Implication

The demand signal findings are consistent with the structural diagnostic produced by the D2 RPP Assessment (RPP score: Severe Structural Misfit). Phase 1 retains a conditional internal investment case subject to build timeline, data readiness, and payback math preconditions. Phase 2 external SaaS, in its current form and positioning, does not have a viable path to market. The Day 9 Reality Check will present the full evidence weight across all Critical Unknowns.

7 Known Limitations

The methodology requires explicit disclosure of the limitations of the evidence base. These limitations do not invalidate the findings. They define the confidence bounds within which the findings should be interpreted.

Limitation	Description	Recommended Resolution
Broker interview count	One qualified broker buyer interview was completed against a plan of two, due to client budget constraint. Single-interview buyer-side findings carry lower evidentiary weight than a multi-interview cohort. The demand signal grade for Phase 2 is capped at Moderate-High confidence — it cannot reach HIGH without a minimum of 3 to 5 qualified broker buyer conversations. Directional corroboration with a Tier 3 contact (Day 1, unprompted) reduces but does not eliminate the single-source limitation.	Additional GLG broker buyer interviews or structured outreach to confirmed PNW brokers through a neutral introduction not associated with NorthBridge. Recommended as Experiment #1 in the D7 Validation Playbook.
Unverified intelligence signal	An internal source referenced a Seattle-based freight intelligence competitor operating a data partnership model in the Pacific Northwest. Independent secondary research found no verifiable record of this company. Excluded from the competitive landscape as an unverified claim. The theoretical category risk it represented is documented in Section 4.	Monitor the FreightTech startup cohort for any company launching a data partnership model targeting PNW regional brokers. Standing watch item in the D7 Validation Playbook.
Broker count estimate methodology	The addressable broker count of 15 to 24 is a top-down estimate derived from national industry data and PNW regional economic share. No public directory publishes a count of PNW freight brokers filtered by freight under management. The estimate is directionally accurate but should not be treated as a precise figure.	A primary broker count from the FMCSA SAFER database filtered by WA/OR/ID and employee count proxy is achievable in one to two days. Recommended before the Day 14 Sprint Master Report is finalized.
Secondary source pricing benchmarks	Freight tech SaaS pricing data is largely opaque — most vendors are quote-gated. The pricing benchmarks are built from published pricing pages, practitioner forum data, and analyst estimates. Directionally consistent with the Tier 2 GLG primary signal but carry methodology risk in the absence of a published industry benchmark.	The GLG Tier 2 signal is the most reliable data point and should be treated as the primary anchor. Secondary benchmarks are supporting evidence only.
WTP segmentation	The upper-market WTP signal ($4,200–$5,000/month for 2,000+ loads/week brokers) is based on the buyer's qualitative estimate, not a primary interview with an upper-market buyer. Upper-market WTP figures should be treated as indicative.	If there is investment case interest in the upper-market segment specifically, an additional GLG interview with a buyer at that scale is warranted before the Sprint Master Report.

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SAMPLE — This report has been anonymized. All client and stakeholder details are fictionalized. The methodology, framework, and analytical structure are representative of a live engagement.