

Planning for the future freight needs of the Lehigh Valley

George G. Kinney, AICP, Director of Transportation Planning

The Lehigh Valley Transportation Study (LVTS) partnered with the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) in an effort to develop the first-ever *Regional Freight Plan* for the Lehigh Valley. This regional effort compliments work currently underway on Pennsylvania's first-ever *Comprehensive Freight Movement Plan*, and the same consultant (CDM Smith) has been employed for both efforts to assure consistency.

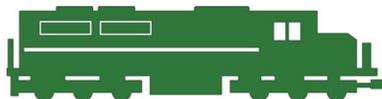
The *Lehigh Valley Regional Freight Plan* has been developed under the direction of a regional Freight Advisory Committee and has recently been delivered to the LVTS and Lehigh Valley Planning Commission in draft form. The plan includes the following components:

Regional Freight Profile

The regional freight profile supports the importance of efficient freight movement to the regional economy, and all modes of travel were considered during the development of this profile. Considerations to be found in more detail within the plan include:

- A summary of current freight flows, including inbound/outbound movements and movements within the Valley.
- An in-depth look at commodity type and year 2040 forecasts for tonnage and value.
- An employment analysis of the most freight-dependent industries.
- An analysis of roadway and bridge assets, including pavement conditions, parking facilities, bridge condition, at-grade rail crossings, congestion and bottlenecks.
- An analysis of travel demand and growth on the local system.
- A review of existing modal facilities and a detailed overview of truck, rail and air movements.

Freight Mode



% Value/Tonnage



📦 = TONNAGE



Freight Trends

Building on the analysis of the transportation system and regional freight flows, the trends highlight the importance of close public and private coordination. Data analysis and stakeholder interviews framed this section, and it is clear from the results that the region is geographically well-positioned and is rapidly growing in those economic industry sectors most conducive to freight growth.

The draft plan provides more detail but essentially discusses system impediments relevant to past growth on the local road system, the need for alternative routes to accommodate projected freight traffic, congestion and bottleneck areas, the lack of necessary truck parking facilities, safety concerns related to the 33 regional at-grade rail crossings, and the federal shortage of certified drivers.

Goals and Policy

The intended goals of the freight transportation planning process are to provide transportation choice, improve system connectivity and improve safety for all passenger and freight modes. Policy recommendations have also been developed in an effort to address the trends, to help identify the desired future performance of the multimodal regional freight network, and to put forth a strategic investment framework that will help the region to realize its regional freight goals while supporting state-wide and national freight plan initiatives.

A review of current local, state and federal freight policy led to the development of the regional freight policy found in the draft plan. Great care was taken to assure that this policy aligns with national freight goals and is consistent with the regional *Long Range Transportation Plan* and PA on Track—the *Pennsylvania Long Range Transportation Plan* and *Comprehensive Freight Movement Plan*.

In addition, performance standards are articulated so that progress can be tracked over time and resources shifted when necessary. Implementation roles are yet to be defined, but it is likely the Freight Advisory Committee will continue in some capacity with a focus on coordinating safety, mobility and stewardship initiatives.

Next Steps

A final draft was presented at the Greater Lehigh Valley Chamber of Commerce Transportation Forum on June 30, and a 30-day public comment followed. The comment period is now complete and staff is preparing responses and reviewing all correspondence for potential incorporation into the plan. It is anticipated that a final plan will be put before the Lehigh Valley Transportation Study in early October for adoption.