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Lehigh Valley Lands First PA Freight Summit

Anyone who needs further evidence that the Lehigh Valley has become a national epicenter for warehousing and logistics should know that Pennsylvania is about to hold its first ever Freight Summit – and it will be here.

The Eastern Pennsylvania Freight Summit is scheduled for June 21-22 at Lehigh University's Iacocca Hall.

The two-day event will start Thursday with a series of panel discussions opened by state Secretary of Transportation Leslie Richards and led by freight industry experts to include CBRE Executive Vice President Bill Wolf and Majestic Realty Co. Senior Vice President Ed Konjoyan.

The second day of the summit will consist of a guided tour of several manufacturing and distribution facilities across the region.

“Our large consumer base and regional position within the lucrative Northeast U.S. market puts Eastern Pennsylvania directly within the cross-hairs of warehousing and distribution activity,” Secretary Richards said in a message to summit attendees. “Geography is destiny, and Pennsylvania continues to maintain its role as the Keystone state.”

That the first summit is being held in the Lehigh Valley rewards the efforts of planning and development officials who lobbied to have it held here, but it's no secret that the region is among the nation's fastest growing freight corridors.

The summit is being hosted jointly by the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission, the Tri-County Regional Planning Commission and the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission.

“We're very proud to have been chosen for this honor, and we're excited to work with our partners from Philadelphia and Harrisburg to host what we know will be an important event,” said Becky Bradley, Executive Director of the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission. “The freight surge in our region presents both challenges and opportunities for our future. I'm looking forward to getting some of the country's foremost experts into one room to talk about it.”

With the growth of E-commerce and the Lehigh Valley's close proximity to 80 million consumers, the warehouse and distribution industry has exploded in the region over the past decade. More than 9 million square feet of distribution space was approved in 2016 alone, as 1 million square-foot warehouses serving companies such as Walmart, Amazon, Nestle and FedEx Ground have become commonplace. It has helped create 28,000 jobs in the Valley,

while forcing municipal and regional planners to begin considering how the surge in truck and other vehicle traffic should be managed.

Determining how to shape that future development will not only impact how \$531 million in transportation spending is allocated over the next four years, but what policies are included in the Regional Comprehensive Plan that is being updated this year by the LVPC.

The Freight Summit is expected to draw 250 people, many of them stakeholders from a 25-county region.