

Five Lehigh Valley Roads Slated as Critical Freight Corridors

With the Lehigh Valley taking its place as one of the nation's fastest-growing passageways for the goods people order online every day, transportation planners are trying to move six high-traffic roads into a new federal program designed to improve freight movement.

Getting sections of Routes 22, 33, 100, 222, 412 and 987 designated as Critical Urban/Rural Freight Corridors would be the first step in extending the existing Primary Highway Freight System that already includes all of Interstate 78 and the Northeast Extension of the Turnpike through the region.

The designation opens those roads to additional federal resources and policies designed to eliminate bottlenecks, reduce the cost of moving freight through the region and enhance efficiency of the freight network to make it more productive and reliable.

The Lehigh Valley Planning Commission, which did the analysis needed to submit the Critical Freight Corridors to the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT), requested all six roadways be designated. However, PennDOT cut Route 33 from the list, primarily because Pennsylvania is limited to designating 141.3 miles of Critical Urban Freight Corridors and 282.5 miles of Critical Rural Freight Corridors statewide.

LVPC Executive Director Becky Bradley made a plea for PennDOT to include Route 33, and asked that a letter be sent to the Federal Highway Administration to add miles to Pennsylvania's allocation to enable it.

Route 33, Bradley argues, is a key connector between Interstates 78 and 80, is home to one of the region's largest logistics developments, is part of the foreign trade zone and has undeveloped parcels where other freight companies are expected to land in the coming years.

"There are a great many reasons why Route 33 should be included," Bradley said. "We know that is one of the corridors where warehouse development and freight movement are growing. Vehicle numbers overall are increasing on Route 33, as well."

The six freight corridors are:

- Route 22, from Airport Road to the I-78 merge
- Route 222, from I-78 to the Berks County line
- Route 100, from Tighman Street to Route 222
- Route 412, from I-78 to Commerce Center Boulevard
- Route 987 (Airport Road), From Route 22 to Schoenersville Road.
- Route 33, from I-78 to the Monroe County line

The Lehigh Valley Transportation Study, which is administered by LVPC and makes transportation decisions in the Lehigh Valley, voted to send the letter requesting that Route 33 be designated as a Critical Freight Corridor.

FHWA will have the final say.

The five corridors approved by PennDOT amount to 22 miles, surpassed only by the 34.2 miles allocated in the Philadelphia region and 23.3 miles in the York region.

“We had 1100 miles in total requests statewide,” said Brian Hare, Chief, Planning and Contract Management Division for PennDOT. “A lot of miles didn’t make the cut.”

The segment of Route 33 not recommended by PennDOT also happens to be the largest corridor request, measuring 16.8 miles.

The next step in the process is to review the state’s recommendations and provide feedback, before they are forwarded to FHWA.