



Chapter 8

Trends, Needs + Issues

Fixed object damage on Adams Road near I-78

In planning for the safe and efficient movement of freight in the future, it is important to understand the future freight growth and development trends, as well as the needs and issues of the current system. Identifying these trends, needs and issues assists in the development of recommendations. Trends, needs and issues along the freight system were identified by analyzing the data and conducting stakeholder outreach, which consisted of stakeholder interviews and freight advisory committee meetings. The trends, needs and issues can be broken down into ten categories:

- Growth on local system
- Need for alternate routes
- Road and bridge conditions
- Rail abandonment
- At-grade rail crossings
- Congestion
- Truck parking
- Commercial driver shortage
- Data collection and accuracy
- Coordination

The trends, needs and issues highlight the importance of close public and private coordination.

8.1 GROWTH ON LOCAL SYSTEM

For the ten-year period ending in 2012, the region's highway network expanded by 215 linear miles; however, 213 miles of this includes locally- or municipally-owned roadway. Volume growth on the locally-owned network over the past decade was 12%.

8.2 NEED FOR ALTERNATE ROUTES

Accidents, congestion and construction can force trucks from their intended routes onto other roads. If a suitable alternate does not exist, trucks end up on local roads not designed to handle such large vehicles. Therefore, in order to ensure efficient freight movement, major trucking routes should have a designated alternate route suited to handle truck traffic.

8.3 ROAD AND BRIDGE CONDITIONS

Locally-owned bridges in the Lehigh Valley region are in worse condition than the state-owned bridges. Locally-owned bridges are about seven times more likely to be posted than state-owned bridges and ten times more likely to be closed. The locally-owned bridges are also twice as likely to be classified as structurally deficient as the state-owned bridges. This illustrates a need to improve maintenance and upkeep on the locally-owned bridges in the Lehigh Valley.

8.4 RAIL ABANDONMENT

The region is at risk of losing some existing rail lines to abandonment, precluding the reuse of adjacent sites by rail-served businesses.

8.5 AT-GRADE RAIL CROSSINGS

From both the rail and highway side, stakeholders noted that at-grade rail crossings were a concern. As noted in Section 7.5, there are 33 at-grade rail crossings in the Lehigh Valley. When a train passes through an at-grade crossing, traffic on the road is forced to stop until the train has passed. Additionally, train speeds are reduced when traversing an at-grade crossing. Furthermore, at-grade rail crossings can pose a safety concern as collisions can occur between trains and other vehicles. Eliminating these at-grade crossings would improve the flow of both trucks and trains and remove a potential safety hazard.

8.6 CONGESTION

Roadway congestion increases travel time and decreases travel time reliability, increasing the cost of doing business for companies. Total daily travel demand in the region is approximately 13.6 million vehicle miles traveled (VMT), an increase of 4% since 2002, which has contributed to the congestion in the area.¹ During stakeholder interviews, US 22 and I-78 were mentioned as being particularly congested. Sections of US 22 from SR 100 to SR 378 were also identified as among the top truck freight bottlenecks in the state. Unless improvements are made, the congestion is only projected to get worse as the region continues to grow. In addition to US 22 and I-78, Section 7.6 lists other congested corridors and future capacity improvement projects to help relieve the congestion. In addition to roadway congestion, there is also congestion on the Class I rail lines. In particular, as the economy has recovered, congestion along Norfolk Southern's mainline in the region and in the Allentown Yard have increased. Additionally, approximately 8% of Pennsylvania's rail freight tonnage both originates and terminates in Bethlehem. Norfolk Southern estimates that 200,000 freight containers could eventually move through the terminal annually. It is important that this terminal keep up with growing demand.

¹ *Pennsylvania Highway Statistics*. 2012. PUB 500 Highway Data.



Truck parking near Adams Road/I-78

8.7 TRUCK PARKING

One issue that was prevalent throughout the stakeholder input was the need for more truck parking in the region. The updated federal hours of service requirements for commercial motor vehicles, which went into effect July 1, 2013, necessitate the need for more truck parking as drivers are required to take more breaks. A truck parking shortage can force drivers to pull over on the side of the road, creating a safety hazard. The availability of truck parking is a concern within the region. Independent studies by the state Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) have determined the region qualifies as a “Region With Unmet Truck Parking Demand.”

8.8 COMMERCIAL DRIVER SHORTAGE

Commercial driver shortages are another concern that appeared throughout the stakeholder input. Companies are struggling to hire enough drivers to keep up with their growing businesses. Long stretches away from home and family, as well as stagnant salaries, have made trucking unattractive to potential drivers in recent years.² The American Trucking Association estimated that in 2014 there were between 30,000 and 35,000 unfilled commercial vehicle driver jobs. As the economy continues to recover and demand for freight expands, this problem is only projected to get worse.

² Bloomberg Business (2013). *Why no one wants to drive a truck anymore*. Retrieved on April 2, 2015 from: <http://www.bloomberg.com/bw/articles/2013-11-14/2014-outlook-truck-driver-shortage>

8.9 DATA COLLECTION AND ACCURACY

Having accurate and updated data is critical when planning for the future of freight movement. Stakeholders stated that there was a lack of data available, especially with regards to commodity movements in the region. For instance, the Lehigh-Northampton Airport Authority does not track the commodities going in and out of the airport, nor do they have information on trends. This lack of data makes it difficult to develop future projections of freight movement that might indicate a necessity to invest in expanding the freight capacity at the airport.

8.10 COORDINATION

In order to implement an effective plan, coordination among agencies, such as LVPC and PennDOT, must take place. Inconsistent permitting issues across levels of government and cumbersome permitting processes for oversize/overweight trucks were also mentioned as an issue. It is also important that specific projects are looked at as part of a larger picture so as not to put two roads under construction at the same time that might act as alternative routes for one another.

Additionally, it is equally important for the public and private sector to work together. During the stakeholder interviews it was noted that Norfolk Southern does not have a liaison with the LVPC. The private sector can help provide valuable input and data during the development of plans, and efforts should be made to include them in the planning process whenever possible. Another form of coordination that should be explored is the expansion of public/private partnerships to fund projects.