



Lehigh Valley Planning Commission

STEPHEN REPASCH
Chair

JOHN DIACOIANIS
Vice Chair

STEVEN GLICKMAN
Treasurer

BECKY A. BRADLEY, AICP
Executive Director

April 4, 2018

PA Invests in Lehigh Valley Rails

Anyone who's grown used to that telltale whistle bellowing every time a train rumbles through one of the 43 active Lehigh Valley railroad crossings knows that the rail freight industry is alive and well in the region.

Pennsylvania has decided to invest nearly \$4 million to keep it that way, as part of an effort to improve safety and conditions along some of the region's busiest rail lines.

Included in the new Transportation Improvement Program, administered by PennDOT and the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission, \$3.2 million is set to be spent over the next four years to improve nine railroad crossings along the Norfolk Southern Corp. lines that snake through the region.

"These are all crossings in which tracks come together with the traffic lanes, and this funding is designed to upgrade those crossings, while improving safety," said LVPC Senior Transportation Planner Michael Donchez. "Freight rail is going strong in this region, and there's every indication that it will increase in the future."

In addition to TIP money, Governor Tom Wolf announced grant money for 27 rail projects statewide, including two in the Lehigh Valley. Included in the \$32 million in grants from the Rail Transportation Assistance Program and the Rail Freight Assistance Program, is \$350,000 to improve tracks in the interchange yard of Lehigh Valley Rail Management in south Bethlehem, and \$266,673 to rehabilitate 1.2 miles of track around the R.J. Corman Railroad Group yard in Allentown.

"Keeping our extensive rail freight system in good shape is a vital component of creating a sound foundation for Pennsylvania's economy," Governor Wolf said. "These investments underscore our continued commitment in building a world-class infrastructure system that supports the creation of new jobs and our business community."

The state grant money is available now, while the TIP money is programmed for improvements over the next four years. Those improvements to replace safety equipment such as mast arms and cantilevers that stop traffic call for:

- \$1.1 million to be spent at crossings at Township Line Road and Christian Springs Road in Bethlehem Township, and Schoenersville Road in Bethlehem. The improvements are scheduled for 2020 and 2021.
- \$732,000 to improve the crossing at Broad Street in Nazareth in 2020 and 2021.

- \$350,000 to improve the crossing at Canal Road in Allentown, in 2021.
- \$284,109 for upgrades at a crossing along Township Road in East Allen Township in 2021.
- \$281,377 for improvements at Penn Avenue in Alburtis in 2021.
- \$270,122 to improve the crossing at Ruppsville Road in Upper Macungie Township in 2020.
- \$185,000 for upgrades at Union Street in Allentown in 2020.

The Lehigh Valley's location at the center of 80 million people makes it a prime location for freight movement, as online shopping by people who expect their purchases delivered within two days increases every year. An LVPC analysis projects that the 40 million tons of freight that moved through the region in 2011 will more than double by 2040. While nearly 90% of that is being moved by truck, roughly 11 percent of goods are still being moved by rail, according to the 2015 LVPC report MoveLV: Lehigh Valley Regional Freight Plan.

The TIP rail money is part of a \$534 million, four-year plan to improve and maintain roads, bridges and transit service in the Lehigh Valley. That draft plan will be formally released Wednesday and is scheduled for approval by the Lehigh Valley Transportation Study in June. The TIP goes into effect October 1.