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## Lehigh Valley's "Main Street" Surpasses 100,000 Vehicles A Day

Anyone who has found themselves on Route 22 going roughly 55 mph under the speed limit around 4 pm, will not be surprised to know that it's easily the busiest road in the Lehigh Valley.

According to newly installed Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) traffic counters, the highway initially called the Lehigh Valley Thruway now carries more than 100,000 vehicles a day. But that only begins to tell the story of a road that, unlike most highways, sees only a minor dip in traffic on holidays and weekends, and sees a relatively low ratio of trucks for a region that now specializes in them.

The new data has been available since PennDOT installed continuous traffic monitors that count the number and type of vehicles that travel daily on Route 22, just west of Airport Road. It flipped on the new system in May to show that segment of road carries between 102,000 and 109,000 vehicles each weekday.

"We've always known there was a lot of vehicles on Route 22, but now we're collecting data 24 hours a day, seven days a week on the number and type of vehicles traveling on the Region's busiest road," said LVPC Transportation Planner Brian Hite, who works with PennDOT to conduct the region's traffic count program. "This will be a valuable tool in planning for the future of improvement and maintenance."

Beyond the number of vehicles, it identifies 13 different classifications, ranging from motorcycle to passenger car to school bus to tractor-trailer, and records the direction of travel for each.

It shows Route 22 doesn't quite reach the 200,000-vehicle level that causes daily gridlock on the Schuylkill Expressway in Philadelphia, but it rivals Pittsburgh's busy Parkway East, and easily outpaces the roughly 80,000 vehicles that travel key segments of Route 33 each day and 70,000 along Interstate 78.

The counters do reveal some interesting facts that suggests it no longer lives up to the Lehigh Valley Thruway name it was given when it was first opened in 1954. Traffic counts appear to dip to about 102,000 on Mondays – suggesting that's the day most often chosen for work-at-home or long weekend days off. Even on weekends, traffic remains at 80,000 to 90,000 vehicles – a drop of roughly 10% to 20%. That makes it busier on the weekend than Route 33 and I-78 are on most weekdays. And it's not clogged merely by people getting to work.

"This data is confirmation that Route 22 is the Lehigh Valley's Main Street," said LVPC Executive Director Becky Bradley. "It's less about people passing through the region and more about people getting on, taking a few exits and getting off at the next city, borough or township. It's how many people get to work, shopping and get the kids to school."

However, it does feature fewer trucks at about 14,000 a day and dropping to about 4,000 on weekends and holidays. That's well below the more than 21,000 trucks that travel Interstate 78 daily, showing that while I-78 traffic is nearly 30% trucks, Route 22 traffic is less than 15% trucks. So, while Route 22 performs very much like a local road, Interstate 78 is doing what was intended when it opened in 1989.

"It was always meant to be an express route through the region that keeps the bulk of the trucks and pass-through travelers off of Route 22," Hite said.

Other interesting stats? Only about 175 motorcyclists a day and 126 buses use Route 22, but more than 11,000 delivery or service style vans – the kind that deliver Amazon packages or show up at your home for repairs – use the highway each day.

As the region's busiest throughfare, Route 22 is also the benefit of future investment. In the 2023-2026 Transportation Improvement Program, more than \$34 million is scheduled to be invested for everything from improvements at the 191 interchange to resurfacing in Bethlehem Township to several bridges crossing the highway to the Freeway Services Patrols that work daily to quickly clear disabled vehicles before they can cause major traffic jams. And over the next 25 years, it is scheduled for more than \$400 million in improvements to maintain and enhance the roadway and improve safety along its exit ramps.