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## Freight Academy Gets Lehigh Valley Education

When municipal, government and planning officials from across the nation meet semi-annually to learn how goods move quickly from the shipping ports to your doorstep, there's one can't-miss classroom: the Lehigh Valley.

The Eastern Transportation Coalition's (TETC) semi-annual Freight Academy spent a day in the Lehigh Valley June 13, getting a crash course from local leaders and professionals in one country's fastest-growing freight corridors. Hosted by the LVPC, the group of planning, government and transportation directors from across the nation got a half-day classroom instruction at the ArtsQuest Center, before getting hands-on tours at the Alpha Inc. plastics plant in South Bethlehem and the newly completed 452,000-square-foot Petrucci Development warehouse on Airport Road in East Allen Township.

“You guys have it all, not just a volume of growth, but a diversity of growth – so many freight operations have a presence here,” said TETC’s Director of Freight Marygrace Parker said as her group toured the warehouse. “This is the best freight classroom in the country.”

The Eastern Transportation Coalition, based in College Park, MD, is a partnership of 17 states and Washington, D.C. focused on connecting public agencies across modes of travel to increase safety and efficiency. Every two years, it holds a weeklong immersive Freight Academy to help give transportation and government officials the tools they need to make informed decisions when they return to their communities.

During the workshop led by LVPC Executive Director Becky Bradley at ArtsQuest, academy students got an overview of a Lehigh Valley freight market in which municipalities have approved more than 30 million square feet of warehouse and logistics facilities in the past seven years, with Bradley detailing how the LVPC has worked with communities to adjust their planning and zoning regulations to manage this growth. Bradley explained how the region’s adaptable workforce and location within one trucker’s shift of 100 million consumers have elevated its place in the global e-commerce economy, as well as the challenges that come with it.

PennDOT Program Center Director Brian Hare detailed Pennsylvania’s new freight plan for students, and 42-year trucker Bob Dolan explained industry challenges that include chronic truck parking issues, a trucker shortage and federally regulated hours of service issues.

“When we get to the end of our federally regulated work hours for the day, we have to find a place to park 70 feet of vehicle quickly,” Dolan said, explaining that most warehouse facilities lack room for truckers to park. “When you see a truck parked illegally on an exit ramp, that’s why. Out of [driving] hours and no place to park.”

And Lehigh and Northampton Transportation Authority (LANTA) Manager of Planning and Scheduling AJ Jordan explained how LANTA works in partnership with the LVPC and employers to devise targeted bus routes to get workers to large work center.

“This is amazing,” said Dana Magliola, Project Manager for Freight & Logistics for North Carolina Department of Transportation. “Every MPO (Metropolitan Planning Organization) and RPO (Rural Planning Organization) should see this.”

During a bus tour, students viewed the transportation set up around the largest FedEx logistics center in the country and the diversity of a Bethlehem Commerce Center industrial park that includes distribution centers for the like of Lowe’s, Walmart, QVC and the Beth Intermodal rail yard. During the group’s visit of Alpla, Plant Manager Vic Bowes explained the supply chain process in which plastic pellets are delivered by rail car, sent into the plant’s dozens of fabricating machines through an intricate pneumatic

tube system, turned into customized plastic bottles, loaded into trucks and delivered to company's like Kraft, Loreal, Revlon and Lysol.

Before heading back to their base in New Brunswick, N.J., the academy students found themselves in the belly of Petrucci Development's cavernous warehouse, with a certificate of occupancy less than a week old. It's one of a new breed of warehouses in the region, with overnight truck parking, two trucker lounges and a roof built to accommodate solar panels if a tenant wants them – all recommendations in the LVPC's review of the project.

"We have 78 dock locations and 100 [overnight] parking spaces," said Petrucci Project Executive Matt Campbell. "This is a [Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design] LEED Silver-Certified or green building. We believe our future is green and are investing for the long-term."

The Freight Academy also had visits scheduled for the UPS Air cargo center at Newark Liberty Airport and at the Port of New York and New Jersey.