

# TCRPC

## Planning Toolkit Fact Sheet

# Managing Warehouses and Distribution Facilities



### INTRODUCTION

Warehouses and distribution centers are common throughout Pennsylvania, but particularly common in South Central Pennsylvania with the number of interstate and limited access highways in the region. The most common concerns with these facilities relates to traffic impacts and the presence and impacts associated with heavy trucks. They are becoming more common with the prevalence of online shopping and home delivery of goods.

With the focus on traffic and roadway impacts municipalities should consider limiting them to areas where they can directly access arterial (preferably principal arterials, but at least minor arterials) roadways. This will help lessen the impacts on otherwise low volume or residentially-focused roadways. Where access is onto a state owned roadway such facilities will be subject to the **Highway Occupancy Permit (HOP)** process and procedures, including the development of a detailed traffic impact study. Municipalities can be partners in this process by signing up for **PennDOT's epermitting program**.

A detailed traffic impact study (TIS) as required through the HOP program is an effective way of understanding the range of traffic impacts that would affect the transportation system and possible mitigation measures necessary to lessen the impacts. As such, municipalities should consider adopting the PennDOT TIS requirements for any significant traffic generating use that would access locally owned roadways. This would produce a consistent approach to analyzing and mitigating traffic impacts. Municipalities should also consider special assessment districts geared toward transportation system needs, commonly known as Transportation Improvement Districts.

Another way of effectively planning and addressing warehouses or distribution centers is through coordination with the applicable PennDOT District and Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). TCRPC acts as the staff of the MPO for Cumberland, Dauphin and Perry Counties. Coordination with these entities will help provide a regional perspective for potential impacts and identification of transportation system needs and projects.

There are a number of other regulatory considerations a municipality should consider to address these uses. For instance, warehouses and distribution centers are often handled as conditional uses with well-defined criteria to help ensure suitability and minimal impacts. Most municipalities limit warehouses and distribution centers to industrial zones, while some provide for them in highway commercial zones, mostly as a potential reuse of abandoned retail facilities. Also, many municipalities require buffers between these buildings and incompatible adjacent uses in an effort to lessen the aesthetic and visual impacts of such large buildings.

### BENEFITS

- Effective planning accommodates warehouses and distribution centers by focusing them in areas with the most transportation system capacity
- Warehouses and distribution facilities are necessary for modern reliance on online shopping and home delivery of goods
- Facilities with adequate truck parking help reduce the parking that often occurs along roadways that is necessitated by hour of driving restrictions
- The large roofs and parking areas provide an opportunity for solar facility development



## DRAWBACKS

- Traffic and truck impacts can be significant
- Warehouses and distribution facilities are often very controversial
- The large roofs and parking areas can have significant stormwater impacts

## PRACTICAL TIPS

- Keep the public involved throughout the planning, zoning and land development processes
- Coordinate with PennDOT, County Planning Commission and MPO in the assessment of local and regional traffic impacts
- Look for opportunities to match these typically large-scale projects with environmental enhancements like solar resource development, stormwater management, and water quality enhancement

## RESOURCES

- **American Planning Association – Regional Planning Can Help With Environmental Impacts of Warehouses**
- **American Planning Association - Institutional Perspectives on Warehousing Development and Mitigating Its Negative Impacts**
- **Federal Highway Administration Center for Innovative Finance Support**
- **Council of Development Finance Agencies (CDFA) Special Assessments and Development Finance**
- **Pennsylvania Transportation Partnership Act (Transportation Improvement District enabling legislation)**

## RELATED TOOLKIT FACT SHEETS

- **Traditional Zoning Ordinances**
- **Commercial-Office Redevelopment**
- **Solar Facilities**
- **Stormwater Management**

