

Officials: Yaphank rail terminal exceeds expectations

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Some of Long Island's most basic needs -- crushed stone, biodiesel, building supplies, fencing and flour -- are increasingly being shipped by rail, taking thousands of trucks off the road.

Two years after opening, the Brookhaven Rail Terminal in Yaphank has exceeded expectations of even the depot's owners and most ardent proponents.

Terminal officials said the facility has received more than 1,620 rail cars since it opened in

September 2011. That amount represents the equivalent of about 6,480 trucks being removed from the metropolitan area's bridges and roads, according to a standard federal transportation formula.

Home Depot in March signed an agreement to become the terminal's anchor tenant for a new facility at the Sills Road site to help the giant retailer more reliably supply Long Island outlets experiencing a post-Sandy increase in demand for building materials.

That facility was completed in June and Home Depot has been ramping up its shipments of lumber, roof shingles and other building supplies, officials said. By the end of July, the home improvement company had shipped 128 cars of materials to Yaphank.

"We're delighted at how far we've come in the short period of time we've been at it," said Andy Kaufman, Brookhaven Rail Terminal president and one of its founders.

The East of Hudson Rail Freight Task Force, which includes representatives from regional railroads and transportation agencies, and focuses on increasing use of rail for hauling freight in urban areas of New York, northern New Jersey and southwest Connecticut, is to meet at the Brookhaven Rail Terminal on Monday.

"We have two main bridges onto the Island. Tolls are up, permissible trucking bridge weights are down, fuel prices are up. We can bring things to Long Island more economically and hopefully get that economic benefit to translate in price for the public," Kaufman said.

Rep. Tim Bishop (D-Southampton) said the Brookhaven Rail Terminal represented "precisely the kind of environmentally responsible economic development we need on Long Island."

Some Yaphank residents last year raised concerns about expansion plans for the terminal site. Suffolk County in May sold to the facility 230 acres adjoining the depot's initial 28-acre site.

Monday's visit by the task force led by Rep. Jerrold Nadler (D-Manhattan) follows renewed emphasis nationally on moving freight by rail and water instead of roads, particularly through urban areas.

A panel formed by the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee on July 26 took testimony in Manhattan as part of an effort studying how to modernize freight transportation. The greater New York metropolitan area, Southern California and Chicago regions are among focus areas.

Nadler, who has long supported a freight rail tunnel under New York Harbor to connect Long Island to the rail network in New Jersey, decried the region's "complete dependence on trucks." That reliance increases pollution and the cost of doing business, and limits economic growth in the region, he said.

The Port Authority and Federal Highway Administration are to complete a review of a draft environmental impact statement for the tunnel project by winter.

Freight and traffic

- * **About 19 percent of freight moves by rail nationally.**
- * **In areas east of the Hudson River, rails carry less than 1 percent of all freight, increasing reliance on trucking and thus congestion, smog and road damage**
- * **The amount of fuel wasted in traffic congestion nationally by 2015 is estimated at 2.5 billion gallons a year**
- * **Each day, 12,000 miles of the country's highway system slow below posted speed limits; another 7,000 miles experience stop-and-go conditions**

Sources: the Federal Highway Administration, Texas Transportation Institute, INRIX Traffic Scorecard, U.S. House Panel on 21st Century Freight Transportation

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