

Home Depot to stock up LI stores via rail terminal

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Home Depot has signed a deal to bring high-demand construction supplies, destined for its stores on [Long Island](#), Queens and Brooklyn, by rail to the [Brookhaven](#) Rail Terminal in [Yaphank](#).

The deal will lead to the construction of a 200,000-square-foot warehouse at the depot, a gain of 85 jobs there, and the elimination of several thousand trucks from [Long Island](#) roads each year, terminal officials said.

[The move](#) is a big step forward for the terminal, which opened in September 2011 to increase rail freight on Long Island. The operation now ships in soybean biodiesel, flour, semolina, fencing, and construction aggregate.

The first 16 railcars laden with Home Depot supplies begin rolling into the depot's Sills Road property, south of Exit 66 off the [Long Island Expressway](#), this week. The retailer is moving a range of bulk lumber and building materials from as far away as [Oregon](#) and [Canada](#) -- material in demand after superstorm Sandy.

Support from officials

The development has won support from several local officials, including [Brookhaven](#) Town Supervisor Ed Romaine.

"Economically it helps the region because it creates jobs," Romaine said. "It helps Home Depot keep down freight costs, because it can move more product by rail car, ensuring steady supply for [Long Islanders](#) -- and it gets rid of the pollution from long-haul trucks running up and down the length of the island."

Home Depot spokesman Stephen Holmes confirmed the deal, which he said was Sandy-driven. "We needed both more capacity to respond to the need in that area, and we wanted more efficiency, both on costs and velocity," Holmes said Tuesday. "This gets some trucks off roads and bridges and helps alleviate congestion on [New York's](#) bridges and tunnels."

The retailer's sales related to Sandy were about \$242 million in the Northeast in its fourth quarter, ended Feb. 3. That's \$112 million more than quarterly storm sales following [Hurricane Irene](#) in 2011, Holmes said.

Terminal principals, citing confidentiality agreements, could confirm only that they signed the three-year service agreement with "a major home construction retailer."

"Talks began shortly after superstorm Sandy when they realized they would need a better mode of transporting materials to the island -- the demand for rebuilding was such they needed to expand supplies on a sustainable basis," BRT principal Jake Watral said.

The facility to be built at the Sills Road depot will combine 60,000 square feet of covered space and 140,000 square feet outside. An extra length of track will be added within the terminal to enable unloading at the new facility, and there will be space for 10 flatbed trucks, which will transport the products to the stores. Completion is expected by June.

Romaine said the stores' locations close to major arterial roads on Long Island would limit traffic on local roads. "Any move to lessen truck traffic has to be a great thing for our environment and breathable air," he said.

Cutting 7,000 truck trips

Terminal operators estimate the contract will require 1,820 railcars on a yearly basis -- equivalent to more than 7,000 18-wheeler truck trips, according to a formula used by federal government transport officials.

U.S. Rep. [Tim Bishop](#) (D-Southampton), a longtime proponent of increasing rail freight on Long Island, embraced the deal, saying it shows the [benefit](#) of rail and is an efficient and economic choice, "especially as our communities recover from Sandy."

"Freight rail can also be a vital lifeline in the case of winter storms that close major roads, as we just experienced with Nemo," [Bishop](#) said.

Until now, Home Depot has largely trucked supplies to Long Island stores from a massive distribution center in southern [New Jersey](#).

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