EXPANDED ACCESS REQUEST REVIEW PROCESS:

DECIDING WHETHER LARGER TRUCKS AND TWIN TRAILERS MAY USE LOCAL ROADS

The purpose of the review process is to determine whether or not a proposed expanded access route can safely accommodate a combination of, or all of, these vehicle types:

- Vehicle combinations with two trailers
- Vehicle combinations over 60 feet in length with a single trailer (48-foot maximum trailer length)
- Vehicles 102 inches in width

Overview of the Process

The process to review, and approve or deny, an expanded access route is not complex, and PennDOT is responsible for most of it. However, municipalities do have some responsibility in the process. That responsibility is focused on investigating a request and making a decision to approve or deny a route for expanded access on locally owned roads. The required investigations are subjective, based upon municipal experience and local knowledge, and do not require hiring a professional engineer.

Most requests for expanded access routes will involve state highways, and PennDOT will investigate these requests for expanding access. But, if a proposed route does include some locally owned roads, PennDOT, which has primary responsibility to manage the request, will ask municipal officials to assist with the investigation and decide whether those locally owned roads may be part of an expanded access route. In those cases, the staff of the local PennDOT Engineering District will guide involved municipalities through their portion of the process.

Occasionally, a proposed access route will include only locally owned roads. In those cases, a request for a proposed expanded access route may be addressed directly to the municipality or municipalities that own those roads. If that happens, the municipality should immediately forward the request to PennDOT and work with the Engineering District to fulfill the request.

The effort to process a request can be broken down into four components:

1. Receive a request
2. Manage a request
3. Investigate a request
4. Communicate a decision

The steps to accomplish each of these components are detailed below.

Receive a Request

The first step in the process for an expanded access route review is the request, which will be initiated by an individual or organization responsible for moving goods by truck. The request will likely be made to PennDOT Bureau of Maintenance and Operations (BOMO). However, if the proposed route involves only locally owned roads, requests may be made directly to municipalities.

If a request comes directly to a municipality from the requestor, a copy of the request should be sent
immediately to PennDOT’s BOMO. If a request comes to a municipality from the Engineering District, that request will include a form letter from PennDOT with clear instructions about what to do.

Manage a Request
PennDOT has the primary responsibility for managing these requests. However, if a request includes locally owned road, the affected municipality may have to respond with additional information about those roads. PennDOT will send the municipality a letter with instructions about its responsibility along with a Traffic Engineering (TE) form that will help the municipality to perform and record a field investigation of a potential expanded access route.

If a municipality is required to investigate a route, it has 30 days to make a decision from the time it receive the request from PennDOT. If additional time is needed to investigate a request, a municipality may take an additional 15 days for any reason by notifying PennDOT in writing.

If a decision is not made within 30 days of receiving the request, or additional time has not been requested in writing, the portion of the proposed expanded access route on those locally owned roadways is automatically approved. Keep in mind that giving up the right to investigate and act may increase a municipality’s liability.

Investigate a Request
Part of a municipality’s responsibility is to perform a field investigation of the portion of a proposed route that includes locally owned roads. PennDOT has produced a form to assist municipalities with their investigation of a proposed expanded access route. This form is based upon the format of PennDOT’s Engineering and Traffic Study forms, also known as TE forms. The TE form for an expanded access route investigation (TE-149) is available on the LTAP website at www.ltapat.state.pa.us. If conditions exist that suggest the denial of a request, the TE form can be helpful with substantiating the reasons for denial.

Even though the form is a TE form, bear in mind that a municipal investigation is not an engineering study. A municipality is not required to hire an engineer to do these investigations. PennDOT Publication 46 indicates that proposed route investigations are to be subjective investigations based primarily upon the experiential knowledge of the investigator. The form simply leads the investigator through the types of issues that will inform a decision to approve or deny a request. PennDOT Publication 212 also states that such investigations can be completed by municipal employees, including police officers, roadmasters, maintenance supervisors, and traffic technicians.

Following are hints and tips for using the TE form for expanded access investigations:
• Section A requires location information about the proposed route. Fill out the County and Municipality boxes. A turn-by-turn description of the proposed route is part of the Application for Truck Access Route that is submitted to PennDOT. To save effort, simply attach the Application to the TE form and check box number 2 in Section D.
• Section B is already filled out. This section lists the law, regulation, and guidance information for this process, and is really there for a municipality to use if it needs to know more about the legal basis for this process.
• Section C lists the study elements from PennDOT Publication 212 Appendix that may be useful to a municipality when it investigates an expanded access route request. The PennDOT Publication 212 Appendix lists 22 specific engineering and traffic study elements, along with information about how to conduct these studies. The study elements listed are those most likely applicable to this kind of investigation and may offer some foundational knowledge about how to conduct an investigation.
• Section D is a standard section that gives the investigator an opportunity to indicate any attachments that will be filed with the TE form.
• Section E is a pass/fail criteria section. If the proposed route has a critical impedance to truck access, such as a bridge weight posting, the request can be quickly denied.
• Section F is a checklist of roadway conditions that are pertinent to this kind of investigation. By working through this checklist, a picture of any impediments to safety along the proposed route can be developed. Essentially, a municipality is deciding if larger trucks or twin trailer combinations can safely negotiate the proposed route. Are clearance or weight restrictions in place that would preclude trucks of the requested type? Are roadway lanes wide enough for the larger trucks? Can the proposed trucks negotiate turning movements at the intersections? PennDOT Publication 46 suggests that a way to definitively answer these questions is to ask the applicant to provide a truck of the type it intends to use and then drive the proposed route. Doing so will demonstrate any potential risks to safety. Section F guides the investigator through these and other questions that will help inform an appropriate approval decision.
• Section G is an opportunity to record comments about the route being investigated.
• Section H has been removed from this TE form.
• Section I is for municipal approval and signature.

Communicate a Decision
A municipality must return the information requested to the Engineering District and include the TE form filled out during the investigation and the approval/denial decision in writing. The Engineering District will include this paperwork along with its own and then issue its decision to the requester.

PennDOT Publication 46 lists the information that is to be included in a municipality’s decision letter:
• The type of truck combinations being approved for the route(s).
• The route(s) identification by local street names and SR number, segments, and offsets for state highways.
• The route description(s) from the designated network or approved access route to the terminal.
• The length of each route in tenths of a mile.
• The name and address of each municipal police chief to be notified of the route approval.
• A map or sketch showing the approved route(s) in color.

Whatever the municipality decides, PennDOT is responsible for publishing the decision and therefore requires the information listed above.

During the process, a municipality should make contact with two PennDOT resources: The first is the traffic engineer at the local Engineering District office, and the second is the Bureau of Maintenance and Operations, Special Hauling Permit Section, 6th Floor, Commonwealth Keystone Building, 400 North St., Harrisburg, PA 17120.

PennDOT Bureau of Maintenance and Operations will publish the results of any decisions to grant expanded access to state and local roads in the Pennsylvania Bulletin and will notify the Pennsylvania State Police, the local police, the Federal Highway Administration, Transport Topics, and the Pennsylvania Motor Truck Association.