

I-81 continues to drive local development



The Walmart fulfillment center stands out along Interstate 81 at Exit 3 in Antrim Township on April 6.
PHOTOS BY AMBER SOUTH/PUBLIC OPINION

Rapid growth in Franklin County placing stress on the area's labor market, housing, child care and infrastructure

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The rate of development in Franklin County won't be slowing down anytime soon.

There are projects underway or on the horizon that will open up more land for industrial development and improve the flow of trucks and other traffic from Interstate 81 to their destinations at distribution centers, logistics facilities and manufacturers.

"The fact is we're located on ... one of the most active, if not the most active, transportation corridors in the country right now," said Mike Ross, president of the Franklin County Area Development Corp. "Everybody who wants to distribute products between Charlotte and Toronto, they're looking to be on 81 somewhere. We have the interstate, we have available property along the interstate that has been zoned for industrial development."

A dwindling labor force isn't changing things. Looking at Antrim Township, which Ross said has seen the most development in Franklin County, and pairing it with the development that's been happening in Washington County, Md., each has about 10 million square feet of development expected in the near future.

That puts "almost incomprehensible" pressure on the labor market, Ross said.

"The rule of thumb is for every million square feet, you need 500 people. So, if you say we're going to develop another 10 million square feet in Antrim Township, that's 5,000 jobs. If we're gonna develop 10 million square feet in Washington County, that's 5,000 jobs. That's 10,000 jobs in a 10-mile radius. We don't have, we can't fill that."

There were 2,500 unemployed people in Franklin County in February, the most recent month for which data is available, according to the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry. In the Hagerstown, Md., and Martinsburg, W.Va., metropolitan statistical area, which covers Washington County, Md., and Berkeley County, W.Va., there were 4,166 unemployed people in February.

But so far, companies who express interest in opening facilities in the area have been optimistic about their workforce prospects, Ross said, based on his conversations with site location consultants.

The labor market is just one of many areas stressed by



A major project is happening along Greenmount Road just north of the Pennsylvania-Maryland line in Antrim Township to improve infrastructure. It also includes the development of a warehousing and logistics facility, seen in the background.

so much growth.

"We don't have enough housing ... we don't have enough childcare, which is another major issue. We need to upgrade our water and sewer systems, (and our) our electrical grid to be able to handle a lot of the development taking place.

"In my world, we're supposed to be patting ourselves on the back — 'oh my God, look at all this stuff going on.' Our challenge right now is how do we manage this?"

Projects are happening all along the I-81 corridor. Here is a look at what's new and what's coming up.

Exit 1, State Line, Pa.

"Exit 1 is going to become a primary interchange," Ross said. Improvements are being made in that area to decrease the amount of trucks and other related traffic

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Mike Ross, president of the Franklin County Area Development Corp.

Development

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using Exit 3.

A \$4 million project is underway to improve access at the interchange and improve the road infrastructure. Less than a half mile from the southbound exit and on-ramp, Greenmount Road is being upgraded to handle industrial traffic it is expected to take on as land on it is developed over the next few years.

Except for the Jerr-Dan plant at its intersection with Hykes Road, Greenmount Road has until recently been home to nothing but fields and a few houses. As part of the infrastructure improvement project, a warehousing and logistics facility is under construction at the south end of Greenmount Road and along Mason-Dixon Road.

There is about 1 million square feet, or just under 23 acres, that can be developed on the north side of Mason-Dixon Road, Ross said. The area is already home to a trucking company and a shipping company.

Nearby, U.S. Cold Storage plans to build a cold storage facility on Hykes Road. It is expected to be the first of two phases.

Exit 3, U.S. 11/Antrim Township, Pa.

Motorists traveling on I-81 just over a decade ago saw little else but fields and trees once they came upon Exit 3. Today, there are gigantic buildings as far as the eye can see.

The headliner right now is the 1.9 million-square-foot Walmart fulfillment center.

It will serve as a "bookend" to the fulfillment center near Shippensburg, which opened last year. At about 4 million square feet combined and eventually about 2,000 jobs, Walmart will have the "biggest distribution presence" in Franklin County, Ross said.

The Greencastle fulfillment center will be high-tech.

"When Greencastle opens, it's our understanding it will be the most technologically advanced distribution center in the Walmart system. So, pretty impressive," Ross said.

Exit 5, U.S. 16/Greencastle, Pa.

The newest development here is in the much-needed sector of housing, particularly the type that the average worker can afford.

York-based Inch & Co. Development Group will build a 300-unit apartment complex with a swimming pool, clubhouse and walking trails. Buchanan Flats will be located on 30 acres north of Pa. 16 and west of I-81. Moss Spring Avenue is to be extended to connect the complex to Pa. 16, which is also known as Buchanan Trail East.

Exit 5 also serves the Wharf Road Industrial Park in Washington Township. Tenants in the 122-acre park near Zullinger include CAM Superline, Jamison Door and ProTube Inc., and there are 300 to 350 people working there.

"It's really done everything we wanted it to do," Ross said.

FCADC not long ago bought the last lot available at Wharf Road Industrial Park. The 20.5 acre lot was subdivided into three lots. One lot had immediate interest from a company, and on another lot FCADC will develop a building that a tenant can customize later. There are no plans yet for the third lot.

Exit 5 — which also serves Manitowoc Crane, which has about 1,000 employees, and Mercersburg to the



Endurance Real Estate Group, out of Radnor, is building a logistics facility just off Interstate 81 Exit 10 in Marion. PHOTOS BY AMBER SOUTH/PUBLIC OPINION



The Walmart fulfillment center in Antrim Township is nearly 2 million square feet.

west and Waynesboro to the east — is a "failed interchange," Ross said. It has long not supported the amount of traffic that uses it every day, and the Buchanan Flats apartment complex will only increase the number of vehicles getting on and off the interstate there.

Exit 10, Marion, Pa.

A 93-acre plot of land directly beside I-81 and Pa. 914 (Swamp Fox Road) is undergoing work to become the site of what will be called the Chambersburg Logistics Center.

Endurance Real Estate Group out of Radnor, Pa., is leading the project, in partnership with Guardian Life Insurance Co. of America, according to a news release.

A 1,006,500-square-foot cross-dock warehouse and distribution facility will be built. Just a few of the features include tilt-wall panel construction, 40-foot clear height, four 14-by-16-foot drive-in doors, 213 trailer stalls (expandable to 303) and 375 parking spaces (expandable to 561).

Ross said there is no tenant yet. The facility is expected to be completed by the end of the year.

The facility will "change the dynamic" at the interchange at I-81/Pa. 914, Ross said, but it will have minimal impact on the Marion community. Because the interstate is right there, trucks and visitors would typically have no reason to travel the village's streets. This is the goal along the I-81 corridor.

"I commend our 81 municipalities from Southampton to Greene to Guilford to Antrim, essentially saying, 'Look, we'll allow it to happen here but we don't want it to happen on the interior of the township. We don't want you coming through Chambersburg or New Franklin or wherever to try to get to the interstate, we want you to be

able to get on and off," Ross said.

Exit 12, Guilford Township, Pa.

A project that has been in the works for around 15 years, it will be at least the end of 2025 before a new exit, known as Exit 12, is completed at Guilford Springs Road, just south of Chambersburg.

The next exit will open up more land for development, Ross said. It should also decrease traffic on Wayne Avenue.

Exit 14, Pa. 316

The big project happening here is the expansion at Martins's Famous Pastry Shoppe on Wayne Road.

The work on an addition for a new production line is almost halfway done and should be complete by the end of this year, Ross said.

West of I-81, a Wawa will be built on Wayne Avenue.

Recently, a factory was upgraded south of Weis Markets. That is a medical marijuana growing facility. Grassroots Cannabis began operations in 2018 but recently underwent an expansion. Ross said it's one of the biggest users of electricity in the Borough of Chambersburg.

The Chambers-5 Business Park also benefits from its close proximity to I-81. F&M Trust opened its new corporate headquarters there in September.

Exits 16 (U.S. 30) and 17 (Walker Road) on the east side of Chambersburg, Pa.

New retailers or services regularly pop up in the shopping area at Walker Road and Norland Drive.

Two local home design companies — Chambersburg Kitchens and Countertops (formerly Superior Floorcoverings and Kitchens) and Floor Trader Outlet — recently teamed up and moved into a space beside Cluggy's Entertainment Center, just off Walker Road on Beddington Boulevard.

Exit 20, Scotland/Pa. 997

Development here has been largely limited to the Cumberland Valley Business Park, which was developed on land that was once part of Letterkenny Army Depot.

There are only a few lots left.

Burnside Autofill, a manufacturer of hydraulic cylinders, is just beginning work on a 30,000-square-foot expansion that will double the size of the facility it first opened in 2014 when the company moved from Ireland to Franklin County, Ross said. The expansion should be completed next year.

As more and more tenants have fled, there's been speculation in recent years over what will happen at Chambersburg Mall.

Ross said he sees "real opportunity" in the mall and developers have expressed interest in turning it into a distribution center. However, Greene Township officials set up zoning there to eliminate that possibility.

A recent rumor that UPMC bought the mall was not true, although, as Ross put it, "They make no secret of the fact they want to expand their presence here." The medical provider runs two primary care offices and two heart and vascular medicine offices in Chambersburg.

Exit 24, Pa. 696/Southampton Township, Pa.

Walmart opened a 1.85 million-square-foot fulfillment center in United Business Park last July. It currently employs about 400 people, a figure that is expected to double, according to Ross.

The original e-commerce giant, Amazon, is set to lease a 1 million-square-foot space near Walmart.

Behind those buildings are about 80 acres owned by Matrix Development Corp., which was responsible for most of the growth in the business park. The original facility Matrix developed is now home to Penske Logistics.

"It needs some infrastructure improvements and wetland mitigation but will be developed similarly to what's out front," Ross said.

In addition, a road is planned that will connect the business park to Mainsville, which is just east of the park.

It's not directly off the interstate, but right off U.S. 11 in Shippensburg, Volvo Construction Equipment recently completed upgrades to its training center.

"That brings folks in from all over the world to look at their equipment," Ross said.