

Bulk Terminal Strategy Checklist

Recent challenges across the supply chain have caused many logistics experts to look for alternative routes for their products and raw materials. Rail transloading and bulk terminals offer flexibility, allowing logistics experts to circumvent particular modes or locations that may be creating challenges.

Finding the right transloading facility is a critical part of planning new routes and overcoming logistics challenges. We created the bulk terminal strategy checklist to help you work rail into your logistics plan and find the right transloading facilities.

Assessing Needs and Goals

The first step in evaluating your bulk terminal strategy is to assess your needs and goals. Whether you are trying to reduce costs, improve speed, reduce environmental costs, or something else, having a clear picture of your goals will help you move forward.

	Costs: If your costs for long-haul shipping have increased significantly, rail can be a cheaper alternative.
	Environmental costs: If your company is motivated to reduce your carbon footprint, rail shipping can be highly effective.
	Supplemental shipping: If trucking or other transportation modes become constrained, rail can supplement your primary shipping mode.
	Modal diversity: Diversifying your shipping modes can help to improve reliability and improve your negotiating power.
	Improving competition: Transloading facilities can help you avoid routes serviced by a single carrier, and open your route to competition.

Gathering Information

Collecting key information beforehand can help you find the right transloading facility. Make a note of the following information. As you start mapping your route, you'll be able to use this information to hone in on the right facilities.

	Material characteristics: a list of material characteristics, particularly those that are hazardous, difficult to work with, or fragile, will help you find the right facilities. The Federal Railroad Administration offers some guidance on hazardous materials in rail.
	Equipment requirements: to load your materials, what type of equipment would be required? Consider equipment like pumps, forklifts, conveyors, scales, and more.
	Transloading Location: Consider a location or locations that are closest to your starting point, closest to the destination with the most volume, or located roughly equidistant to your final destinations.

Transload Facility Features

With your goals, list of materials characteristics, equipment requirements and transloading location requirements in mind, you'll know what you're looking for in a transload facility. [Our transloading map](#) and [route planning software](#) provide essential information about transload facilities. You can also contact the transload facility to fill in this information.

	Equipment: Is the equipment available at the facility suitable for your materials? Consider conveyors, pumps, steam boilers, lifting equipment, truck washes, scales, and containment. This equipment may be available on-site, or it may be possible to move the proper equipment to the location.
	Storage: Services such as tank storage, warehousing, on-track storage, secure storage and more can help to improve shipping flexibility and avoid fees.
	Services: If your products require inspection, sampling, metering, or documentation, these services should be available on-site. Other services can help you speed up operations, such as blending, repackaging, or containerization.
	Technology: Some technologies can make it easier to track and schedule your shipments, reducing costs and speeding up operations. Ask about technology available, such as tracking, reporting and communications.
	Scheduling: Understanding rail and truck capacity, service hours, and the rail switching schedule can give you a better picture of how quickly you'll be able to move your products through the terminal.
	Safety & Training: Do the staff at the location have the right training to work with your materials? This is particularly important for materials that are flammable, toxic, caustic, or require containment.
	Truck Drayage: Local truck transportation is critical. Nearby trucking services or a list of services may be provided by the terminal manager.
	Fees: A list of fees can help you keep track of costs and make sure your bulk terminal strategy makes sense with your goals. Ask about transfer costs per railcar, equipment fees, track occupancy rates, or potential fines.

Looking for the right information can help you find the right terminals faster, and optimize your bulk terminal strategy. Use this checklist to track your information, ask the right questions, and start planning your route.

Talk to an expert to get cost-saving rail solutions