

In drawing up your component transportation playbook, consider choosing an experienced third-party logistics provider to call the plays in the huddle.

AT ONE POINT, all companies have internally analyzed the option to have their suppliers own the transportation of components or to manage it themselves. Decisions were made based on resident knowledge of the transportation industry and the final cost of the good sold. These factors are critical when negotiating the transportation scope, but are not the only factors that should be considered when making this analysis.

3PLs (third-party logistics providers) are more often used when the supplier or customer of the purchased goods does not have the internal staff available to manage the abundance of asset-based trucking, rail, barge, ocean, and warehouse companies generally used during a project or delivery to a port or staging location. 3PLs are best utilized for entire turnkey solutions as well as the management of only a portion of the project delivery. Working directly with an asset-based establishment is the streamlined approach to the pieces of equipment needed, and eliminates the need for an additional vendor. This is no secret. The hidden risks can be in the supplier's or customer's internal operational abilities and resources to manage every single asset-based carrier, scheduling, invoices, scorecards, inspection sheets, claims, and—above all—their ability to perform in accordance with DOT regulations, on time and within budget. This is feasible with a limited staff if everything works perfectly. For those who have had firsthand experience with transporting wind turbine equipment, we all humbly know even the most successful projects face challenges in their execution.

At times when project contingencies are in full swing, the ability to rely on a 3PL to realign the project may be the best option. Not only do 3PLs have an abundant network of carriers and other critical supply chain partners, it is in their best interest to build and foster those relationships. It has been my experience that the network of “players” are always eager to help and contribute to the success of any endeavor. Think of a 3PL as the quarterback on a football team. Your project is the ball and the network comprises the remainder of your offensive. Though not all players touch the ball, they are all in formation to deliver your project to the goal line. As in football, a play is created and the quarterback gives the ball to another player with the

sole purpose of advancing the ball toward the goal line. If the quarterback doesn't take full advantage of the entire offense that is at his disposal, he can't move the ball effectively. If the network isn't there to protect him, the quarterback may be subject to a blindside sack. These unforeseen challenges can slow progress—or even force steps backward. Similarly, the offensive players would not function properly without a quarterback, requiring the sideline coaches to manage the players individually. Because it is not football season now, I will digress from this illustration and refocus on the benefits of a 3PL.

With the abundance of 3PL options in the marketplace, choosing which company to send an RFP can sometimes be a daunting task. Identifying which 3PLs have a well-rounded staff of project managers, engineers, technical support, and experience is the first way to separate the professionals from the companies who don't measure up. Secondly, it is important to identify if the 3PL is licensed and certified in areas such as NVOCC and C-TPAT. These qualifications demonstrate that the company and its supplier network operate at a high security level, and are validated by the Federal Maritime Commission and Customs Border Patrol. Lastly, it is important to know what the 3PL can provide from a technological standpoint. Only a handful of 3PLs are proving customized cloud-based services that enable their customers to have real-time visibility of inventory levels and cargo in transit, as well as provide a platform for capturing valuable data for KPIs reporting and document library platforms to centrally house, BOLs, inspection reports, inventory tracking sheets, and delivery schedules. This is very appealing for suppliers and customers who do not want to invest in a full transportation or warehouse management system.

Whether hiring a 3PL, an asset-based carrier, or simply having the supplier manage the transportation, it is important that the risk of transporting the components be understood and packing and transportation and handing specifications be current. Although a large number of deliveries have been made successfully, there has been and always will be the need for process improvement and innovation. ✨

Harde Eddison is a logistics manager with Vectora Transportation. He can be reached at heddison@vectoratransportation.com.