

The Truck Wash Site Selection Checklist

What to confirm before you fall in love with a piece of land. A truck wash site fails or succeeds on factors that have nothing to do with the equipment inside it. This checklist walks through the same screen an experienced developer runs before a site ever gets a letter of intent.

1. SITE GEOMETRY

- ☐ **Usable acreage: 1 to 3+ acres**
Express car wash gets by on 0.8 to 1.5 acres. A truck wash needs the extra room for turning paths, stacking, and vehicle lengths a car wash never has to consider.
- ☐ **Turning radius: 40 to 55 feet for a 53-foot trailer**
Check the swept path in both directions. A site can pass a truck entering and fail the same truck exiting, especially at tight corners or shared drive aisles.
- ☐ **Stacking depth: 180 to 420 feet (3 to 6 trucks)**
This is the queue length before a truck ever reaches the wash bay. Many jurisdictions count stacking as part of site plan approval, and running short can cap throughput before the facility even opens.
- ☐ **Building and canopy clearance**
Confirm vertical clearance for the tallest vehicles you intend to serve, including reefers, tankers, and RVs if those are part of the target mix.

2. ACCESS AND TRAFFIC

- ☐ **Full-movement access preferred**
Right-in / right-out works for a car wash. A truck wash strongly prefers full-movement access, since a truck that cannot make a left turn back onto the corridor is a truck that will not return.
- ☐ **Freight corridor positioning**
Look for proximity to interstate interchanges, distribution centers, and truck stops, not just raw traffic counts. A high-VPD retail arterial is not the same demand signal as a freight corridor.
- ☐ **Truck percentage of traffic, not just volume**
A busy road with mostly passenger vehicles tells you little. Look for the truck share of average daily traffic and the time-of-day pattern, since freight traffic clusters differently than commuter traffic.
- ☐ **DOT curb cut and access ruling**
Full access versus right-in/right-out is often decided by a traffic study and a DOT or municipal curb cut ruling, not by the site plan alone. That ruling can reshape the entire site layout.

3. UTILITIES AND ENVIRONMENTAL

- ☐ **Water and power capacity at the site, not just at the street**
Availability at the main is not the same as capacity. Your equipment partner sizes a system to perform, and a transformer or water service upgrade can add real cost and months if it is caught late.

☐ **Wastewater pre-treatment and reclaim capacity**

Truck wash requires enhanced pre-treatment compared to standard car wash discharge. Confirm sewer capacity and any local discharge limits before assuming a standard system will be approved.

☐ **Pretreatment permit requirements**

Many municipalities cap what a facility can send to sewer and require a separate pretreatment permit. This can dictate reclaim system design and should be confirmed early, not during construction.

4. ZONING AND ENTITLEMENT

☐ **Zoning posture toward heavy vehicle uses**

Confirm the jurisdiction's general attitude toward truck-related uses before spending time on a specific parcel. Some zoning categories permit it outright, others do not, and some require special review.

☐ **Conditional use or special permit requirements**

A truck wash is frequently a conditional use even on a correctly zoned parcel, which usually means a public hearing. That hearing is where timeline risk really lives, so build it into your schedule from the start.

☐ **Entitlement risk rated Elevated, not Moderate**

Heavy vehicle operations draw more scrutiny than a standard commercial use. Plan for a more defensible, more complete application the first time, not a rough submittal you expect to revise repeatedly.

5. DEMAND AND COMPETITION

☐ **Carrier, distribution center, and fleet density within routing distance**

Identify the fleets and DCs that would realistically route through this site. Demand should be qualified during site selection, not assumed after the fact.

☐ **Existing wash options nearby, and what they cannot serve**

Note the nearest competing wash options, their format, and their limitations. A market with one aging manual-wash option may have real room for an automated alternative; a market with two modern automated washes already may not.

☐ **Drive-up versus fleet contract demand mix**

Understand which portion of expected volume comes from pass-through drivers and owner-operators versus signed fleet contracts, since this affects both site design and the realistic ramp-up period after opening.

How to use this checklist

Most parcels fail on geometry alone, which is why that screen comes first. Run a candidate site through all five sections before committing to a letter of intent. A site that fails on turning radius or stacking depth fails permanently, since no amount of operating skill or equipment quality fixes bad geometry. Everything else on this list is solvable with the right team and enough lead time, provided you find out about it early.

This checklist is a starting screen, not a substitute for a market evaluation, a civil engineer, or an entitlement attorney. Big Rig Development Group runs this exact process, along with the deeper site selection and market evaluation work behind it, for clients developing commercial truck wash facilities nationally.