



Testimony of
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Pennsylvania Department of Transportation
COVID-19 Impacts to Pennsylvania's Transportation System
Senate Transportation Committee
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Thank you for the opportunity to review the steps PennDOT has taken to keep critical business moving while we try to keep employees, the public, and business partners safe in this COVID-19 situation.

COVID-19 has led all of us to take unprecedented measures and precautions. As per Governor Wolf's directive, every action PennDOT has taken is aimed at mitigating the virus's spread to protect citizens, employees, and business partners alike. We would rather err on the side of caution and adjust as needed than wish we had taken certain measures.

Within a matter of days, PennDOT closed buildings and offices, first in southeastern Pennsylvania then across the state and successfully transferred essential functions – including traffic management centers and executive leadership – to remote operations. Early in the situation, we enacted our Incident Command structure centrally, ensuring consistent alignment with the direction set by Governor Wolf and the PA Department of Health (DOH), coordinated through the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA). All facets of our operation adjusted their respective Continuity of Operations Plans (COOP) and deployed components as circumstances warranted. While we frequently follow National Incident Management processes for winter storms or flooding events, the impacts of COVID-19 required many adjustments to our typical approach. The Area Command team and our executive staff have been actively engaged in planning activities every day since the first restrictions were needed and will continue through the pandemic. This procedure drives consistent approaches to all that we do, keeping us in lock step with Pennsylvania's evolving plans.

Immediately upon enacting closures and standing down operations, PennDOT engaged teams to begin to determine how to successfully restart all that was paused. Every facet of our business has developed phased approaches to redeploy staff and deliver services safely. To date several of these phases have been enacted, while other stages are ready for engagement as the Governor's plan to reopen Pennsylvania unfolds. All of these require coordination with our partners in AFSCME. Maintenance teams are reengaging this week after we focused operations on emergency and critical activities. Our business is critical for life-sustaining efforts that continue, and for effective economic functions that are restarting. Our construction program addresses critical asset condition needs and is a vital step in efforts to restart the economy and is a direct economic driver.

Much of what PennDOT has done, from protocols for worker and public protection to processes, documents and forms, have been recognized as best practices and are serving as templates for other agencies. The collaborative efforts of our industry partners both public and private have kept us in a good

place – working through the impact of COVID-19 and continuing emergency and critical functions while ensuring workforce and customer safety.

Administration

The efforts of the Administration Deputate have been crucial to the success of PennDOT’s response to COVID-19. Constant communication has been required with the Office of Administration (OA). From the tracking and coordinating of leave requirements, ensuring purchasing of critical supplies, coordinating telework abilities and keeping our partners at AFSCME up to speed, the efforts of the Administration have kept PennDOT functioning through these challenging times.

PennDOT has been ranging from between 30 to 40 percent of our currently “filled complement” workforce being able to telework. Through last week, of our total 10,400 filled positions, almost 3,700 have been active in a telework capacity, 3,600 have been physically working on the jobsite, and the remainder have not been working. With the reengagement of the remainder of the maintenance field staff and reopening of Driver Licensing facilities, the majority of our staff will be actively employed.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) coordination has been conducted through a virtual 24/7 response, in concert with PennDOT Area Command. PPE will be made available for reopening of any additional facilities moving forward. In coordination with the Multimodal Deputate, staff procured and supplied disinfectants and masks for various transit agencies. Staff collaborated with the Department of General Services (DGS) Procurement to assist with, among other items, researching available sources for handwashing stations and obtaining emergency approvals for the purchase of protective barriers for the Driver License Centers and Welcome Centers in preparation for reopening these facilities. Formal policies have been developed and adjusted to ensure compliance with the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and DOH evolving guidance.

Driver and Vehicle Services

PennDOT’s 75 Driver License Centers and 27 Photo License Centers are some of Pennsylvania government’s most public touchpoints. In accordance with Governor Wolf’s mitigation guidance, we transitioned from regional facility closures to closing all centers statewide. To help alleviate customer impacts, PennDOT:

- Quickly extended expiration dates for driver’s licenses, photo ID cards, learner’s permits, vehicle registrations, safety and emissions inspections and disability placards;
- Ensured that the most common customer transactions remain available online; and
- Are addressing mission critical functions to support law enforcement and ensure essential customer service functions are completed.

As done by many states, PennDOT requested that the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (USDHS) consider extending the October 1, 2020 deadline for REAL ID enforcement. On March 26, USDHS announced that enforcement would be postponed until October 1, 2021.

Customers are still able to complete various transactions and access multiple resources on the Driver and Vehicle Services website: www.dmv.pa.gov. Driver and vehicle online services are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week and include driver’s license, photo ID and vehicle registration renewals; driver-history service; changes of address; driver license and vehicle registration restoration letters; ability to pay driver license or vehicle insurance restoration fee; driver license and photo ID duplicates; and driver exam scheduling. There is no additional fee for using online services.

Our Riverfront Office Center (ROC) public-facing operations are not currently open as this region is still in the red phase, but much of our staff is engaged in processing these online transactions, engaging in mail processing to provide products to customers and process payments, and to support businesses that remain or become active. Mission-critical functions continue to be processed in our central office by a minimum number of staff practicing social distancing, mask requirements for all employees, heightened cleaning of surfaces and temperature taking before entering the facility. Functions include items such as driver license recall through the medical unit, Medical Examiner Certificate processing, convictions and restorations processing, vehicle suspensions for lack of insurance, support of the vehicle inspection program, mission critical vehicle titling and registration. This includes depositing of funds, printing and mailing support. These functions are critical to ensuring unsafe drivers and vehicles remain off of PA's roadways while ensuring those who are safe to operate can continue to move goods, provide much-needed services, and have mobility to obtain life-sustaining goods and services during the COVID-19 pandemic. Plans have been developed to phase in all operations at this location as circumstances warrant.

PennDOT enacted plans to safely resume Commercial Drivers Licensing testing and Hazmat certification processes at four locations to support the needs of the construction industry and others as work resumes in these fields. As regions of the state are transitioning to the yellow phase, Driver Licensing and Photo centers in these counties will reopen with stringent COVID-19 safety protocols for our staff and for our customers.

It is key to note that the extension of expiration dates is only a temporary fix, and all of these services are queueing in backlog. We will see the impacts of these delayed product needs over many months ahead. Reopening a facility with proper social distancing and safety measures will mean that services take more time than prior to COVID-19, and the backlog of volume will be a challenge. Extended hours of operation are being evaluated, and hours of operation are being dedicated to seniors as an example of changes to standard business practices to safely meet customer needs.

Engineering Districts and County Maintenance Offices

PennDOT's District offices were closed in response to guidance relative to COVID-19 mitigation. Many functions of these offices are continuing, thanks to telework capabilities. Our staff and our engineering partners are continuing to plan and design projects electronically. Hauling permits are being issued through electronic systems. PennDOT County Maintenance offices also closed, but mission critical processes and crews were assembled to respond to essential safety needs. These small groups followed guidance to minimize close contact and reduce the risk of spreading the virus. Expanded staff was called into action as needed to address snow removal needs and to react to flooding events.

As the impacts of COVID-19 extended beyond the initial two-week period, the definition of critical operations had to broaden. We added staff to remove anti-skid materials from roadways, restore traffic markings and keep drainage facilities functioning, for example.

The maintenance planning focus moving forward is for core preservation activities in light of expectations of drastically reduced revenue. Core maintenance activities are being redefined for the remainder of 2020 and into 2021 as revenue is expected to be down by at least 30 percent. Resurfacing projects will reduce, so expanded patching, crack sealing, skin patching and seal coat activities will be needed to preserve the system.

Bridge replacement efforts will shift to lower cost preservation activities. Asset condition degradation expectations are being considered in longer term planning efforts. Beginning May 11, 2020, all maintenance field staffing has resumed. This permits us to achieve these redefined goals of system preservation in the COVID-19 impacted world.

As counties transition to a “yellow” reopening phase we will continue to perform as many functions as possible in a telework setting. While some customer engagement may be permitted, District and County Maintenance offices will not be back to business as usual, and where direct customer interaction needs to occur there will be specific protocols to protect the public and our staff.

Construction

PennDOT quickly put construction projects on hold – first regionally beginning on March 13 and then statewide on March 17 – to minimize exposure for PennDOT and private-sector employees, and for the communities where they live and work. By 10:30 AM on Wednesday, **March 18**, the morning after the shutdown, Acting Secretary Yassmin Gramian **assembled a multidisciplinary team** of industry representatives from the Associated Pennsylvania Constructors (APC) and the Pennsylvania chapter of the American Civil Engineering Council (ACEC-PA) to meet with PennDOT, the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission (PTC) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to collectively develop strategies to restart the highway and bridge construction program in Pennsylvania in a safe and effective manner while mitigating the potential spread of COVID-19. This team established a framework for COVID-19 safety protocols and requirements that were in alignment with Department of Health and CDC guidance. To restart our construction program immediately without the steps outlined above would be irresponsible given the statewide COVID-19 mitigation strategy.

Our staff and contractors have been addressing emergency needs, and on March 31, we announced that [emergency and critical construction projects](#) will continue. This work addressed specific safety need criteria, such as landslide repairs, advancing asset deterioration (such as bridge, pavement, tunnel, drainage repairs), and work needed to eliminate temporary roadway restrictions that could impede the ability for the movement of life-sustaining goods and services. Conditions were continuously monitored and additional projects became critical as time progressed. All continuing critical and emergency projects were required to enact COVID-19 Worker Health and Safety protocols developed by the multidisciplinary team and conform with DOH, CDC, and OSHA requirements. These critical projects are listed on our COVID-19 page at www.penndot.gov.

Beginning May 1, PennDOT road and bridge construction projects were restarted with limited exceptions based on project-specific factors, including location and feasibility COVID-19 safety protocols at the jobsite. Work on all projects will be conducted in accordance with Centers for Disease Control and Pennsylvania Department of Health guidance as well as a project-specific COVID-19 safety plan.

Planning and Programming

Since March 16, 2020, the Office of Planning has been teleworking, and has been able to accomplish practically every function remotely in conjunction with our partners. All of Pennsylvania’s Metropolitan and Regional Planning Organizations (MPOs/RPOs) are holding Board and Coordinating Committee meetings online. This has allowed the 2021 Program Update (Transportation Improvement Program/State Transportation Improvement Program) process to move forward. This year’s Municipal Liquid Fuels (MLF) allocations to municipalities continued to be released electronically as appropriate documentation is received from the municipalities. Various Local Technical Assistant Program (LTAP) training courses have continued in a virtual format.

As you are aware, Pennsylvania has one of the largest state-managed interstate systems in the nation, at more than 1,300 linear miles (2,740 miles when considering that each direction of the highway is worked on independently) and carrying 26 percent of the state’s traffic volumes. Pennsylvania’s annual need to meet cyclical asset management is \$1.2 billion. Currently, we spend between \$450 - \$500 million per year on the Interstate System. The plan put forward by the Financial Guidance Work Group, will increase

Interstate investment by approximately \$150 million in Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2021 and grow the investment by \$50 million/year until it reaches \$1 billion (FFY 2028). This has caused MPOs/RPOs to delay several regionally funded projects. COVID-19 related revenue reductions will further stress the program development. The projects that have been delayed would likely be candidates if the proposed \$50 billion stimulus package for transportation infrastructure becomes a reality.

COVID-19 is causing major reductions in State revenue sources in Pennsylvania. As communicated in our letter to the congressional delegation, without federal stimulus, projected transportation revenue impacts in the short term as a result of COVID-19 will mean at least \$800 million less in our construction and maintenance programs, and over \$100 million less available for Multimodal initiatives. The reduced MLF revenue will also mean approximately \$50 million less Liquid Fuels distribution to municipalities. In previous years, PennDOT's annual lettings ranged from \$2.2 billion to \$2.4 billion. With the projected reductions in revenue, we are anticipating the program being between \$1.8 and \$1.9 billion for calendar year 2020. Without federal stimulus funds, we will likely see impacts to our calendar year 2021 lettings. AASHTO's current \$50 billion backstop proposal to congress, could potentially mean \$2.0 billion for Pennsylvania's infrastructure. PennDOT greatly appreciates the Transportation Committee's communication to our Congressional Delegation emphasizing the importance of federal stimulus funds for our transportation infrastructure. Stimulus funds must be afforded the flexibility to backfill real revenue losses, and advance reasonable projects to offset asset condition degradation.

Project Design

The majority of design activities have progressed well as telework continues. Early coordination with the consultant industry occurred to keep them informed. Non-emergency design field activities were suspended March 21 as efforts focused on life sustaining operations and development of new protocols for safely conducting field operations. Critical work such as bridge inspections resumed March 30th. A multidisciplinary team was established that framed parameters to resume field design tasks within COVID-19 protocols. Beginning May 1, field activities for critical tasks were permitted to resume on all projects. Some activities cannot continue at this time. An example would be Right of Way acquisition for some projects. While much of the data needed is available online, some locations require visits to Court Houses which remain closed.

PennDOT continued to bid projects for 2020 through the impacts of COVID-19. Revenue impacts will require a lesser program for calendar year 2020 and 2021 unless federal stimulus funds are made available. But while some states stopped bidding projects, we continued to keep a flow of 2020 work moving through the process. With a relocation of a formal "bid opening" location to comply with social distancing requirements, our Electronic Contract Management System (ECMS) permitted the process to function electronically. Procedures were developed to affix legal signatures and professional stamps to plan documents. We capitalized on the legislation that allowed for eNotary processes.

A portfolio of projects is being designed to ensure our ability to respond to stimulus funding as it may become available. Projects will be available "on the shelf" to accelerate advancement and ensure no money is lost to Pennsylvania under stimulus programs forward.

Rest Areas and Welcome Centers

PennDOT initially closed all welcome centers and rest areas in a proactive measure to protect employees and the motoring public and discourage travel overall. However, while rest areas in Pennsylvania are not equipped for or designated as long-term truck parking facilities, we understand that truck drivers delivering lifesaving amenities need access to parking to safely do their job. So PennDOT has now reopened the indoor facilities at many rest areas statewide. Additional cleaning and maintenance is being

performed at all reopened locations. We will continue to evaluate the situation and determine when the remaining few locations can safely reopen.

Multimodal

PennDOT recognizes that while public transportation is a critical need for many Pennsylvanians, mitigation recommendations from the national Center for Disease Control and the PA Department of Health within these services can be challenging to deploy. We have been in close communication with and supporting transit agencies throughout the state, as well as Amtrak, as they navigate adjusting schedules and services. Transit agencies have enacted frequent cleaning procedures to reduce traveler exposure risk. County shared ride services are working to ensure critical transportation services are available for those that depend on them. Through all of this, we've seen the perseverance and tenacity of public transportation providers who continue to provide an essential service to the neediest throughout the Commonwealth. The dedication that our transit agencies and their employees have shown to their communities is commendable. PennDOT has worked on a one-on-one level to address agency challenges and concerns and has taken several actions statewide to help in the response to COVID-19. We are continually providing guidance to agencies, sharing information with the Federal Transit Administration, and ensuring that design and construction activities in the non-highway modes follow our overall safety guidance.

Moving forward, beyond safety and operational considerations, we expect that our existing funding challenges will be exacerbated by this situation.

While the Turnpike Commission may be delayed in making their first payment in the new fiscal year (July 31st), we do not anticipate any immediate short-term operating impact to transit agencies across the state. Federal CARES Act awards for transit will be able to cover the immediate operating loss that they are experiencing. Of the total \$450 million of Turnpike funding, \$25 million is allocated across all the agencies across the Commonwealth for operating expenses. The Federal CARES Act transit funding for Urban systems is distributed directly to them through an application process with the Federal Transit Administration. The transit funding allocated for Rural systems is allocated to PennDOT, and then distributed to the Rural systems. As for capital projects, PennDOT is proceeding with existing projects as funding is currently available through existing reserves. If the Turnpike Commission is unable to make future payments beyond July or the Fiscal year, these projects would be re-evaluated.

Closing Comments

All of our agency efforts are evolving constantly as circumstances change – a tribute to the dedication of our team, and their keen ability to innovate. Our team in PennDOT Engineering District 6 in southeastern PA and our Driver and Vehicle services teams were the first to work their way through the impacts and have been mentors to their counterparts across the state as the COVID-19 virus effects spread. Many lessons learned in these early actions have aided in the statewide planning process.

We look forward to the time when COVID-19 is within control, and full transportation services can be restored. In every facet of the business we are developing strategies to phase in services when it is safe to do so and are forging plans to recover from the impacts of this disease. Your diligence in slowing the spread by following the guidance of the Department of Health and Governor Wolf, and your patience as we work through the challenges together, is truly appreciated.