

PennDOT's Response to COVID-19

COVID-19 has led all of us – both as people and as organizations – to take unprecedented measures and precautions. As per Governor Wolf's directive, every action we have 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 across the state and successfully transferred essential functions – including traffic management and executive leadership – to remote operations. Maintenance teams are engaged statewide to ensure our roads are kept safe and passable, and our crews remain available for responding to weather events.

This is a challenging time that has called for quick, decisive action with the goal of mitigating COVID-19's spread. We understand the impacts and frustration that result from some of our actions. Please know that we are constantly evaluating how we are moving forward and will continue to convey decisions that impact the public. We appreciate your patience and strongly urge you to follow federal and state guidance to not travel unless you must, and to take every personal precaution to tackle this challenge. We are all in this together.

Area Command

At the onset of COVID-19 impacts in Pennsylvania, PennDOT enacted its Incident Command structure centrally, ensuring consistent alignment with the direction set by Governor Wolf and the PA Department of Health, coordinated through the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA). All facets of our operation adjusted their respective Continuity of Operations (COOP) plans 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.

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 these 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;
- Requested of the United States Department of Homeland Security an extension of the October 1, 2020 deadline requiring a Real ID for domestic flights within the US; and
- Are addressing mission critical functions to support law enforcement and ensure essential customer service functions are completed.

Engineering Districts and County Maintenance Offices

First in southeastern PA and now statewide, PennDOT District offices were closed in response to guidance relative to COVID-19 mitigation. Many functions of these offices are continuing, thanks to

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telework and phone and video conferencing. 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 are assembled to respond to essential safety needs. These small groups are following guidance to minimize close contact and reduce the risk of spreading the virus.

Construction

PennDOT quickly put construction projects on hold – first regionally and now statewide – to minimize exposure for PennDOT and private-sector employees, and for the communities where they live and work. PennDOT uses advanced electronic bidding and construction documentation systems, so contractor payments for work completed prior to this hold are being processed timely. Our staff and contractors stand ready to address emergency needs within our projects as they arise. We understand the importance of these projects to the local community and to our industry partners. PennDOT has assembled a team comprised of our industry partners and the consulting engineering community, as well as the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission and the Federal Highway Administration, to determine how these activities can safely resume when health risks reduce.

Traffic Management Centers

To ensure that essential traffic management systems continue to function, PennDOT transitioned all its Traffic Management Centers (TMC) – the statewide TMC, four regional 24/7 operations and two peak-hour facilities – to remote operations. The first area impacted by the virus was southeastern Pennsylvania, where the highest traffic volumes exist. We quickly migrated these operations to other Traffic Management Centers within the Commonwealth. This successful shift of service enabled us to develop a broader approach, and now all are functioning remotely.

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. However, 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 23 rest areas statewide. All reopened rest areas will return to normal service with additional cleaning and maintenance. We will continue to evaluate the situation and determine whether additional locations can be reopened.

The reopened locations are:

- Interstate 79 northbound in Allegheny County, 8 miles north of Exit 45;
- Interstate 79 northbound in Crawford County, 8 miles north of Exit 154;
- Interstate 79 southbound in Crawford County, 3 miles south of Exit 166;
- Interstate 79 northbound in Lawrence County, 3.5 miles north of Exit 105;
- Interstate 79 southbound in Lawrence County, 3.5 miles south of Exit 113
- Interstate 79 northbound in Mercer County, 5 miles south of Exit 141;
- Interstate 79 southbound in Mercer County, 6 miles north of Exit 130;
- Interstate 80 eastbound in Centre County, 13 miles east of Exit 133;
- Interstate 80 westbound in Centre County, .5 miles west of Exit 147;
- Interstate 80 eastbound in Jefferson County, 1 mile east of Exit 86;
- Interstate 80 westbound in Jefferson County, 10 miles west of Exit 97;

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- Interstate 80 eastbound in Montour County, 4.5 miles east of Exit 215;
- Interstate 80 westbound in Montour County, 4.5 miles west of Exit 224;
- Interstate 80 eastbound in Venango County, .5 miles east of Exit 29;
- Interstate 80 westbound in Venango County, 4 miles west of Exit 35;
- Interstate 81 northbound in Cumberland County, .5 miles north of Exit 37;
- Interstate 81 southbound in Cumberland County, 5.5 miles south of Exit 44;
- Interstate 81 northbound in Lackawanna County, .5 miles north of Exit 202;
- Interstate 81 northbound in Luzerne County, 1.5 miles north of Exit 155;
- Interstate 81 southbound in Luzerne County, 1.5 miles south of Exit 159;
- Interstate 81 southbound in Susquehanna County, 4 miles south of Exit 211;
- Interstate 84 eastbound in Pike County, 6 miles east of Exit 20; and
- Interstate 84 westbound in Pike County, 1 mile west of Exit 26.

Transit

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.

All these efforts have unfolded within one week's time, 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 anxiously 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.