

Online Public Meeting Transcript

March 23, 2021

Alexis Campbell (Press Secretary):

Good evening and welcome to the statewide Online Public Forum hosted by the Pennsylvania State Transportation Commission and the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation. I'm Alexis Campbell with PennDOT, and I will be moderating the Forum this evening. We appreciate everyone taking the time to join us, and we hope that you find the conversation meaningful. We also want to note that this broadcast is being recorded and will be posted at a later date on the talkpatransportation.com website.

A couple of house cleaning things about the format of our session. This webcast includes closed captions in English and open captions in Spanish. A transcript of the audio content will be available by request at the end of the Public Comment Period. The transcript will be in an HTML format and automatically translate to a user's preferred language settings.

Microphones for the audience will remain muted throughout the presentation, however, your questions are invited and encouraged. To submit a question, look for the designated question button on the PAcast platform or e-mail your questions to RA-PennDOTSTC@pa.gov. Our support team is monitoring those feeds. They will send those questions to me, and I will present them to the speaker's panel for a response. Again, please submit your questions at any time. We will respond to as many questions as possible during our live Q&A session, but all questions received during the Public Comment Period and their responses will be published on the Talk PA Transportation website after the Public Comment Period concludes.

We will begin with presentations which will take about 20 minutes and then we will open the floor to answer questions [in] the remaining time. Our session will be one hour in length, so we will conclude at 7:30. Now, let's get started. If you participated in the last meeting, welcome back. If you are with us for the first time, welcome to the conversation. Tonight, I am joined by State Transportation Commissioner, Ronald Drnevich, PennDOT Deputy Secretary of Planning, Larry Shifflet, and our keynote speaker, PennDOT Transportation Secretary and STC chair, Yassmin Gramian. Our first presenter is State Transportation Commissioner Ronald Drnevich.

Thanks.

Ronald Drnevich (State Transportation Commissioner):

Good evening and thank you for attending this important meeting. I have been a State Transportation Commissioner for over eight years. The State Transportation Commission, also known as the STC, is comprised of 15 members and serves as PennDOT's board of directors. The STC was established by Act 120 in 1970, which is the same law that created PennDOT from the old Pennsylvania Department of Highways, since PennDOT is actually responsible for all modes of transportation in the state. The commission is comprised of representatives from across the state with various transportation backgrounds. For example, I'm a resident of Dauphin County in central Pennsylvania, I'm on the Public-Private Partnership Board, and have over 40 years of transportation engineering.

The committee membership represents both a wide range of expertise and geographic locations throughout the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth is responsible for the high-level evaluation of the Commission, excuse me, is responsible for the high-level evaluation of Pennsylvania's transportation system. We provide policy-driven direction in the development of the 12-Year Program. We work on your behalf to deliver a safe and efficient transportation [system] for all residents. The 12-Year Program outlines Pennsylvania's next 12 years of transportation projects. It is multimodal. The TYP, 12-Year Program, represents all modes and means of transportation including highways, bridges, public transit, aviation, and rail, as well as active transportation such as bicycling and walking.

Tonight marks an important milestone in our public outreach process for the update of the 2023 12-Year Program. The first step in the update process and evaluation of the performance of the transportation system. The evaluation is captured in the Transportation Performance Report, which was briefly discussed. It is the TPR. It is Pennsylvania's tool for monitoring the performance of the transportation network and tonight we will discuss some of the results with you.

It includes information on accidents, improved roadway surfaces, congestion relief and that sort of thing. The release of the TPR also signals the start of the Public Comment Period. This Online Public Forum is part of our biannual 45-day Public Comment Period designed specifically to collect public input. Years ago, the State Transportation Commission would have meetings in different parts of the state and a few people would attend those meetings; and mostly they were lobbyists. This program, now that we have outreach, is very significant. We have reached more than 3,300 comments from the public throughout Pennsylvania out of a goal of approximately 7,000 before the period is over.

The transportation program; as well as Pennsylvania's Long Range Transportation Plan and Freight Movement Plan, and other regional and statewide plans and programs; all gain your input from this. Of those 3,300 comments that we get, there are some real nuggets in there that we would not have gotten otherwise from meetings like we did before. Our 2023 12-Year Program update process will be completed next year, and the outcome will be a planning tool that lists all projects planned for Pennsylvania over a 12-year period. The first four years complete the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program, the STIP. If you are not familiar with this tool, please take a look at the 2021 12-Year Program on our website at talkpatransportation.com. The statewide Long Range Transportation Plan and Freight Movement Plan are also being updated and will be completed by the fall of this year.

Those plans will also benefit from your input. So, as noted earlier, your feedback is very important. If you have not taken the transportation survey yet, please visit talkpatransportation.com to take the online survey. To complete the survey over the phone or request a paper copy of the survey, please contact PennDOT. I look forward to hearing your comments and answering your questions later tonight. For now, please welcome Deputy Secretary of Planning Larry Shifflet to give an overview of the TPR, Pennsylvania's Long Range Transportation Plan, and the Freight Movement Plan.

Thank you.

Larry S. Shifflet (Deputy Secretary of Planning):

Thank you, Commissioner Drnevich, and good evening to all of our participants tonight. It's great to be with you.

The graphic you see on the screen illustrates three primary elements of PennDOT's planning process. They include planning, programming, and performance measurement. Each of these elements is guided by the Long Range Transportation Plan, the 12-Year Program, and the Transportation Performance Report, respectively. I will start with the Transportation Performance Report. Last month the State Transportation Commission adopted the latest version of this report, and it is available for review on the STC's website, talktransportation.com.

The 12-Year Program's update cycle overlaps with the update of our Long Range Transportation Plan and Freight Movement Plan. The input received during tonight's public forum, as Commissioner Drnevich noted, will be used to help shape not only the 12-Year Program but the Long Range Transportation and Freight Movement Plans. PennDOT began the process of updating these two plans in 2020. They will be completed in a few months and will serve as a blueprint for PennDOT's future Transportation projects and initiatives statewide.

The transportation performance report explains the progress and needs of Pennsylvania's Transportation system over the most recent two-year period. The report focuses on five key performance measures: safety, mobility, preservation, accountability, and funding. Let's take a closer look at how we did, beginning with safety. Safety is our highest transportation priority, and our dedicated focus continues to result in a safer transportation system. The number of roadway crash fatalities in Pennsylvania continues to decline.

In 2019, crash fatalities were the lowest in recorded history. PennDOT continues to use a data-driven approach to further encourage improvement in those numbers. In 2019, Pennsylvania matched an all-time low in the number of work zone crashes, reversing a two-year upward trend. A new state law, Act 86 of 2018, now allows automated speed enforcement cameras in work zones on certain Pennsylvania highways, including the Turnpike and our interstate highways. We initiated the program in March of 2020 to help reduce the number of work zone crashes. The end result benefits our highway workers and the traveling public as well.

The next measure I want to hit on is mobility. Moving people and goods safely and efficiently is vital to our quality of life and our economic wellbeing. Highway capacity across Pennsylvania has remained relatively constant in recent years, while total daily vehicle miles traveled has increased by more than eight million since 2013. The focus has shifted from large, capacity-adding projects to preserving and maintaining the current highway system, optimizing the performance of the existing system, and managing travel demand.

We work with partners to reduce travel delays through demand management, such as promoting public transportation use, flexible work schedules, and telecommuting. We also accommodate more traffic on existing roadways through operation improvements such as improved traffic signals and integrating technology. Having a choice of well-connected transportation modes is key for the efficient and safe mobility of people and goods. Unfortunately, public transit ridership plummeted during Fiscal Year 2019-2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and transit agencies have been forced to cut service. We know public transportation is a vital part of many Pennsylvanians' lives, and we have increased health and safety regulations on public transit to ensure the wellbeing of both riders and employees.

The next measure I want to hit on is preservation. Pennsylvania's vast network of roadways and bridges requires effective resource management to improve and maintain the system. State bridge conditions continue to improve through targeted investments in our infrastructure. PennDOT has greatly reduced the number of bridges in poor condition through both traditional and non-traditional means, such as public-private partnerships, however, there is inadequate funding to continue this method of prioritization.

In Pennsylvania, 6,400 bridges are owned and maintained by counties or municipalities. Local bridges have improved in recent years with the number of bridges rated poor now under 1,800. This is an 18% improvement over the past 5 years. We are helping local partners further address this issue through bridge bundling programs to help save time and resources. Our local partners are also supported through Act 89 of 2013 which established a special fund allowing counties to implement a \$5 fee on vehicle registrations. 24 counties have participated and have used funding to improve local bridges. The Transportation Advisory Committee approved the findings and recommendations of a Local Small Bridge Study Report in 2020. The study included recommendations to help create increased capacity and incentives to facilitate uniformity in local small bridge asset management. Small bridges are structures that are less than 20 feet in length. In addition to investing in bridges, we are focused on improving our roadways. PennDOT's transportation asset management plan provides data-driven approaches to help select the most cost-effective improvements. Pennsylvania's roadway network is roughly the same size as New York, New Jersey, and New England's roadway networks combined, and still our pavement conditions, on average, have been slowly improving over the past several years.

Our next measure is accountability. For transportation agencies, accountability means making the most of every dollar available to provide a safe, efficient, and accessible transportation system. Modernizing technologies, materials, and practices, forming beneficial partnerships, tracking performance, and collaborating with communities are some of the ways Pennsylvania continues to enhance resource management and efficiency with greater impacts.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought with it the need for an increasing number of PennDOT employees to work from home. At the end of 2020, approximately one-third of the Department's workforce was teleworking. We managed to adapt to the times and continue business as usual with all accountability measures staying steady. For over a decade, we have completed more than 90% of highway construction projects on time each year. In mid-March of 2020, all construction projects were temporarily suspended due to COVID-19. Still, on time and on budget performance has been steady for PennDOT's highway construction contracts, with 91% of highway contract projects being on time in 2020.

Funding is our final performance measure and is an essential foundation for transportation performance. We carefully manage the Commonwealth's \$9.67 billion transportation budget to prioritize improvements for safe and efficient travel. PennDOT's Secretary and STC chair, Yassmin Gramian will be speaking next, and is going to elaborate further on this area.

It is with honor to share highlights of the 2021 Transportation Performance Report with you, and again, I encourage you to read the full report on talkpatransportation.com. I look forward to our dialogue during

the question and answer session later this evening, and now I would like to introduce Secretary Yassmin Gramian.

Yassmin Gramian (PennDOT Secretary and State Transportation Commission Chair)

Thank you, Deputy Secretary Shifflet and Commissioner Drnevich for your informative presentations. The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 has affected public health in a manner that we haven't seen for decades.

Changes in how Pennsylvanians work, shop, and travel have also had an enormous effect on transportation revenues. The decrease in the demand of travel and the way we travel, significantly reduced the gas tax and other revenues. This is in addition to already existing and growing funding challenges that we were taking steps to address at that time. While we were confident in the actions we were taking and our planning efforts, no one could have anticipated the breadth or the depth of the impacts of COVID-19 on the global stage. COVID-19 has had a major impact on the Motor License Fund. From March 2020 to December 2020, revenues were \$450 million less than anticipated. As a result, we needed major spending reductions in maintenance operations, construction lettings, as well as future payments to municipalities. These reductions will continue well into calendar year 2021, as we expect total COVID revenue losses to be between \$500 and \$600 million. We are working hard to ensure the future of transportation in Pennsylvania.

In November 2020, we launched a new program: PennDOT Pathways. Through this program we continue to analyze new, future-focused sources of funding for our highways and bridges that could better serve our communities and all Pennsylvanians for the next generation. We also held a 30-day comment period to get your feedback on transportation funding sources. As part of this program, PennDOT authorized an alternative funding, planning, and environmental linkages study to explore options for funding the maintenance and improvement of the state's highways and bridges. Predicting the future of transportation funding is very complex. PennDOT, the STC, and our partners continue to work hard to stay ahead of the issue and ensure your safety and transportation needs are met.

On March 12, Governor Tom Wolf signed an Executive Order establishing the Transportation Revenue Options Commission, which will develop comprehensive funding recommendations for Pennsylvania's large and aging infrastructure. In establishing the commission, the Governor committed to phasing out the gas tax which is becoming an unreliable source of funding for Pennsylvania's vast transportation network. The group will have its first meeting on March 25, and will submit its report to the Governor's office by August 1, 2021.

We are dedicated to constantly creating safer infrastructure that will get you where you need to go safely and efficiently. PennDOT was recently recognized with two 2020 Annual Transportation Systems Management and Operations (TSMO) awards presented by The National Operation Center of Excellence. TSMO is focused on improving how roadways operate within the restraints of PennDOT's existing roadway infrastructure.

As a state that has always been at the forefront of innovation and industry, it should come as no surprise that Pennsylvania is at the very epicenter of the rise of highly automated vehicle technology or HAV. Pennsylvania's world-class research universities have continually served as a breeding ground for

technological advances with Carnegie Mellon University, the birthplace of self-driving vehicles, and the University of Pennsylvania's Robotics Research Program. PennDOT has also been active in national efforts to develop uniform standards and practices for HAVs. We plan to take action to sustain Pennsylvania's Leadership in HAV research while simultaneously ensuring that public safety remains the paramount priority as HAVs are tested on the roadways.

Before we get into the questions and answer forum, I would like to say how proud I am of the good work done by our great staff at the Department of Transportation throughout the state. Our folks are genuinely dedicated to the work they do to improve our transportation system. The transportation effort in Pennsylvania is not exclusive to PennDOT alone. We rely on the support and expertise of our many partners across the state. We have 24 regional Metropolitan and Rural Planning Organizations who keep us connected to your communities. We also collaborate with a vast number of transportation stakeholders such as our elected officials, municipalities, interest groups, transportation authorities, and other transportation advocates. A big thank you to all of you for your dedicated service. And now we want to hear from you, our valued customers.

Let's open the question and answer portion of the meeting. Please remember to try to focus your questions tonight on the upcoming update of the 2023 12-Year Program, the Long Range Transportation Plan, and the Freight Movement Plan. We want to hear about your transportation issues, concerns, or even your ideas to make Pennsylvania's transportation infrastructure work better for you. I will now turn it over to Alexis to begin our Q&A discussions.

Thank you, Alexis.

Alexis Campbell (Press Secretary)

Thank you, Secretary.

And thank you to all of our speakers tonight. We appreciate hearing from you.

We will now transition to the question and answer segment of tonight's forum. As you know, we did invite participants to submit questions before tonight's forum and we did receive quite a few. And we will begin our discussion with those submissions, but we still want to hear from you. So, if you have not yet had an opportunity to ask a question or if any part of the presentation this evening has sparked new questions, please feel free to submit them now. If you are on the PAcast platform, all you need to do is click ask a question. And if you are viewing this on a different platform, please e-mail your questions to RA-PennDOTSTC@pa.gov. Please include your name, where you are from, and your question or concern and we will respond to as many of your questions as we can until 7:30 p.m. And if your question is not answered tonight, please look for all of the questions and answers to be posted at a later date at TalkPATransportation.com.

So, let's begin with a few of the questions that were submitted early by e-mail or with meeting registration forms, and then we will follow with some questions received during the forum. I am going to ask the question and then I will invite the panel members to respond accordingly. I do ask our panel members to try to limit your response time to about five minutes so that we can cover as many questions as possible. So, let's start with question number one.

And this question is for Secretary Gramian. So, Secretary, this question is from Pat. And Pat asks, what suggestions or plans are being discussed to capture revenue from the growing number of electric vehicles that are utilizing our transportation infrastructure?

Yassmin Gramian (PennDOT Secretary and State Transportation Commission Chair):

Thank you for that great question. PennDOT supports the increased adoption of electric vehicles, but it does amplify the need for new revenue solutions to support transportation, as fuel efficient vehicles and the rise of electric cars continue impacting our revenue. This trend shows no sign of slowing as evidenced by auto makers planned transition to electric vehicles. For example, General Motors announced earlier this year, that it would produce only electric powered vehicles by 2035 to meet the market demand. In addition to passenger cars, even heavier, more damaging vehicles are moving towards electronic technologies. This includes the light trucks and van segments of the trucking industry. And you may have heard, on March 3rd, FedEx announced by 2040 [that] the entire FedEx parcel pickup and delivery fleet will be zero-emission electric vehicles. And by 2025, 50% of FedEx Express Global vehicle purchases will be electrical, rising to 100% of all purchases by 2030.

So, currently Pennsylvania has an Alternative Vehicle Fuel Tax that is levied on the electricity used to charge an EV as an alternative fuel. Our policy office is very engaged in various initiatives related to planning for the increased availability and adoption of electric vehicles. In addition to working with the Department of Revenue on increased compliance with current Alternative Fuel Vehicle Tax, we are also working with the Legislature on a proposal for a fee that electric vehicle owners would pay at registration and renewal.

Alexis Campbell (Press Secretary)

Thank you.

Thanks for that response. The next is for Deputy Secretary Shifflet. Deputy Secretary Shifflet, this question is from Ken. And he asks, what is the algorithm that is used by PennDOT to determine which state roads are repaired and when? Having a better understanding of the methodology of the repair decisions and timing can be a big help in responding to residents. Can you answer that one?

Larry S. Shifflet (Deputy Secretary of Planning):

Sure can. Thank you, Alexis, and Ken, good question.

Rather than an algorithm, Ken, it is a project selection evaluation and prioritization criteria that is established at the local level, meaning at our Metropolitan and Rural Planning Organizations. As we have discussed tonight pretty significantly, every two years we are required to lead an effort with our planning organizations, as well as our federal partners, Federal Highway, and Federal Transit to update our 12-Year Transportation Program. As part of that, we also have what is known as the State Transportation Improvement Program, or the STIP, that is the first four years of our 12-Year Program. This process, as I did mention earlier, starts with the release of the Transportation Performance Report.

From that report, we take a look at how we have done over the last two years. And then in earnest, the process really starts this evening with input from the online forum and the public comments that we have been receiving and plan to receive through the open Public Comment Period. That information is

shared back with our regional Metropolitan and Rural Planning Organization to help prioritize projects. Again, with the public input as part of our overall outreach effort. Then, as part of that, we do release some critical guidance, two pieces of guidance which are really important to the overall process. One is general and procedural guidance, which we work very closely with all of those partners to develop. That lays out the expectations of prioritization, programming of projects, and the ability to maneuver, change, and adjust based on cost of projects throughout the two-year period.

The other one which is equally, or depending on if you are a funding person, may be more important is financial guidance. That lays out the formulas for distribution of funds to each of our Metropolitan and Rural Planning Organizations, and then as part of that they utilize the input again from this meeting tonight, as well as the comments we receive online to develop their project selection, evaluation, and prioritization, and move that forward.

Thanks.

Alexis Campbell (Press Secretary)

Great, thank you.

We're going to move on to our next question. This question is for Commissioner Drnevich. There you are. Hello.

This question is from Mike. Mike asks, is PennDOT addressing ways to improve planning and data for better decision making?

Ronald Drnevich (State Transportation Commissioner)

Those three items are very connected when we come right down to it: decision making, data, and planning. PennDOT certainly has a lot of data. We know road conditions, accident rates, failures, congestion; everything related to the roads and bridges. They're in bad shape. They know what ridership is on transit and those sorts of things. So that data is there. The trick is to get it in the right place and to be able to use it. The Department is in the process of developing a repository that they have been working on for more than a year now to pull all of that data into a single place where it can be accessed readily and utilized for decision making. It is really improved when you have the right data. If that is true, then the planning should come out pretty well.

The point is, though, there is a lot of other data that they don't have in that repository that comes from the actual site of a project that's being planned. We are not sure what is happening alongside it. So, more data needs to be gathered; and they've developed this system called PennDOT Connects that they are implementing to pull all of the data related to a project into the decision for how to improve it in its process. There is nothing worse than repaving a piece of road for a mile or two, and two weeks later somebody comes in to dig it up and put in a utility or something of that nature. Very frustrating. We don't need to see that happen anywhere. It is a loss of money, time, and effort.

Not only that, but the whole repository as well as PennDOT Connects becomes available to the various MPOs and Planning Departments that are throughout the state. We have 24 of them in Pennsylvania that actually filter all of the planning that they need in their areas with priorities up to the Department

to get into the 12-Year Program. So, that whole process, is getting better and better. With a concerted effort to involve not just the project details but project areas and locations, users, and the plans that are in the region where projects are. So, we are making progress in this area. It is a very good question and needs continued attention. But thank you.

Alexis Campbell (Press Secretary)

Thank you.

We will go to our next question. This one is from James and it is for Secretary Gramian. And James is asking, is there anyone that goes out and visually inspects work zones to ensure that they are safe for travel by the motoring public? Or are the standards set and enforced strictly by the companies performing the work?

Yassmin Gramian (PennDOT Secretary and State Transportation Commission Chair)

Yes, all traffic control devices are being inspected daily. If it is for short-term closure they are inspected daily. Traffic control devices for long-term closure are inspected twice each day, once at the beginning of the day and once at the end of each working day. This is done by PennDOT staff.

Contractors are also required to review the traffic control set up as well. And PennDOT's construction and maintenance projects have a quality assurance program to routinely evaluate field performance. And PennDOT's Central Office goes through a statewide review of its program every two years through FHWA.

So, it depends on where the project is and who the owner of the project is. For example, for PennDOT projects, Department staff or consultant inspectors review work zones daily with documentation for short-term closure, as I mentioned; weekly for long-term closure. For PennDOT maintenance projects, foremen are responsible for the daily implementation of work zones. For permanent municipal projects, the contractors performing the work are responsible for the oversight of the work zone.

PennDOT permit staff routinely reviews the work zones to ensure conformance. In all cases, if any work zone isn't to the provision identified within the publication of PennDOT 213 or the project's specific plans, those are addressed immediately to ensure the safety of both road users and the workers.

Alexis Campbell (Press Secretary)

Great, thank you.

This next question is for Deputy Secretary Shifflet, and it is from Brian. And Brian asks, how are the Freight Plans and the Long Range Transportation Plans being addressed and implemented in this TYP update? And what resources are needed for these Freight Plans?

Larry S. Shifflet (Deputy Secretary of Planning):

Thank you, Alexis.

We will hit on the first part of that question. Pennsylvania's freight industry obviously is the cornerstone to the Commonwealth's economy. And I would say during this past year, in the pandemic mode, the

importance of our freight network and moving essential goods and supplies has never been clearer. In addition to the Long Range Transportation Plan, as you said, we are also updating our Statewide Freight Plan. This will result in the development of a Freight Investment Plan and better position Pennsylvania to be eligible for Federal Freight Funding that's available, again, as part of the Federal Highway Administration's Freight Program. The updated Freight Plan will be addressing pressing issues like truck parking, [which] always has been and continues to be an issue. And other freight related issues that will only grow more significant as our reliance on goods and services and moving them more efficiently and more quickly grow.

Emerging issues such as autonomous, explosion growth of e-commerce as well, that we have seen not just during the pandemic period but leading up to the pandemic, and the ever-changing supply chain patterns, are still huge factors and play a big part and affect our overall planning process. And of course, all of our decision making will need to be informed by the need to reduce the impact of this to our transportation network as well as on our changing climate and to ensure that we are meeting the overall need of our customers, our communities, and the citizens in an equitable and justly manner.

On the resources part of that question, obviously, that's a very important question. Resources are always important. Plans don't get implemented without resources of all kinds. Not just money, but you also need the people and the partner organization. As the secretary mentioned in one of her closing slides, that we work closely with throughout the Commonwealth. Clearly, we're at a point where resources for transportation system improvements are inadequate. And revenue sources, mainly the Liquid Fuels Tax, is not sustainable with the advent of, again, we talked about electric vehicles. There is a whole lot of other things that are involved with that as well. That's one of the key components right now. The bottom line, obviously, with the resource implications is that we have to now start finding new ways of raising transportation revenue just like the other states are looking at it. Our PennDOT Pathways initiative is one initiative that we have out there taking a look at transportation funding. As we know, transportation funding is not a static issue. It is dynamic and we must change and adapt just like other businesses and other business models must change and adapt.

So, we are looking to accomplish much through our partnerships and the strategies and strategic alliances that we have recognizing that plans, goals are achievable as we work together. Again, I think we have a very collaborative approach as we develop our 12-Year Program. And we carry that same approach through with our Long Range Transportation Plan as well as our Freight Plan.

Alexis Campbell (Press Secretary)

Thanks. We are going to move on to our next question. This question is for Commissioner Drnevich. It's from Tim. And Tim is asking what are the important trends affecting the 12-Year Program?

Ronald Drnevich (State Transportation Commissioner)

Oh, man. There are a lot of them. There are a lot of trends going on. Let me think of a couple. One is aging. Our interstates were initiated in the late '50s and most of them built in the late '60s. That makes most of the highways in the state 60, going on 70 years old. And time is tough, especially when it is utilized heavily. The vehicles in those early years were not as heavy as the trucks we are allowing on the highways now. It just combines with the rest of it.

Driver distraction is another one, it is separate from wear and tear, and the distractions are more monumental than they used to be. Electronics are amazing in vehicles. Vehicles start to talk to each other in this day and age. One can come across an accident and put it up on the sign and a message goes out; somebody six cars back has the message that there's a problem there. What is interesting about this stuff is our Transportation Improvement Plan, our four-year plan, is financially constrained. We can't plan anything or put anything in it unless we have dollars for it. If we can't predict the dollars, it is very hard to put a plan that you can complete. It's like building a foundation without having the dollars to finish the house. I am going to talk much more about that. It is an issue everybody understands. I would say that we see it every day.

It used to be a mailman came once a day, and now there is a delivery truck going 10 times a day to different houses up and down the street, whether it's delivering food, or Amazon delivering something that people don't have to go out and shop for anymore. And while we think that cuts traffic back, there's more of those delivery trucks out there and now drones are in the picture. It's very extensive.

The pandemic is another piece of all of this. It is going to alleviate at some point. Will it go back to what it was? Probably not. I could see a change that we must anticipate somehow of how someone decides to go in to work an hour later rather than wait for an hour in traffic, and make his commute 15 minutes instead of an hour. There's going to be a flattening perhaps of traffic congestion at rush hour, maybe it disappears. Maybe there will be less traffic.

Automated vehicles beyond that are another part. All of these things temper the decisions. It gets complex when you don't know what is happening out there, but you can bet it's going to be different. And we have a lot of people that really noodle on this stuff to make sure what we are doing is consistent with what might happen as we move to the future. A good time in one way, interesting and fun, but complex as well.

Alexis Campbell (Press Secretary)

Definitely. Thank you.

This next question is for Secretary Gramian. It's from Thomas. And Thomas asks, how does PennDOT plan to systematically address bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure in the future?

Yassmin Gramian (PennDOT Secretary and State Transportation Commission Chair)

Okay. So, PennDOT completed the Active Transportation Plan back in 2019. And this plan outlines a vision and framework for improving conditions for walking and bicycling across the state. Most notably, actually, for those Pennsylvanians who walk and bike out of necessity, rather than for leisure or recreation. The active transportation plan also identifies and helps prioritize strategies intended to increase the number of people walking and biking, while supporting safety and multimodal connectivity throughout the state. This plan serves as a resource for MPOs and RPOs and municipalities throughout the state, providing guidance to local governments as they develop and implement regional and local bicycle and pedestrian plans.

Also, as Deputy Secretary Shifflet mentioned, our PennDOT Connects Project approach helps us to incorporate bike/ped issues early on in the project development process. Through PennDOT Connects,

we are talking to our partners at the local county and regional level earlier in the process, so that we can incorporate their asks and assets that the community truly feels is important to them and really fits in the fabric of their neighborhood. In the past we would get through a good chunk of the project on the design side, and something would come up when talking to our partners. The township would want a pedestrian walkway or new streetlights. And it could ultimately affect our project delivery as well as the project cost. PennDOT Connects helps us to avoid some of these surprises and, while we won't be able to accommodate every request, we will end up with more inclusive projects though.

We want every project to be considered in a wholistic way to look for opportunities to improve safety, mobility, access, and environmental outcomes for all modes of transportation including bikes, bicycles, pedestrians, transit, utilities, and community health. Earlier collaboration will ensure that projects will meet current and projected needs as much as possible, and we will reduce costly changes further in the project development process.

Alexis Campbell (Press Secretary)

Thank you.

We have another question here it is for Deputy Secretary Shifflet. And this question is from Jane. She asks, commercial trucks are the main cause of roadway wear and damage. Would it be more logical to bring roads up to present day needs instead of just putting up weight limit signs?

Larry S. Shifflet (Deputy Secretary of Planning):

Thank you, Alexis. I am going to hit on one of the most recent Transportation Advisory Committee studies that was conducted just within the last year. That study was on truck weight exemptions. As part of that study, there was an indication in there that a 100,000-pound truck operating on a low-volume rural road, for example, has a greater impact on bridges and pavement deterioration than the same truck that operates on a high-volume interstate highway, simply because the cost of the repairs and maintenance are shared among fewer users. So that was one of the more recent Transportation Advisory Committee studies that was done on just a quick excerpt from that. As noted in the presentation by the Secretary, we are losing significant buying power due to more fuel-efficient vehicles.

The influx of electric vehicles, which is resulting in less revenue, combined with the overall cost of inflation as well. We currently just do not have a sustainable form of funding to maintain the current network. Traffic routes and primary highways generally are not posted. If they are posted, obviously, they do become a priority project for us and the MPOs and the RPOs to look at as part that prioritization process and making sure we find a way to get the resources, [even] if that means pushing another project back to try to eliminate or avoid a weight posting on that. Now, on the secondary routes, obviously, for the most part they weren't designed or built to carry overweight vehicles. So, a little bit harder to not have weight restrictions or postings on some of those secondary routes because of that.

Thank you.

Alexis Campbell (Press Secretary)

And while you are unmuted, Deputy Secretary Shifflet, I have another question for you. This is a question from Andrew. And he asks, will local government be represented on the new Transportation Revenue Options Commission to recommend new funding streams?

Larry S. Shifflet (Deputy Secretary of Planning):

Yes, I will say there are a couple of definitions of local government. Obviously, we have a few different associations. You have PSATs, you have CCAP, you have the Transportation Supervisors, the County Commissioners, and you have the PSABs which is the boroughs.

The Executive Order that was issued did limit the membership. Therefore, we weren't able to include each of those groups like I think we did last round, when we had the Transportation Funding Advisory Committee. We do have PSATs, and I'm confident that they will share all information with all of the other local groups as well. We do have quarterly meetings with what is called a Municipal Advisory Committee, where each of those local municipal groups are represented, and also, we plan to share information through that resource as well with those that were not able to be included. So again, limited membership means we can't include each of those groups, but we did include PSATs. Dave Sanko, who is the Executive Director, has promised me that he will share back through his channels to each of those other organizations the information that is shared at each of the Transportation Revenue Options Committee Meetings.

Alexis Campbell (Press Secretary)

Thank you very much.

We are going -- I think we have time for one more question. And this is for Secretary Gramian. Secretary, this question is from Aaron. And Aaron asks, does PennDOT have any goals or plans to reduce the department's carbon footprint?

Yassmin Gramian (PennDOT Secretary and State Transportation Commission Chair)

Yes, PennDOT is in the process of electrifying more of its fleets in response to Governor Wolf's 2019 Executive Order. Our goal is to replace 25% of our passenger vehicle fleet with hybrid electric or battery electric vehicles by 2025. Currently we only have four hybrid electric vehicles in our fleet. Additionally, we are also installing charging stations at some of our facilities. We have three charging stations at the fleet management division expanding to six by the end of this year. Two charging stations are at Greene County Maintenance Facility; five are planned for the new District 6 which is Philadelphia's Regional Office.

Also, we work closely with the GreenGov Council, which works with the state agencies on meeting energy efficiency and sustainability goals. And as we build and upgrade new department facilities, we are constantly installing energy saving features like LED lighting and water saving plumbing fixtures.

Alexis Campbell (Press Secretary)

Great, thank you very much. Well, at this time we are going to close the Q&A session and conclude our Online Public Forum. I want to encourage you to please share your comments through the online survey that's available now through the STC website. As a reminder, any of the questions that we didn't get to during the forum will be answered, and those answers will be posted on the website as well.

We will be accepting those surveys through April 14, and even if you participated today, we still would love it if you would complete the survey. And we also want to let you know that a full recording of tonight's meeting will be available on the website. When the comment period closes, we're going to collect that feedback and provide a summary to our commissioners, to the Metropolitan and Rural Planning Organizations, and this data is very important and it will be used to inform the updated Pennsylvania Long Range Transportation Plan and the Freight Movement Plan.

The survey results will be posted on the website and as noted earlier the questions that were discussed tonight and those we didn't get to, we are going to post those responses on the website at the conclusion the comment period in mid-April for public review. There are many ways to stay in touch with PennDOT. They are listed on the screen there. Also, we have presence on all of the social media channels as well. We encourage your input, and we appreciate it.

Thank you all again.

Please stay healthy and be safe. And enjoy the rest of your evening. Thanks.