



2023 Online Public Forum Transcript

April 12, 2023

Alexis Campbell (Moderator):

On behalf of the State Transportation Commission and the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, I would like to welcome you to the 2023 Online Public Forum for the 12-Year Program update. I'm Alexis Campbell with PennDOT, and I will be moderating the forum this evening. We appreciate everyone taking 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 online at TalkPATransportation.com.

A few housekeeping items before we begin. This webcast will include closed captions in English, open captions in Spanish, and American Sign Language interpretation. A transcript of the audio content will also be available by request at the end of the Public Comment Period. The transcript will be automatically able to translate to a user's preferred language setting.

So, throughout the presentation your questions are invited and encouraged. To submit a question, look for the designated question button on the PAcast platform or email your questions to RA-PennDOTSTC@pa.gov. You can also comment on the live Facebook feed. We will respond to as many questions as possible during our live Q&A session, but all questions received tonight and throughout the Public Comment Period and their responses will be posted at TalkPATransportation.com after the comment period concludes.

We will begin with presentations which will take about 30 minutes, and then we will open up the floor to answer questions for the remaining time. In response to feedback received after the last Online Public Forum, we've extended the time allotted for Q&A to 60 minutes, so the meeting will conclude at 8 o'clock.

With that, I would like to welcome and introduce our keynote speaker, PennDOT's Deputy Secretary of Planning, Larry Shifflett, to officially kick off the Forum.

Larry S. Shifflett (Deputy Secretary of Planning, PennDOT):

Thank you, Alexis, and good evening to everybody! Thank you for joining us on a beautiful spring day in Pennsylvania. So, for those that are taking the time to join us, an extra special thank you on [this] nice evening. If you're with us for the first time, thanks again for joining our conversation. If you joined last time in 2021, thanks for coming back. Obviously, you found some of that dialogue meaningful and we're hoping to get a few of those new members finding it for the next [cycle].

As Alexis mentioned, my name is Larry Shifflett. I'm currently the Deputy Secretary for Planning at PennDOT. Tonight, I'm joined by two other presenters, esteemed colleagues from our State Transportation Commission, State Transportation Commissioner Ron Drnevich and State Transportation Commissioner Karen Michael.

Each of us has some interesting information to share with you – and hopefully you find it interesting – before the Q&A session, and then all three of us will work together as a team to address your questions at that time. As Alexis mentioned, we're hopeful that we'll have a full hour for Q&A as we move forward with the presentation.

With that, I would now like to introduce Commissioner Ron Drnevich.

Ronald Drnevich (State Transportation Commissioner):

Thank you, Larry. I've been a State Transportation Commissioner for over 10 years now. 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 of 1970, which is the same law that created PennDOT. To give you an idea, that was 53 years ago.

I hate to admit it, but I remember when that happened. It used to be the used to be [named] the Pennsylvania Department of Highways, and the focus was always on highways and bridges. But [Act 120 of 1970] brought all transportation together into one focus area, and the Department has functioned that way ever since.

The Commission is comprised of representatives from across the state with various transportation backgrounds. For example, I'm a resident of Dauphin County, a member of the Pennsylvania Public-Private Partnerships Board, and have over 45 years of transportation engineering experience.

The Commission members represent a wide range of expertise and geographic locations throughout the Commonwealth, so they go from Erie to Philadelphia and every place in between, so there's good spread across that area. The Commission is responsible for the high-level evaluation of Pennsylvania's transportation system. We provide policy-driven direction to guide the development of the 12-Year Program. We work on your behalf and use your feedback 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's multimodal, meaning that it represents all modes and all means of transportation including highways, bridges, public transit, aviation, and rail, as well as active transportation such as bicycling and walking, which has really come up in recent years.

Tonight marks an important milestone in our outreach process for updating the 12-Year Program. The first step in this process is to evaluate the performance of the transportation system as captured in the 2023 Transportation Performance Report. It's a thorough review of what's the status of everything that's happened in transportation, the status of our projects, and the status of the transportation system itself. It's a tool to measure and monitor the performance of our transportation network in the most recent two-year period.

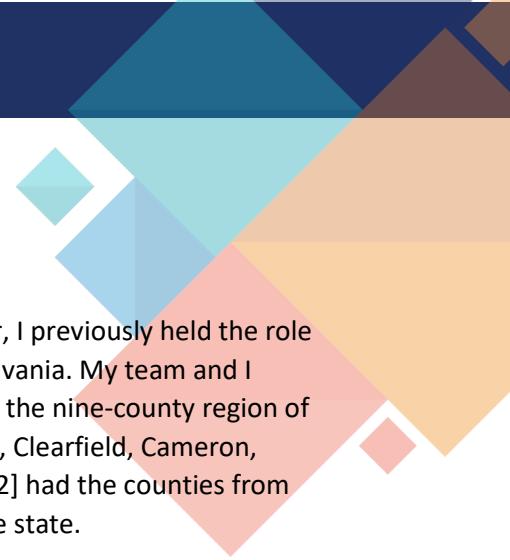
Tonight, we'll discuss some of the results of that TPR with you. The release of the Transportation Performance Report also leads into the start of the Public Comment Period, including the Online Public Forum, designed to collect public input and feedback. That public [input] is not just tonight, but everything over the last [month] and for another [two weeks]. The feedback is used to inform the 12-Year Program and other state and regional transportation plans.

The current 12-Year Program update process will be completed next year resulting in a planning tool listing all projects planned for Pennsylvania over the next 12-year period. The first four years of that period comprise the statewide transportation improvement plan called the 'STIP.'

If you're not familiar with the tool, please take a look at the most recent 12-Year Program on our website at [TalkPATransportation.com](https://talkpatransportation.com) – that's probably been mentioned three or four times already; it's a good connection if you can recall it.

I look forward to hearing your comments and answering your questions later tonight. For now, please welcome STC member Karen Michael to give you an overview of that Transportation Performance Report.

Thank you.



Karen Michael (State Transportation Commissioner):

Good evening.

Thank you, Commissioner Drnevlch. In addition to my role as a Commission member, I previously held the role of District Executive for PennDOT's District 2 in Clearfield County, Clearfield, Pennsylvania. My team and I were responsible for planning and supervising the state highway system throughout the nine-county region of District 2. In addition to Clearfield County, that includes McKean, Elk, Potter, Clinton, Clearfield, Cameron, Mifflin, and Juniata. I know, that's a mouthful! I used to explain it this way: [District 2] had the counties from the New York border almost all the way down to Harrisburg in the central part of the state.

I am pleased to join you all tonight for this opportunity to highlight how critical planning for transportation future is to Pennsylvania's growth.

The graphic shown here illustrates the three primary elements of PennDOT's planning process: programming, planning, and performance measurement. Each of these is guided by a resource specifically developed to encompass the corresponding planning process element. The planning element is guided by the Statewide Long Range Transportation Plan; a 20-year plan focused on setting PennDOT's direction through measured goals, strategies, and plans. The programming element, which focuses on prioritizing projects and identifying the best use of available funding, is represented in the 12-Year Program.

Now, I'll take a few moments to highlight and provide an overview of the third primary element mentioned earlier: performance. [This is represented by] the Transportation Performance Report or, [as] you will hear some of us report referred to it tonight, the TPR. This February, the State Transportation Commission adopted the latest version of this report, and if you haven't had a chance to review it yet, please do. It is available on the STC's website, [TalkPATransportation.com](https://www.talkpatransportation.com).

The TPR, or the Transportation Performance Report, explains the progress and needs of Pennsylvania's transportation system over the most recent two-year period. The report allows PennDOT to monitor, measure, and evaluate their performance trends, and is developed with public use in mind. The report focuses on six key performance measures – safety, mobility, preservation, accountability, funding, and freight.

It is important to note that the 2023 Transportation Performance Report is the first to feature freight as a key performance measure. This new measure was added to account for the significant efforts PennDOT has made in innovation and resources dedicated to implementing the goals set in Pennsylvania's 2045 Freight Movement Plan.

Now, to walk us through a closer look at how we did in these key performance measures, please welcome our keynote speaker, Deputy Secretary for Planning Larry Shifflet.

Larry S. Shifflet (Deputy Secretary of Planning, PennDOT):

Thank you, Karen and Ron. One, for helping out tonight and, two, for your dedicated service to the State Transportation Commission, greatly appreciated.

Continuing on the topic [of], as Karen mentioned and Ron mentioned, the TPR. Continuing on that topic, the first key performance measure I'd like to talk about is safety. Safety is always at the top of our list when it comes to anything we talk about so, certainly, that's where we'll start tonight. From the performance measure discussion, we generally take a very multifaceted approach to improve safety statewide through initiatives like

awareness campaigns, behavioral programs, and infrastructure improvements, to continually provide a safer transportation system for the motoring public.

The COVID-19 pandemic – I hate to even bring that up, as hopefully we're working ourselves outside of that – is really important to note here because it certainly had a great impact on how typical road users traveled in 2020 and 2021, during which time Pennsylvania, oddly enough, experienced an overall rise in roadway fatalities. PennDOT continues to use a very data-driven approach to identify the things that influence transportation to [influence] a downward trend in these numbers.

In response to the increase in pedestrian and vulnerable use road user fatalities, which is where the general increase was in the last year or two, we've also implemented an Active Transportation Plan to provide safe, reliable, convenient and cost-effective approaches and facilities for pedestrians, bicyclists, and other vulnerable users in the Commonwealth.

PennDOT is also dedicated to charting the course for highway safety, as can be seen in the 2022 Strategic Highway Safety Plan. The Strategic Highway Safety Plan serves as the Commonwealth's blueprint for the reduction of fatal and serious injury crashes, and targets areas that have the most influence on improving highway safety statewide.

Another area of significant growth and innovation is automated speed enforcement. Certainly worthy of another mention is an event [that took place] earlier this week highlighting safety as we get into construction season. Before I talk through some of my other points, I just want to really get [the message] out there to make sure you stop and slow down when you're in a construction zone. Put your phone down.

Just remember the mother, father, grandfather, son, daughter, and a whole host of folks that we all know and love. Let us not forget PennDOT workers, colleagues of mine, construction industry workers, that work as part of the PennDOT team as well. So again, just a reminder that safety is important, especially in our work zones.

Through Act 86 of 2018, the Pennsylvania legislature amended the state's Vehicle Code and introduced automated speed enforcement in Pennsylvania's work zones and on a portion of Roosevelt Boulevard in the City of Philadelphia through a five-year pilot program. [Since this was part of] Act 86 2018 – we're in [2023] – that pilot program is nearing its end, so it's very important to see some sort of action as we move forward.

The State Transportation Advisory Committee, not the STC but the group that advises the STC, did an evaluation of that pilot program in 2022 and recommended the program's continuation and statewide expansion after the law's planned sunset in December 2023.

The next performance measure is mobility. Moving people and goods safely and efficiently is vital to our quality of life and economic well-being. As a multimodal transportation agency, Mr. Drnevich hit on that earlier, the former Department of Highways – now PennDOT – which is, again, very multimodal oriented.

As a multimodal transportation agency, PennDOT manages a range of programs that facilitate the movement of people and goods throughout Pennsylvania's nearly 121,000 miles, that's both state and local, [of] roadways. That supports over 281 million miles of daily travel. PennDOT continues to develop and enhance tools to monitor the magnitude and causes of traffic congestion within the state.

Pennsylvania travelers have a variety of information options at their fingertips with 511PA.com, strategically placed message boards with travel times, construction updates on key projects, and Twitter notifications.

PennDOT also supports key technological advancements through various initiatives, like the National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Plan – you wouldn't be a PennDOT employee if you didn't give the acronym for that; you'll hear it called NEVI – to help build electric charging throughout the Commonwealth. This program will provide more than \$171 million in federal funds to the state over five years.

Despite these areas of considerable growth and opportunity, key pieces of our system's mobility still require focused efforts. This was made clear by the 2022 Transportation Advisory Committee study – a group that has been instrumental in reviewing a lot of things for the Department and coordinating through the State Transportation Commission – but as part of that [study], they identified an annual state funding gap of \$53.5 million for Pennsylvania's aviation system; again, [highlighting] the multimodal aspect of Department.

This shortfall in aviation funds sets off a chain of implications which can lead to airports deferring important improvement projects, thus impacting their future growth opportunities and general economic well-being, again, in those areas where airports reside and, of course, we're [also] facing ongoing challenges with a post-pandemic decline in transit ridership. Although it's recovering, ridership has still not returned to pre-pandemic volumes.

The next performance measure is preservation. Pennsylvania's transportation network of roadways and bridges requires effective resource management to improve and maintain the system. PennDOT continues to drive down the number of poor-condition, state-owned bridges around the Commonwealth with targeted investments in infrastructure.

In Pennsylvania, 6,400 bridges are owned and maintained by counties or municipalities. These locally owned bridges have improved in recent years as well – as you can find in our TPR – with the number of bridges rated poor now under 1,800 compared to over 2,000 a decade ago. It doesn't sound like a monumental lift but, quite honestly, it's quite a lift in a decade.

These improvements are, in part, made possible by the passage of Act 89 to 2013. As part of that passage of Act 89 in 2013, there was a special fund that was established that allowed counties to implement a \$5 fee on vehicle registrations. [To highlight] the impact of that since 2013, we've had 27 counties choose to implement the \$5 fee on vehicle registrations over that time. That initiative has raised over \$216 million for local transportation projects.

In addition to investing in bridges, PennDOT's Transportation Asset Management Plan provides data-driven approaches to help select the most cost-effective improvements. Pennsylvania's state roadway network, just to put things in perspective, is roughly the same size as New York, New Jersey, and New England state roadway networks combined.

Again, the key [phrase] there is Pennsylvania state-owned. It's very comparable to those states to our east and north; they're state owned, they have a much larger locally owned county and municipal system. Despite that, we're still making improvements on our pavement conditions. On average we've been slowly improving over the past several years. Again, if you take a look at the TPR, you can see that.

The next performance measure is accountability. Transparency and accountability are top priorities for PennDOT. For transportation agencies, accountability means making the most of every dollar to provide a safe, efficient, and accessible transportation system. This is reflected in PennDOT's values, as over 90% of highway construction projects have been completed on time over the last decade as is represented in that

graphic that you're seeing right now. In assessing our transit performance, both SEPTA and Pittsburgh Regional Transit have been federally recognized for their service.

[Also] in the accountability realm, we launched what's called the Mentor Protégé Program in May of 2022 – approaching one year since we've launched it. This program is aimed at enhancing the ability of Small Diverse Businesses to compete for the many contracting opportunities with PennDOT. Find My Ride PA, released in May 2021, was developed to help citizens and their caregivers quickly and easily apply for transportation assistance programs.

Modernizing technologies, materials, and practices; forming beneficial relationships; tracking performance; and collaborating with communities are ways that Pennsylvania continues to enhance resource management and efficiency for more significant impacts statewide.

Funding: how can you not have a discussion and talk about funding? PennDOT always talks about funding. This next performance measure I'll talk about certainly is essential to the foundation of transportation performance. Again, on all levels – aviation, highway, bridge, transit, et cetera. We carefully manage the Commonwealth \$11.5 billion annual transportation budget to prioritize safe and efficient travel improvements throughout the Commonwealth.

The passage of the Federal Bipartisan Infrastructure Law in November of 2021 injected \$2.34 billion for highway programs and \$1.76 billion for bridge replacement and repairs in Pennsylvania through 2026 – so, again, through the next four years; the bill was a five-year bill. The new law also includes various discretionary [grant] programs that are available for critical infrastructure [projects] statewide such as bridges, electric vehicles, various safety programs, and reconnecting communities.

While this influx of federal funds creates a variety of exciting and very significant new opportunities for the Department and infrastructure in Pennsylvania in general, it does not completely bridge the gap between our statewide transportation system needs and the funds that are available to address them.

Your participation in this effort tonight – whether through submitting your feedback and questions, helping spread the word to get Pennsylvanians involved, or just by being a part of this forum tonight – plays a critical role in informing our statewide planning, programming, and delivery process for multimodal infrastructure projects.

The final performance measurement, mentioned earlier by Commissioner Michael, [is freight]. The 2023 Transportation Performance Report, for the very first time, includes a component for freight as one of our key performance measures. This comes largely in response to recent initiatives by PennDOT to improve the safe and efficient movement of goods throughout the Commonwealth.

We updated the state's Freight Movement Plan in 2022 through a process that included a virtual statewide freight forum, as well as engagement with our Metropolitan and Rural Planning Organizations, and various freight stakeholders throughout the Commonwealth. This plan makes Pennsylvania eligible for \$58.5 million annually in federal freight funds from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law which, as mentioned, passed in November 2021.

Efforts like these are becoming increasingly necessary, as heavy trucks comprise nearly 30% of all daily vehicle miles of travel in Pennsylvania; so that 281 million number, 30% of that [is] truck related, and 37% of that is on the Interstate system. Heavy truck crashes – obviously, if you're seeing an increase, you're likely to see an

increase in crashes as well – reached a three-year high, regretfully, in 2021. To meet this challenge, we've organized a Freight Work Group to serve in support of the agency's freight planning activities, including the implementation of future updates to the Freight Movement Plan and projects that come out of it and support that Freight Movement Plan.

This concludes my formal remarks and, again, I want to extend my sincere thanks to everyone before we get into the question-and-answer part of [the Forum].

I mentioned the survey – we have 18 days left, [TalkPATransportation.com](https://talkpatransportation.com) – for those who haven't taken the survey that may be joining us tonight, please go out and take the survey even though you are joining us. We want to hear from you! For the survey, we set a goal of 10,000 surveys, [and] with 18 days remaining we're at 90% [of our goal]. I think we were earlier today at 9,023 [completed surveys], so thank you to everyone who may have submitted the survey and is still joining in.

Before we get to the Q&A session, I do want to take a couple minutes to say how proud I am of the great work being done by our dedicated staff at PennDOT. \$11.5 billion is a big number and a huge responsibility, and every one of our employees takes that seriously every day.

Our folks are genuinely dedicated to work for you as a Commonwealth employee. Making strides and improving our transportation system – and certainly this effort in Pennsylvania is not exclusive just to the PennDOT employee, so I'd be remiss if I didn't thank a few more before we get into the Q&A.

We rely on [the] support and expertise of many of our partners throughout the state. First and foremost, our Metropolitan and Rural Planning Organizations throughout the state. For those that are online and listening or may listen down the road, if you don't know who or what your area's Metropolitan or Rural Planning Organization is, I would recommend that you learn and get connected with them. They are a direct connection to your communities and the needs for your communities, and a very direct connection back to the Department.

We also collaborate with a vast number of transportation stakeholders such as our elected officials, municipalities, interest groups, transportation authorities, and other transportation advocates. So, a big thank you to all of you for your dedicated service and your support of PennDOT throughout the years and throughout the coming construction season.

Now, what we're here for tonight: we want to hear from you! Let's open the Q&A portion of the meeting. [We will] try and focus as much as we can on questions related to the 12-Year Program update, and we'll focus on getting you good, solid answers this evening. We want to hear about your transportation issues, your concerns or even your good ideas that you may have to make our transportation infrastructure work better for you and for your community.

I will now turn it back over to Alexis to help guide us through the Q&A session, thank you.

Alexis Campbell (Moderator):

Thank you, Deputy Secretary Shifflett, and to all of our speakers tonight; we appreciate hearing from you. Now, we're going to transition to the Q&A portion of tonight's Forum. We invited participants to submit questions in advance when they registered, and we did receive quite a few questions, so we're going to begin our discussion with those. We still want to hear from you, so if you have not yet had an opportunity to ask a

question or, maybe, something from the presentation sparked a new question for you, please feel free to submit them now.

If you're on the PAcast platform, all you need to do is ask a question [and] we'll receive it right away. If you are viewing us on a different platform, you can email us at RA-PennDOTSTC@pa.gov. If you're watching on Facebook [Live], all you need to do is submit a question in the comment section of the live stream.

Please include your name, where you're from, and your question or concern, and we're going to try to get through as many of those questions as we can until 8 o'clock. If your question is not answered tonight, please look for all of the questions and answers; they'll be posted on the website, TalkPATransportation.com.

So – I just need to make a little adjustment to my situation here so I can see better – our first question is from Morgan. Morgan says, “Level of service has been a metric to measure the efficiency of state roads running through towns and cities, but unfortunately has led to unnecessary widening of roads and induced demand that has led to dangerous, unpleasant downtown and Main Street spaces. Changing the metric to something more useful, like Vehicle Miles Traveled, has been done in other states with success. Would PennDOT consider changing this metric to better reflect cities and townships needs?”

Karen, do you want to start us off with that response?

Karen Michael (State Transportation Commissioner):

Sure! When you look at downtown roadways, we always struggle with what to do with those roadways. It seems the more people that go on them, the wider we have to make the roads, and it starts to impact, as you said, businesses and homes. Unfortunately, the challenge is that there's not just one metric that can capture that full picture of what downtown street performance would be. Especially in terms of a Complete Streets and all modes of transportation, because when you're downtown, you're looking at buses, pedestrians, bicyclists, and people crossing, and there's a lot to consider there.

Level of service has its place in looking at how efficient a roadway actually works, but it helps us to realize how much capacity is there and what do we need to do for it. Vehicle Miles Traveled, that particular performance metric, is increasingly being used when we consider challenges related to funding, but it's not really a good measure of efficiency. So, when you look at it it's just a difficult thing to look at, and we can take a look at that, and we don't really consider changing the metrics, but we still are going to struggle with this as we go forward.

Larry S. Shifflet (Deputy Secretary of Planning, PennDOT):

I'll just add a bit – Karen had a good key point there, that we don't completely ignore VMT. Certainly, when we look at our 12-Year Program update every two years, we have a process where we update our funding formulas for distribution to our Metropolitan and Rural Planning Organizations. VMT certainly is a component of certain formulas for funding distribution. So, again, it's not something that's not looked at, it is something that's part of our overall mix when we look at funding and the distribution of funding.

Alexis Campbell (Moderator):

Thank you both.

Next question. This is from Aaron. Aaron asks, “How does Pennsylvania prioritize and select which roads see resurfacing, reconstruction, or other improvements?”

This seems like a question up your alley, Larry, if you could start us off.

Larry S. Shifflet (Deputy Secretary of Planning, PennDOT):

Sure! During my formal remarks, I mentioned Metropolitan and Rural Planning Organizations, and if you don't know who your local Metropolitan or Rural Planning Organization is, check out our websites, we have access maps showing you. At that regional level, we work very closely. Again, every federal dollar for highways and bridges that comes through formula to Pennsylvania gets distributed back to each of those 23 Metropolitan and Rural Planning Organizations through formulas, as I mentioned, to make improvements. There's a vast array of different federal categories, and for each one of those there's a different formula.

So, that prioritization of projects happens at the local level with input from the folks at our State Transportation Commission, from the Secretary of Transportation, [and] from the Governor, who may have priorities as well. So, all that input kind of feeds down that that funnel right to our 23 Metropolitan and Rural Planning Organizations. That's where the real prioritization regionally happens. So, again, I encourage everyone who may not be engaged in that process to find a way to become actively engaged in that process.

Karen Michael (State Transportation Commissioner):

Just to add a little bit to that; PennDOT loves data. We are a data-driven agency, the nature of our business is data, and we have a lot of different programs out there where we look at bridge data and we look at roadway data, but all of this data is no good unless, like Larry said, you actually get to provide some input. It's just numbers if you don't really understand what you're looking at, and when we give the data to the MPOs and RPOs, that really helps them to understand where we're coming from, but that dialogue between us and them really helps us to understand where they see the needs in their own systems. So that's really important.

Ronald Drnevich (State Transportation Commissioner):

I'd add that the MPOs and RPOs meet regularly, monthly. One is a higher-level meeting, one a coordinating meeting and PennDOT is at every one of those meetings in every District that those MPOs and RPOs are in. They are easy to get to, they are in your own community, and they're all represented by some local folks, so you'd be surprised at who might be on a local MPO that lives down the street from you. It's an interesting interface.

All of the State Transportation Commission folks are also interfaced with the MPOs and RPOs in their regions, but the best connection is directly dependent on the feedback; it comes up. You don't tell the MPOs what to do, they're telling you what they see happening locally, and PennDOT doesn't have to try and do that from a regional or District office. Very valuable structure.

Larry S. Shifflet (Deputy Secretary of Planning, PennDOT):

I'd be remiss if I didn't mention – all those 9,023 surveys we received so far, those Metropolitan and Rural Planning Organizations where those surveys or issues or concerns were identified, they will get that data, Karen mentioned the data, to help feed their decision-making process moving forward. So, again, it is circular in nature. We do it every two years, and there's a reason we do it every two years. Not just because of Act 120 of 1970. It's important for us to get that data and update that data and those issues and concerns.

Alexis Campbell (Moderator):

Thank you all for those great perspectives.

Next, we have another question here, this one is, “Are there communications between PennDOT and utility companies in order to avoid conflicting work, such as digging up a newly paved road?”

Ron, you look excited for this one!

Ronald Drnevich (State Transportation Commissioner):

I think we're probably seeing that someplace at some time there's a lot of different things in and around the roadway, and you need a strong database to know what they are. But, beyond that is what people are planning to do in those areas. We miss them once in a while, no question, or a project's been planned and no one told anyone about it until it was too late.

Can we do a better job? Sure. With any roadway work that gets done, there's always a check with utility companies by the designers and the contractors themselves before they do any work. But once in a while it does get missed; a frustrating but valid point. It needs better focus and more focus. You can only put so many rules in place, but it's interesting.

Karen Michael (State Transportation Commissioner):

One point to add. Most Districts across the state do, what they call, a coordination meeting with the utilities. Like Ron said, it is part of the design process. However, I know in District 2-0, we had an annual meeting every spring where we talked to them – and maybe we didn't talk to them about the projects that were that year although that did come up – we talked to them about several years out, so that the utility companies could also be planning their upgrades at the same time as we were planning our upgrades.

That's why it's so important to have the 12-Year Program out there so we know what's upcoming, because there's a lot of partners that depend on us to give them that information up front.

Larry S. Shifflet (Deputy Secretary of Planning, PennDOT):

I'll just add that, as recently as earlier today, Secretary Mike Carroll [announced that] this is one of his priorities: to make sure that we're having extra coordination with utility companies to make sure that we're doing the right thing and that they're doing the right thing.

For those who haven't heard of PennDOT Connects, that's one of the ways to help us, hopefully, do better at avoiding some of those issues. [For example], as soon as you have a utility company do a saw cut, you now have a joint, and that becomes your weak point moving forward, especially in Pennsylvania, as we have freeze-thaw many times a year in a typical winter.

Alexis Campbell (Moderator):

Thank you.

Our next question is from Facebook. This is from Nikki W., she asks, “When Deputy Secretary Shifflett speaks of Regional Planning Organizations, is he speaking of the PennDOT districts organization structure?” So, maybe could you talk a little bit about what an MPO and RPO is?

Larry S. Shifflet (Deputy Secretary of Planning, PennDOT):

Sure! Just for perspective, I was not referring to our 11 PennDOT Engineering Districts when I mentioned Metropolitan and Rural Planning Organizations. Although, as Commissioner Drnevich mentioned, we do have

District representation, including at our Central Office in Harrisburg, at each of those 23 Metropolitan and Rural Planning Organizations. I'll give you an example, [as] we're in Harrisburg this evening. The Harrisburg Area Transportation Study, which is the Harrisburg MPO, covers the three-county Harrisburg area. It covers Dauphin, Cumberland, and Perry counties. I'll stick to this region for those that are listening.

Also, in this area we have the York County Metropolitan Planning Organization, the Lancaster County MPO, Adams County MPO, [and] Franklin County MPO, so for the most part, the individual counties in this area – minus the Harrisburg area – is an individual MPO, including Lebanon County. But [if] you move to Karen's old neck of the woods in District 2, and you have Center County alone, which is an MPO, but then you also have the North Central RPO, which is shared by a few districts.

Then, you have SEDA-COG, which is now an MPO that's chaired by Districts 2 and 3, so there's a wide array of membership. If you look at southwestern Pennsylvania, from a county perspective, that is our largest MPO. They encompass 10 counties in the southwestern corner of Pennsylvania.

Ronald Drnevich (State Transportation Commissioner):

[Also], Philadelphia is its own [MPO]. Those MPOs are made up of three counties, so there are three county commissioners on there [as well as] assistants to the members of the planning groups within those different counties, and each one has a Planning Department, so they know what's going on, and other interested people.

So, there's a real structure not governed by PennDOT at all; PennDOT is just there listening and advising on what's available from PennDOT to help them do things. But the information of where the problems are comes through them. We can run surveys from PennDOT to do it, but the people are on the street [and] can get the word to their County Commissioner, or their local [representative] who's involved in this, and that information comes up, so it's a wonderful organization, actually.

Alexis Campbell (Moderator):

Thanks!

The next question is from Michael, and Michael says, "Studies have shown that road noise can have negative health effects on nearby residents. When existing highways are expanded, will PennDOT commit to reducing road noise for residents, rather than nominally increasing noise?"

Karen, do you want to start us with this question?

Karen Michael (State Transportation Commissioner):

Sure! When you look at noise, it's a very important topic to most people that are located along a road, especially if we're widening the road. That's a hot concern of a lot of people. Our policy on noise abatement, at this point in time, is limited to when we actually can put a barrier up or not. A lot of times when you think about noise, you think about noise walls, and people often request noise walls, especially if we're doing a large Interstate expansion, or somewhere where we're going from two lanes to four lanes. Unfortunately, the money involved in something like a noise wall is very, very heavy.

There's a lot of money involved in trying to build those. So, at the present time, PennDOT's noise abatement policy is currently limited to when there is either new alignment or an expansion of lanes. We don't really have a funding mechanism – correct me if I'm wrong, Larry – but we don't really have a funding mechanism for

retrofits. A lot of times, people will say, “when I first moved here, the traffic was ‘such and such’ and we could do ‘this and this,’ but now I can no longer go into my backyard and enjoy what I used to be able to enjoy.” Unfortunately, we just don't have the money for those retrofits at this point in time.

Larry S. Shifflet (Deputy Secretary of Planning, PennDOT):

Karen, you're absolutely right. [Regarding] that the retrofit part, there's no dedicated funding source for that as far as the policy and what we are required to look at it when we're expanding. I will say, if you were to leaf through the lengthy list of projects in our 12-Year Program, you will not see an extensive amount of expansion projects where we're widening the roadway for new capacity.

That's largely because of the funding that we have coming to us, both from the federal and the state level, and the overall needs of our network. I think that alone really does limit our ability for expansion. Limited expansion means limited ability for new noise walls.

Ronald Drnevich (State Transportation Commissioner):

The only exceptions are some of the interstates where some windings are needed, but Larry's right, you can expect to see very few new lane miles built in Pennsylvania on existing local and state roads. [It's] just not going to happen.

Alexis Campbell (Moderator):

Thank you.

Next question: “Does PennDOT ever plan to look to the future of transportation like other states and countries, or will they always be 10 to 20 years behind in design?” That question is from Tara.

Larry, do you want to start that one?

Larry S. Shifflet (Deputy Secretary of Planning, PennDOT):

Sure, I'd love to! Maybe I'm very focused on PennDOT, how well we do and our dedicated staff, but I'm going to say we certainly have a 20-year Long Range [Transportation] Plan that does help us set priorities out for 20 years. We also have our 12-Year [Program], which is our mid-range plan. The way we approach it [is] with all this public input, with the Metropolitan and Rural Planning Organizations, through our District offices.

It's really an example, nationally, of coordination and communication. It's recognized nationally, so I don't know that we're behind. If folks are looking for innovation, we have a whole group that takes a look at, I mentioned materials earlier, innovative processes, innovative pavement products [and more].

While it may seem to some that some that weren't behind, I would tell you that we're likely a leader in many of those aspects and I'd say, as an organization, we're generally a very modest organization, and we may not tout that leadership nationally or even internationally when it comes to some of the bridge work and things that we're doing, there's probably room for us to share some more of our story moving forward.

But I will say, too, we're always looking for a better way to do things. It's the importance of tonight, [and] it's the importance of the survey. If there's things that folks are interested in seeing us look at, let's have a discussion and let's have a survey and [identify] more questions and answers.

Karen Michael (State Transportation Commissioner):

A perfect example of that is – going back to the last question about noise – one of the innovations that I was involved with was about “how do we make sure that our new roadways are not noisier than they need to be? Is there a way to pave the road with a different type of material? Is there a way to maybe the timing of the concrete pavement; depends on how much road noise you get from the tires, is there a way to do something different that way?”

So, that was an innovative thing that we looked at because we're very cognizant of the noise and the noise issues and that was just a small example of some of the innovations that we've looked at over the years.

Alexis Campbell (Moderator):

Thank you.

Our next question is from Jerry. Jerry asks, “What funding or policy options does PennDOT use to encourage cyclist-friendly streets and connectors to regional bike trails?”

Ron, do you want to start us off here?

Ronald Drnevich (State Transportation Commissioner):

Sure. In the last 20 years, [there has been an increased] focus of the general public on personal fitness, bicycle, hiking, trail activity, rails to trails, and opportunities that have come up. They have heightened the interest in and the need to keep focused on these alternative methods of traveling. [For example], some people go to work every day on a bike.

It's a constant effort – and I'm not talking about just the dedicated trails, a lot of those are there on the rails to trails – accommodating bikes along the roadways. Every project that's anywhere near an urban area all have a review to cover that group. In fact, the MPOs all have a representative of the biking groups on those groups raising awareness of what the issues are and what needs to happen.

[It's] a very important resource and source of information to make sure that things are carefully planned without doing too much widening of roads, [and making sure to] accommodate the folks who bike, and there's just tons of them everywhere.

Karen Michael (State Transportation Commissioner):

There are a couple of dedicated funding sources for that, or at least what normally the MPO would use, [and that is] the Multimodal Transportation Funding. It is a good source for that or any type of hiking, biking, [or] trails, but there's also the transportation alternative set aside, too. There is dedicated funding to looking at that and, Ron's completely right, that every MPO at this point in time has a hiking/biking-type representative on their committee.

Larry S. Shifflet (Deputy Secretary of Planning, PennDOT):

We work pretty closely with a couple of our sister state agencies: DCD, DCNR, as well as the Department of Health. As Ron mentioned, with the fitness component, [we] certainly recognize that need, and that need was really highlighted and recognized – we've talked [about] a couple times tonight – with our Active Transportation Plan and that Active Transportation Plan implementation.

Alexis Campbell (Moderator):

Thanks.

Next question is from Mary. Mary asks, "Will there be a new focus on Public Transportation in the near future?"

Larry, do you want to speak to that?

Larry S. Shifflet (Deputy Secretary of Planning, PennDOT):

Sure, I'll start off. I would say [it is] certainly not a new focus, that focus has never left the Department or left the Commonwealth. I mentioned earlier, we have some very recognizable large transit authorities/agencies and in SEPTA and Pittsburgh, so I don't think it has ever left. I will tell you, if anyone has listened to Governor Shapiro 's budget address, certainly, the Governor is extraordinarily interested in continuing our commitment to public transit. Obviously, public transit plays a key role for the economic engine that drives each of those two corners of the state.

We have public transit options and opportunities in all 67 of our counties. It's not something that we've ever lost focus on. I would say, as I mentioned during the presentation, we have lost some riders with [the impacts of] COVID, with telework, and we've lost some miles traveled, too, as people work from home a little more frequently than they once did. So, all that plays a role in formulating the right plan and the right mix of public transportation and accessibility.

It's certainly key, [and] there have been lots of things that have happened with public transportation with some of the little things you'd never think [of]. Folks want to use a bicycle, so you have the multimodal aspect, where they bike to a station, and they catch the station, but they want their bike, and they get to the end destination to finish their commute. Some of those things over the last few years certainly have played a key role in helping us, I'd say, connect those users with multimodal actions.

Ronald Drnevich (State Transportation Commissioner):

How do we get people out of their cars? How do we get them on the bus? You can advertise it and provide the service, and there's a lot of buses running with three people on them; it's very frustrating for the bus companies as well. They really want to provide and have their services utilized.

Another example that drives me nuts is empty school buses. Everybody's driving their kids to school and not taking the bus. That's an American fad, this independence [and] not doing those kinds of things, it's a mindset. How do we change that? We're open to suggestions, and certainly the bus companies are.

Alexis Campbell (Moderator):

Thanks.

Next question: "How does How does Pennsylvania's 12-Year Program meet emission-reduction requirements?" This is a question from Michael.

Karen, do you want to start that one?

Karen Michael (State Transportation Commissioner):

I can. Larry probably has more information on this than I do. Thankfully, when we were going through our 12-Year Programs in the past, most of our counties are, what they call, an attainment. It's all about what is in your

current air environment currently. [For example], if your counties – of which I had nine pretty rural counties, all of mine except for, I believe, one kept coming in and out of some watchfulness – were an attainment.

However, the federal guidelines on creating a 12-Year Program are that the counties that are not an attainment, and you have a project in them, [they] must go through a process called Air Quality Conformance. And you must go through a process to make sure that what we are doing or what we're proposing to do would not increase the detriment of the air in that county, per se. Larry, you probably have way more information than I do.

Larry S. Shifflet (Deputy Secretary of Planning, PennDOT):

Karen, you nailed it. I'll just add to it that there are a couple flavors of funding that are aimed at just that. We have one at the federal level, Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality funds, that are aimed specifically at that, and as you utilize those funds, you have to show an air quality benefit through the use of those funds.

A new category that came about with the passage of the Federal Infrastructure Law in November of 2021 is carbon reduction [which is] similar to the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality, but [with] a few little twists and tweaks on that. We're still, I'd say, learning a little bit more about that program and how we can make a difference with the funding that's coming out of that.

Again, there are two federal programs that specifically tie back to us showing an air quality benefit, specifically in those areas that are currently at non-attainment areas in the state.

Alexis Campbell (Moderator):

Thanks.

This question is from Zach, and it's for Larry: "You compared the number of roads in Pennsylvania to New York, New Jersey, and New England, [in reference to] our state-owned network, of course. Does Pennsylvania face any unique issues that are not experienced by those states that may affect our ability to meet freight goals, how do you plan to address those challenges?"

Larry S. Shifflet (Deputy Secretary of Planning, PennDOT):

I guess one of the things I would say, and certainly there's mountains and hills in each of those states that I mentioned but, I think we have some unique topography in our makeup as well as those hills. So, one of the things we see a lot of are some of the heavy rainfall events we've seen. Some, or most of them, quite honestly, are localized, but we get a lot of rain quickly.

[For example], we have slides that happen that come across the road and take a section of roadway out. If you look in the southwestern part of our state – I mentioned the 10-county MPO, Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission, that handles the Pittsburgh area – there are plenty of roads, mostly secondary state routes, that are still currently closed from rain events because of a slide or a washout over the years. I think that's one unique aspect; again [it's important to note the amount of] freeze/thaw.

The state component of that, I think, is one of the most unique. It's maybe not an apples-to-apples [comparison] because New York has a large network in and of itself, too, it's just a matter of ownership and how they go about funding their overall improvements.

Karen Michael (State Transportation Commissioner):

Two things come to mind as far as 'unique.' About five years ago, we started the process, or the procedures to, whenever there was a large snow event or a weather event, to reduce speed limits on the interstate. That's unique, because we get a lot of pushback from the trucking industry at first. But also, even in some severe events, we've actually stopped them from coming on the interstates altogether. That's, I believe, unique to Pennsylvania, although, New York with the freeway, they have closed lots of times.

The other thing that they're also looking at is – in my District, we had a very large section of Interstate 80, and one of the things that we would see, especially during a severe snow event – the possibility of whiteouts. The whiteouts would start, coming across the Ohio State border and coming east, and as they did, as the storm came across, each management center that that was in charge of monitoring the roads would need to be making sure that they told the others as they were coming that, 'hey this storm is still coming, and this is very dangerous conditions.'

That was a little bit unique, I think, to Pennsylvania: the white out, when you get a system that comes from the west to the east, it'll just follow, and I've watched it again, and again, follow Interstate 80 right down the line. There's a snow squall that begins, and somewhere around Williamsport it, sort of, dies out. That's unique to us, too. So, there are some, like [Larry] said, there are some topographical unique things that happen.

Alexis Campbell (Moderator):

Thanks!

This is from Stephen. Stephen asks, "How is PA preparing to handle the increased number of electric vehicles on the road today and into the future?"

Ron, do you want to speak to that?

Ronald Drnevich (State Transportation Commissioner):

I'm sure all have some input on this, [as] we all have an interest in it, big time. There's a major effort on the part of PennDOT to install [electric vehicle] charging stations along all travel corridors; everybody worries [about] how many miles they can go before they need to find a charging station.

As that's being implemented, we could close our eyes and let the private industry do it, but there's a whole plan in place now to install charging stations and encourage others to do them as well with very basic criteria. You'll see coming over the next year and a half or two years, and it's all in our future right now; we're very conscious of it.

[I'm] not sure how fast you're going to get an electric car, but that technology is going to change for the better as well. We're very aware of it.

Larry S. Shifflet (Deputy Secretary of Planning, PennDOT):

I'll just add – I mentioned earlier about the \$171 million in new federal funds coming to Pennsylvania through the passage of the Federal Infrastructure Law, as Ron mentioned – [this funding is] specifically for developing charging stations on what we call our Alternative Fuel Corridors, [of] which, I'm going to say for the vast majority, 99% is our Interstate core network.

We have an open round, I think, through May 5th, [2023] – don't quote me completely on that, but I think there's an open round through May 5th. I think we're probably in the 20- or 30-plus range of applicants,

maybe, that we've had come in through our open application round so far, so [there's] certainly very much interest in electrification. As you hear the car industry and others, sort of, ramping that up over the last two or three years, we need to make sure that we have the ability for folks who choose to purchase an electric car, or already have purchased an electric car, to be able to travel the Interstate and get across to visit family [and] friends, or [take a] business trip, or whatever it may be, and have the option or opportunity to pull off, make sure they're able to pull off safely, at the right spot, and charge their vehicle to get to their final destination.

So, as Ron put it, [there's a] very concerted effort going forward. We have our NEVI application round out there, so, again, there's great interest as we're seeing.

Alexis Campbell (Moderator):

Thanks!

The next question is from Ava: "How can we get assistance with traffic calming measures on a state road?"

Karen, do you want to talk about that?

Karen Michael (State Transportation Commissioner):

Sure. In each of the Districts, and including the Central Office, there are people which we call Municipal Services Technicians. They help in each of the counties in each of the municipalities with issues that you may have on a state road, especially going through your locality. They are, probably, your first point of contact, if not to the people, like Ron said, [with the] the MPO.

Because the MPO folks also have a wealth of information as far as that [goes]. They can get you to the right people and, [at] PennDOT, normally traffic calming is dealt with from our Traffic Unit, and there are definite tried-and-true measures of how to do that and what you can do for a road or, maybe, possibly get a project program to do that, too.

Ronald Drnevich (State Transportation Commissioner):

It's a lot more than speed bumps; it's many things. You're seeing them more and more, with the dividers that spread throughout or make you slow down and do a little curve and those types of activity there. They're coming to more and more places, mostly where there's more pedestrian traffic or semi-residential areas. But many of them are state roads. Whoever came up with the comment or the term 'traffic calming' ought to get some credit, because it's an easy one to jump on, and people are encouraged to accept it.

That's a very good question. We have roundabouts and those sorts of things there that's slowing some of that down as well for some of us drivers, but I think they are pretty good creations.

Thank you.

Alexis Campbell (Moderator):

Thanks.

The next question is from Aaron, and Aaron asks, "What are some ways Pennsylvania is looking to diversify funding streams in addition to, or as a replacement for the gas tax?"

Larry?

Larry S. Shifflet (Deputy Secretary of Planning, PennDOT):

Sure. I'll say, we're always looking for a way to diversify. We're very dependent and, obviously, folks have been paying attention [as exemplified by] that question that that came in. We're very dependent in Pennsylvania on the state's Motor Vehicle Tax at the gas pump. I think 74%-to-75% of our state revenue – so, a huge portion of our state revenue and the Motor License Fund – is generated at the pump.

So, what happens to that as we have more electric cars, as we have more fuel-efficient, gas-powered cars, and, by the way, as we have more people teleworking and, maybe, not driving their cars as frequently as they once did? Obviously, the funding stream from the gas tax, when you look out from revenue projections, doesn't quite get us where we need to [be to] get across the finish line.

There was an effort two years ago to take a look at some options as far as potential options to help with different funding streams. I would say that one, while it's not necessarily a new revenue stream, the one being most looked-at right now is the Motor License Fund revenue that's going from the Motor License Fund to help fund the Pennsylvania State Police. Let me preface all this with – and I think you've probably heard it in the Governor's budget and any of Secretary Carroll's budget hearings that he's had – certainly, the State Police need their full funding as well, because we're all dependent on them on the roads as well as in our homes. So, obviously, there needs to be a mechanism for that.

The one thing that's really, I'd say, generating some interest and concern lately – and for those who didn't, maybe, watch or tune in yesterday – there was a House Transportation Committee hearing to talk about just this fact of looking at a mechanism – and Governor Shapiro in his budget address mentioned this as well – moving the money, still \$500 million roughly a year, that's going from the Motor License Fund to the Pennsylvania State Police.

Again, not new revenue being funded, largely through that that gas tax, but it would be new revenue to the Department, which would allow us to advance some projects, [and] allow us to help match some of those wide arrays of discretionary opportunities that are now available through the [Bipartisan] Infrastructure Law. The proposal that's out there – Governor Shapiro, in his budget address, mentioned the \$100 million this year and, I believe, that [the] House of Representatives has a proposal out there – to ratchet that down and [is] pretty much in step with what the Governor's proposal was over the next five years, \$100 million each year.

At the end of that five years, that equates to approximately \$1.5 billion for PennDOT that we would not have seen otherwise. Again, not a new revenue source, but one that seems to have some legislative movement and, certainly, without legislative movement, it's not necessarily PennDOT's decision to make a choice as to revenue streams. We'll certainly have conversations and continue the dialogue whenever these legislative members and the Governor may be interested in moving forward.

Ronald Drnevich (State Transportation Commissioner):

We're not the only state with this issue. We're probably more vulnerable than some because we're so dependent on the gas tax. [For example], it takes 50 kilowatt hours of power to fuel a Tesla to go 300 miles. It costs about \$9, and that's about what we pay if you have a car that goes 20 miles a gallon to go 300 miles. The gas tax brings in \$9 to PennDOT; an electric car brings nothing in. So, there's something is going to happen not just here, but in the United States.

The only fall back is that, to get more dollars – you can raise the price of electric vehicles, unless that might happen anyhow – it's going to come through some other mechanism, too. I don't want to say tax, but it is a tax on electric vehicles, which might be mileage based or something of that nature. [This is] a very real issue, and it's not too bad now, but in three or four more years, it'll exacerbate, and Pennsylvania is among one of those states that really needs to find a new mechanism.

Good question.

Alexis Campbell (Moderator):

Thank you.

The next question is from the Turners. The Turners ask – Karen and Ron, you just mentioned roundabouts, so, in that same family – “What are the benefits of diverging diamond interchanges in comparison with more standard or conventional intersections and interchanges? Additionally, Are there rules and regulations regarding standards of roundabout sizes?” We have some engineering questions for you, so have fun!

Ronald Drnevich (State Transportation Commissioner):

I know, a lot of people hate roundabouts, [but] I, personally, like them. People are just learning to navigate them better than, perhaps, they ever thought before. I've seen some small ones in little, rural areas, and some big ones. It's an education, [and] it ought to be in driver training. There are a lot of them coming because they are so effective [as a result of] avoiding stop signs and truly avoiding accidents, as long as you don't stop in [a roundabout].

The interchanges are easier to drive through, but people have to get used to them, too. We have a handful in the state, but from what I've seen, they are safer interchanges; less conflicts of cars going through.

Karen Michael (State Transportation Commissioner):

Ron touched on it very well. On a typical intersection, there are many points of conflict. The whole goal of either a diverging diamond interchange or roundabout is to minimize those number of conflicts. So, when you look at a roundabout, we take you around and get you off very easily, off to the right, where there are no conflicts. When you're coming into the roundabout, there is [a point of conflict] and then [another one when you are] going out.

So, it's two points of conflict versus what you would normally have. A diverging diamond interchange, if you've ever been on them, is really strange to go on the first time. What they do is, there'll be two lanes going one way, and two lanes going the other way; they'll cross over and, actually, take you on the opposite side of the road than what you think, and what it's doing is minimizing those conflicts. It's taking you off to the right rather than conflicting with the traffic that you would normally conflict, especially at the ramp areas.

When you look at the statistics, the statistics are [showing] that there are 50% less conflict points so, therefore, the thought processes [is that] you have 50% less crashes at that time. It also has a couple of other benefits. The interchange itself takes up less space, it reduces the impact of the property needed to do it, and it also provides for improved capacity. There are a lot of good things that come out of the DDI and, also, the roundabouts. Like Ron said, either you love them, or you hate them.

If you're going down a road, even a small secondary road in Massachusetts, suddenly, you'll come to a roundabout with no warning; there's a roundabout. We don't quite have that many yet, but we do have quite a few and they're working well.

Larry S. Shifflet (Deputy Secretary of Planning, PennDOT):

I'll just say, for those in the local area listening, go ahead and take your tour. There is one at US 322 and US 222 in Lancaster County. If you're used to driving that road and you haven't driven it in a little bit, go take a ride and check it out. The first time through, it's a little bit different, but once you get through, you're like "wow, I didn't realize that I crossed over and with no impact it", so it is pretty slick.

It's newer to Pennsylvania, but it's not necessarily new. I think they're catching on similar to [how] roundabouts [are catching on] here. It was a tough sell, and a tough educational component, but I think that, from a safety standpoint and a movement traffic flow movement [standpoint], it certainly is a key option in our toolbox moving forward.

Alexis Campbell (Moderator):

Thank you.

This question is from Kathleen; and Kathleen asks, "Does the 12-Year Program include improvements to passenger rail, as well as ways to reduce traffic congestion?" So, are those sorts of things typically directly addressed in the TYP?

Larry S. Shifflet (Deputy Secretary of Planning, PennDOT):

Yes. So, I'll take each one separately and, maybe, tie them together if I can. But, the 12-Year Program is a multimodal program, so it does include passenger rail. We've got some very big passenger rail projects that are included as part of our 12-Year Program and will continue to be included as part of our 12-Year Program. Then, the second part of that [question] – could you repeat it please, Alexis?

Alexis Campbell (Moderator):

Ways to reduce traffic congestion.

Larry S. Shifflet (Deputy Secretary of Planning, PennDOT):

Certainly, public transit, as Commissioner Drnevich mentioned earlier, is a key component in getting folks out of cars and getting them to and from work, to and from sporting events, and other destinations. So, obviously, public transportation is key. We have a very successful service from Harrisburg to Philadelphia [which], over the [past] decade-plus, has shown great improvement. [If you] take that anomaly [of the COVID-19 pandemic] – and I'm not going to mention the words because I said I wouldn't again earlier tonight – but [if] you take 2020 and 2021 out of the mix, that corridor has shown some really great strides.

We have shown some really great strides in our ability to provide accessibility at each of the stations along the way, and that that effort continues as well. Certainly, that helps to tie in with congestion and congestion reduction, making sure that we have adequate – and not just on the public transit side – active bus service as well to get people out of their cars and be able to get to and from where they [need], whether it's work or play.

Ronald Drnevich (State Transportation Commissioner):

We only have east-to-west passenger rail in Pennsylvania and, I think, we have three new stations, rebuilt stations, on the corridor from Harrisburg to Philadelphia. [The stations feature] convenient parking, free parking, good access, good-looking stations, attracting local people, and they're adding more cars on the trains to do it. Now, we're talking about adding a new train going west, because, I think, there's only one [per] day that goes west to Pittsburgh. Everything else that goes up into New York has to go through Philadelphia, the way it is right now, and I don't see any new passenger rail lines mixed with freight where the freight rails [travel] coming [in the near future].

There's been a good focus, [and] the stations are just nice to be there. It looks like every place we put a station, the area around it develops. It's because there's people getting off and there's little stores, and that's generally true in any passenger railway station, so it's good to see that happening. We don't own the train, so we can't put more trains on, that only happens by people needing a ride and so [that] people use it, and it's going to use them here. Good question.

Alexis Campbell (Moderator):

[We have], kind of a follow up to that from Philip. Phillip asks, "Is PennDOT actively seeking federal money to expand passenger rail in the state?"

Larry S. Shifflet (Deputy Secretary of Planning, PennDOT):

I'll keep my answer short to this. Certainly, where there's discretionary opportunities, we are submitting discretionary applications. I'll mention Hoboken, [New Jersey], because that comes to mind. We certainly will be knocking on the door where we can for some of those additional federal dollars to help us where, maybe, we weren't able to get across the finish line before and, hopefully, with this influx of those discretionary dollars, we can moving forward.

Alexis Campbell (Moderator):

Thanks.

This question is from Dominic: "With the use of automated speed enforcement potentially expanding, will the funding that's generated be used toward engineering improvements, which would naturally bring the average speed back to the intended speed limits?" They gave some examples, traffic calming road diets, et cetera.

Larry? Karen? Ron?

Ronald Drnevich (State Transportation Commissioner):

I have a daughter that lives in New Jersey. Last week, she got a letter from PennDOT, and she apparently was 10 miles over the speed limit in a construction zone in Philadelphia, [which] devastated her. [The notice] didn't charge her anything, but she's on the list now, so [if she receives another], there will be dollar bills [involved]. Some people might laugh at that, but she took it very seriously, and didn't realize that she was violating something, but she got that surprise letter in the mail. I think it can be an effective deterrent.

Is there enough money to do many things? Not yet. Let's hope we don't get a lot of money from that. We don't want to raise money through people speeding through constructions zones. I think those fines are relatively small, \$25 to \$35 initially.

Larry S. Shifflet (Deputy Secretary of Planning, PennDOT):

I'm not sure what the what the fines are but, Ron, you're absolutely correct. The goal of that Automated Speed Enforcement is not to generate revenue; it's to get folks to slow down to save lives, their lives, our lives, [and] the construction industry workers' lives. All you have got to do is look to the unfortunate incident, maybe, three weeks ago in Maryland near Baltimore, I think. Six, in total, construction workers were killed while they were at work one day, which was an unfortunate incident. Certainly, [we are] not looking to generate revenue from that program.

What we're looking to do is have folks slow down in the construction zone, put their phones down, and pay attention while they're going through [a construction zone]. Slowing down is key. I'll say, the one thing that we've seen with our program, [PennDOT's Automated Speed Enforcement] pilot program – Maryland [also] had [a similar program] in place for quite a few years, in their 10+ years – I think we in our five years, probably three years, have seen a 10-mile-per-hour general [speed] reduction through work zones.

Then, the other key component is those that are really, really speedy through work zones; we've seen a significant decrease in those very high speeds through the work zones, too. So, the program's definitely shown its dividends, [but we] can't rest on our laurels, [PennDOT's Automated Speed Enforcement] pilot program does expire as well, so don't know if that gets it all of it, Alexis.

Alexis Campbell (Moderator):

There are grant programs that are available through some of these Speed Enforcement Programs in Philadelphia to help municipalities. Certainly, not designed to be a moneymaker, we're trying to save lives. Thank you all for that!

This question is from Betsy: "Is it possible for the public to get a list of who serves on the local board that feeds PennDOT an assessment of what is happening at the local or county level. I'm particularly interested in the group that serves on the Advisory Board for Bucks County." Is that maybe, the MPO?

Larry S. Shifflet (Deputy Secretary of Planning, PennDOT):

The Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission.

Ronald Drnevich (State Transportation Commissioner):

You can look it up on the internet: DVRPC, they'll tell you.

Larry S. Shifflet (Deputy Secretary of Planning, PennDOT):

On our website, if you hop on there, you can get a link right to the DVRPC, including contact information.

Alexis Campbell (Moderator):

Thanks.

This [question] is from Gail: "How does public safety agency response to traffic disruptions figure early in the planning process?"

So, I guess – how do we consider first responders and others when we're planning transportation projects?

Karen Michael (State Transportation Commissioner):

Each MPO/RPO gets funding – let's call it a pot of money – so that they have this safety line item with money to program projects with. So, probably, about 10 to 12 years ago, now, we had something called the Safety Audit Process, where there was a group of folks that went out from the Districts, Central Office, the FHWA, and MPOs or RPOs, and looked at areas of concern, especially things that were safety related.

Whether it was run-off-the-roadway crashes where they crash on a curb or, maybe, there was an intersection that was seeing a lot of safety issues, and this team on the safety audit would look at the sites in a particular area and determine a priority order of, maybe, what we could do there.

Sometimes, when you look at it, such as drunk driving accidents, maybe, there's really nothing you can do there. Maybe, there's additional signing, maybe, there's additional lighting; there are all sorts of things [for] mitigation that you can do. [The Safety Audit Process team] would put a priority on those projects in each area.

I'm not sure if [my response] answers what she's talking about, but it definitely is an all-hands-on-deck [approach to] looking at what we have seen, and we would do it every two years, [asking], "what have we seen in the last two years? What has changed? What if we had a project go through and we thought that we had the safety issues solved? Did it really show it in the data?" So, there was an assessment as well as an evaluation after.

Ronald Drnevich (State Transportation Commissioner):

We do safety assessments, but I'm just thinking – the question is good – I don't know that we've ever involved the local police department, because that, theoretically, is the safety agency that would have input on that sort of thing. Good question.

Larry S. Shifflet (Deputy Secretary of Planning, PennDOT):

Karen can correct me if I'm wrong, but, I think, as we're out doing projects as well, we do engage – again, I'll tie it back to PennDOT Connects, but even before PennDOT Connects; we did this, let's say, on every project that we have out there, especially if there's a detour – we engage fire [departments], EMT, police services, and schools, to make sure that there's that coordination that, if there's going to be an accident, that folks are aware of the potential detour route; aware that, if we may have to have a bridge closed in those things, there can, certainly, be good emergency services provided for those who may need them at that time.

Alexis Campbell (Press Secretary):

Great! Thanks, everybody!

So, at this time we're going to close the question-and-answer session and conclude our Online Public Forum. I want to encourage you to continue to please share your comments through the Online Survey, which is available now at TalkPATransportation.com. Surveys will be accepted through April 30th, [and] even if you participated today, you can still complete the survey. As noted earlier, a full recording of tonight's meeting will be available at TalkPATransportation.com.

When the [Public] Comment Period closes, we will compile all of the feedback and develop a statewide and a regional summary that will be available for you to review at the TalkPATransportation.com website, and shared with our STC commissioners as well as our Metropolitan and Rural Planning Organizations. Again, thank you all for your time and for your attention, and have a great rest of your evening.