Communication was Key for Motorists during the Democratic National Convention in Philadelphia

PennDOT Uncovers Rich History

Tunnel Maintenance At-The-Ready to Assist Those in Need

Recycled Asphalt Pavement Saving Millions
Communication was Key for Motorists During the Democratic National Convention in Philadelphia

By Charles Metzger, Community Relations Coordinator, District 6

When it was announced that the City of Philadelphia would be hosting the Democratic National Convention (DNC), PennDOT began coordinating with a number of stakeholders, including the U.S. Secret Service, PA State Police, City of Philadelphia, Philadelphia Police Department, Delaware Regional Port Authority, Federal Highway Administration, PA Turnpike, Delaware DOT, N.J. DOT and N.J. Turnpike.

PennDOT worked with law enforcement and transportation agencies to develop a Traffic Management Plan to effectively manage travel during this major event by minimizing traffic approaching and entering the event security area; providing alternate routes for commercial vehicles over five tons while maintaining commercial vehicle access to businesses located near the venues; and allowing for the safe movement of visitors and residents.

The department worked closely with regional transportation partners to coordinate DNC travel-related messaging and the use of electronic message signs to inform truck drivers of I-95 travel restrictions in Philadelphia.

DNC travel-related messages in the Philadelphia region were posted on 109 permanent and portable electronic message signs during the convention, which included signs in Delaware and New Jersey. The messages began appearing Saturday, July 16, and continued through the DNC. Messages were posted to clearly and succinctly inform travelers of restrictions on I-95.

Messages were also listed with trucking associations, Pennsylvania’s 511 travel website, agency websites, local and regional media outlets, commercial traffic services, highway advisory radio in Delaware, and WAZE.

In addition, PennDOT launched a special DNC travelers’ website on July 14 to assist visitors, residents and commercial drivers. The site’s home page offered options to see information about real-time traffic conditions on highways in the Philadelphia region and listed street closures around the convention venue at the Wells Fargo Center in South Philadelphia.

PennDOT’s State Farm Safety Patrol tow truck service ran around-the-clock from Saturday, July 23, to Friday, July 29, on I-76; I-95 between Route 63 and the Delaware state line; I-476; I-676; U.S. 202 between Boot Road and I-76; and U.S. 422 between U.S. 202 and Route 29, to expedite the reopening of travel lanes resulting from breakdowns or incidents.

Over 100 buses from the King of Prussia area and 250 for the other locations were in use to transport delegates.

Over the course of convention week, several tweaks were made to the traffic control plan to keep traffic moving smoothly through the Philadelphia region and to adhere to the security plan. Traffic was monitored in the District’s Incident Command Center, which was staffed by several different PennDOT units and the PA State Police.

The national event went off without a hitch and was cleared by early afternoon on July 29.
PennDOT Uncovers Rich History

By Gabrielle Alberigi, Intern, District 4

Before work starts on any PennDOT project, an archeological team will survey the space to educate themselves and the construction team on the history of the area and make sure there is nothing in the way that could hinder the building process.

When crews started building a bridge over Roaring Brook Creek in Scranton, they found that the area was full of history. They discovered that there used to be an amusement park in that area called Luna Park, and they found hundreds of glass bottles near this work site, many of which are now displayed in the PennDOT District 4-0 Field Office in Taylor.

Luna Park was one of the first amusement parks in the area. It operated from 1906 to 1916 before a fire burned it down and stopped all operations. The bridge that carried pedestrians over the creek to the amusement park had electric lights and huge arches on top of it. However, after years of not being used, the bridge slowly deteriorated. Fast forward into this century and you can now see a new, beautiful, enclosed cedar bridge with wooden shingles. This bridge, built in 2007, is in the exact spot as the old Luna Park Bridge. The stone abutments for this bridge are directly in front of the old ones used for the former bridge. Crews found more links to the past; if you stand on the bridge, you can see a pair of rocks with holes drilled through them. These rocks were used as part of a retaining wall for gondola rides when the amusement park was operating.

Perhaps some of the most interesting items crews found when they were constructing the new bridge were hundreds of glass bottles. These bottles came in all different shapes, sizes, colors and uses. Some are milk bottles, whiskey bottles, oil bottles, spice bottles and medicine bottles and most are in great shape.

Back in the day, people would not throw away their glass bottles because they were afraid they would break and cut people in route to or once they arrived at the landfill. Instead, they would mix the glass bottles with coal ash and use the glass as clean fill. When they started building bridges, the workers realized that they needed to use something to fill in the sides where the abutments would go. So, they took the coal ash mixed with the glass bottles and used that as their fill for their structures. This is the reason why crews found so many bottles near the banks of rivers and creeks when in the process of reconstructing a bridge, especially in an area that is so rich with coal mining history. PennDOT District 4-0 crews have also found bottles on the banks of Leggits Creek near the Rockwell Avenue Bridge in Scranton, and near multiple other bridges throughout the region.
Employee IdeaLink 20/20 Idea Leads to Safety Awareness Social Media Campaign

By Paul Sparano, Management Analyst Supervisor for the Bureau of Innovations

Employee ideas gathered through PennDOT’s IdeaLink 20/20 system, the department’s online employee engagement system, are helping the department improve operations, enhance customer service and even increase its presence in the social media world. The development of the “Drop the Boom” campaign is the direct result of an idea submitted by a District 8 highway designer. The employee submitted the idea due to the significant number of fascia beam bridge hits that cost the department hundreds of thousands of dollars each year.

The idea was specifically for PennDOT to create a media campaign for heavy equipment haulers to load once and check the height twice prior to traveling the interstates. Just a sample of the creative message used in the campaign includes: Bridge Hits Hurt; Repairs and Bridge Replacements Cost Thousands or Millions of Dollars; and Heavy Haulers Take Note!

Following the employee’s idea submission, PennDOT’s Press Office developed this targeted safety messaging and is distributing it through the department’s various social media sites, including Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Views of the Facebook posts have already reached over 20,700 and received over 150 likes, comments and shares.

Since the inception of the original IdeaLink system in 2011, PennDOT employees submitted over 2,200 ideas, many of which were implemented or partially implemented. Since the launch of the upgraded system, IdeaLink 20/20, in August 2015, over 400 additional ideas have been submitted.

Thanks to the innovativeness of this District 8 employee in submitting the idea into IdeaLink 20/20, its implementation is expected to increase public awareness and motorist safety, and ultimately avoid unnecessary repairs and allow more time and revenue to be devoted to other projects.

As a part of PennDOT’s employee engagement and continuous quality improvement efforts, the Bureau of Innovations administers the IdeaLink 20/20 system. IdeaLink 20/20 seeks to empower all PennDOT employees to share innovative ideas to improve the department in the areas of efficiency, safety, customer service, cost savings, and revenue generation.

Bridge Strike Study for Best Practices Underway

PennDOT’s Bureau of Maintenance and Operations (BOMO) recently kicked-off a study to identify national best practices to prevent bridge strikes by over-height vehicles. Industry education, social media outreach (#droptheboom), revised signing and potential technology pilots such as electronic height detection and warning systems are expected to play pivotal roles in addressing this important issue affecting Pennsylvania roadways.

New Child Restraint Law in Effect

On August 12, a new law affecting transporting children under the age of two went into effect.

The new law requires any person operating a motor vehicle who is transporting a child under two years of age to securely fasten the child in a rear-facing child passenger restraint system. This must be done until the child outgrows the weight and height limits designated by the manufacturer.

This is in line with the known safety benefits of keeping children restrained in rear facing seats.
PennDOT Implements First “Flashwing Yellow Arrow” Signal in Pennsylvania

The first Flashwing Yellow Arrow signal in Pennsylvania was activated in May in Lower Allen Township, Cumberland County. It is located on eastbound Rossmyne Road, at the northbound on-ramp in the interchange with Route 15. This new type of left turn traffic signal has been proven to improve left turn safety at signalized intersections.

The Flashwing Yellow Arrow signal is new to Pennsylvania, but has been in many states across the country over the last 10 years. Based on studies and transportation agency testimonials, Flashwing Yellow Arrow signals improve left-turning safety by helping motorists recognize that they should yield while making left turns when there is oncoming traffic and pedestrians.

According to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), left turn crashes can be reduced by as much as 20 percent after the installation of the Flashwing Yellow Arrow signal. Also, Flashwing Yellow Arrow signals can be adjusted depending on the time of day, reducing delays and improving mobility.
Tunnel Maintainers At-The-Ready to Assist Those in Need

By Steve Cowen, Community Relations Coordinator, District 11

Over a quarter of a million motorists use the Department’s three tunnels located in District 11 on a typical day. The Squirrel Hill, Fort Pitt and Liberty tunnels provide access to Pittsburgh, a city surrounded by steep hillsides to the south and low hills in the east. Unfortunately, with that much traffic in these confined spaces, there are bound to be incidents. PennDOT’s tunnel maintainers are on the scene to address a wide array of problems 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year.

In a four-year period from 2011 through 2014, there were 14,032 incidents in the three tunnels. That averages out to nearly ten incidents each day. Issues include crashes, disabled vehicles, pedestrian and animal encounters, abandoned cars and debris clean-up.

In addition to routine maintenance activities, tunnel maintainers have two major focus areas: protect and assist those involved in a tunnel incident and get traffic moving as soon as possible. New tunnel maintainers have a two-week training course that provides the tools necessary to handle any emergency situation that may occur in and around the tunnels. Training includes how to properly tow a vehicle and providing assistance to customers. Garden variety assistance includes changing tires, providing gas, oil or other fluids and crash scene protection. However, maintainers always expect the unexpected and have responded to baby births, police chases and a family of ducks trying to make their way through the tunnel.

District 11 has 13 tunnel supervisors and 39 tunnel maintainers. Typically, one supervisor and two or three maintainers staff each tunnel around-the-clock every day of the year. Supervisors are trained in incident command and their role in a wide range of emergency scenarios that could unfold at any moment. They daily assist police and emergency responders and monitor the cameras located inside each tunnel.

Aside from the activities that many PennDOT maintenance personnel are skilled in handling, tunnel employees have several specialized duties that are unique to the tunnels. Maintainers monitor carbon monoxide levels inside the tunnels, operate fans based on conditions and use emergency jet fans when conditions warrant. Additionally, one electrical foreman and five electricians maintain the lighting and ventilation systems.

Maintainers are also responsible for the High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) system that is only found in the Pittsburgh area. HOV lanes are intended to incentivize commuters to carpool by bypassing the more congested mainline interstate. Maintainers provide service patrol on the HOV lanes and on I-279. Additionally they open and close gates on a daily basis on the reversible HOV system to ensure wrong-way crashes do not occur.

Tunnel washing activities occur on a regular basis in all three tunnels. A four person crew conducts overnight washing operations to remove the build-up of vehicle exhaust and dirt that coats the tunnel walls. In addition, they clean the cross-passages between the tunnels. District 11 also has an agility agreement to clean the Allegheny County-owned Armstrong Tunnel and the City-owned Bates Street underpass.

“Our tunnel staff is critical to keep traffic flowing into and out of Pittsburgh. Much like firefighters battling a fire, which tunnel maintainers do on occasion as well; they manage incidents, congestion and help motorists every day,” said Ben DeVore, tunnel maintenance manager. “Without the tunnel staff, traffic would be an apocalyptic mess. I’m thankful to have such a dedicated and hardworking staff that keeps the motoring public safe and moving.”
In June of 2014, Pittsburgh motorists traveling I-376 (Parkway West) found a surprise in the inbound Fort Pitt Tunnel: a dog.

At around 10:30 a.m. Monday, June 2, 2014 traffic came to a halt, as a small dog was found traveling through the inbound Fort Pitt Tunnel. The 11-pound dog, later identified as “Chico,” stopped traffic for nearly 30 minutes, as motorists and our own PennDOT highway workers attempted to rescue the dog. Fort Pitt Tunnel Maintainer, Ted Waldman, played an active role in the dog’s rescue.

According to a Post-Gazette article, Chico’s owner, Treble Dixon was quoted saying, “I’m so grateful to the people in the tunnel.”

But how did Chico end up inside the Fort Pitt Tunnel? No one knows. Apparently Chico was on a “play date” in a nearby neighborhood when he escaped his leash.
There are 33 historic bridges in PennDOT’s six-county northwestern region – ten of which are owned by PennDOT and others are on the local system or owned by a railroad.

District 1 has focused on efforts to preserve its historic structures and its current preservation project is a 126-foot-long steel truss bridge over Sugar Creek in Venango County.

The bridge was built in 1920 by the Groton Bridge Company of Groton, New York and Karl A. Miller. The bridge itself has been deemed a historic structure, but what’s more is the unique scene it makes paired with a similar railroad truss positioned right next to it. It is a rare setting in a pastoral area; a sight that would have been more common in a bygone era. Locally, the structures are known as the twin bridges.

However, the bridge is structurally deficient, and is restricted to vehicles weighing 28 tons of less, or 39 tons for combination loads. On average, 1,000 vehicles use the bridge each day.

To extend the life of the bridge, PennDOT has set a rehabilitation project in motion to restore the small, but significant, truss bridge. The bridge will be taken apart piece by piece to be restored and reassembled into its original form.

The project will begin with disassembling all of the truss members for sandblasting and galvanizing. This process involves removing rust and salt from the structure, and using acid to ensure other chemicals are cleaned off thoroughly. Then, members will be coated with four protective layers of zinc and iron. Each of the members will be marked to allow for identification during reassembly. The work is expected to add an estimated 75 years to the life of the historic bridge.

Using this form of historic bridge restoration is a first for District 1. The process was selected because it is cost effective, long lasting and fits the size and nature of the structure. The contractor for this project is Allison Park Contractors, Inc. of Gibsonia, PA and the cost is $1,523,000, which is to be paid entirely with state funds. The project started on June 27, 2016, and is expected to be complete in early November.

PennDOT identifies bridges as historic in regards to their age, location, builder, the number of them still remaining, the style, the special features, and the integrity behind the structure.

District 1 has been successful in selling two historic bridges to private buyers; those were the Mead Avenue Bridge in Crawford County and the Carlton Bridge in Mercer County. They were sold, disassembled, and taken to be rehabilitated and reused elsewhere. Additionally, the District transferred ownership of another historic bridge – The Quaker Bridge in Mercer County. The District redesigned the road around the bridge, then left the bridge to a community organization to use as a centerpiece in their park.

However, not all historic bridges can be saved. In the event that one of the District’s historic bridges must be demolished or replaced, PennDOT follows strict procedures before tearing it down. The district files a Historic American Engineering Record (HAER) report including information such as the bridge’s history, builder, and materials, as well as photographs of the structure. The idea is to understand how it was built, and document it well enough that it could be recreated.
Happy Holidays!

Here is a list of the remaining 2016 holidays when PennDOT’s Driver License and Photo License Centers statewide and Riverfront Office Center location in Harrisburg and will be closed. If you are planning to visit one of PennDOT’s On-Line Messenger Service Centers, please call ahead for hours of operation during holidays.

- September 3 & 5, 2016 - Labor Day
- October 8 & 10, 2016 - Columbus Day
- November 11, 2016 - Veterans Day
- November 24, 2016 - Thanksgiving Day
- November 25, 2016 - Day after Thanksgiving
- December 24 & 26, 2016 - Christmas Holiday
- December 31, 2016 and January 2, 2017 - New Year’s Holiday

Sign the Car as a Pledge Not to Drink and Drive

By Anthony Scalia, Safety Press Officer, District 9

Each year, PennDOT District 9 teams up with DelGrosso’s Amusement Park to warn summer fun seekers about the dangers of driving under the influence of drugs and alcohol. A crashed car is provided by Russell’s Towing and Recovery of Bellwood and park goers are given the opportunity to sign the car as a pledge not to drive impaired over the Independence Day holiday. Children are given the opportunity to sign the car as well as long as they pledge not to ride in a vehicle with someone who is under the influence of drugs and alcohol. By the end of the day, the car has hundreds of signatures and serves as a sobering reminder of the consequences one could face should they choose to make the wrong decision.

Representatives of the Pennsylvania State Police were on hand to talk to the media about their enforcement efforts over the holiday along with PennDOT Districts 9 & 2 staff and other safety partners. Safety materials were available for visitors along with the opportunity to talk to safety partners, police, and PennDOT staff about a variety of highway safety topics. One of the most rewarding aspects of the event is the ability to watch parents and children take the pledge together to ensure a safe holiday for the whole family. The 2016 event was once again a success and we look forward to partnering up again and spreading the highway safety message next year!
Recycled Asphalt Pavement (RAP) has become a standard component of District 1’s summer maintenance program. But this year, one particular project added a little twist to the traditional RAP process, and that twist has the potential to increase the volume and value of the district’s RAP program.

The project is a pilot to test the potential of a more durable RAP mixture – one that could increase savings in coming years by expanding the number and types of roads eligible for the RAP program.

District 1 has been a pioneer in RAP development, and continues to take millings removed from the region’s highways during rehabilitation projects and use them in cold-mix asphalt placed on secondary roadways and shoulders.

The district has reaped the benefits of RAP. Last year, two district maintenance crews completed more than 50 RAP miles using almost 75,000 tons of millings. The cost of the RAP they placed was $31.55 a ton – about $2.6 million less than the district would have paid for hot-mix, virgin asphalt.

Since 2007, District 1 estimates that it has saved $21.8 million by using RAP instead of virgin asphalt.

RAP has mainly been used on four-digit routes and roadways with an Average Daily Traffic (ADT) of 3,000 vehicles or less and no more than 10 percent truck traffic. But that restriction might be changing.

This year, Portland cement was incorporated into the traditional RAP mix before it was placed on a roadway.

It is a pilot project that grew from a study the district asked Penn State University to do on the possible benefits of adding a polymer to improve RAP. Initial tests showed little benefit from the polymer additive, but then the professor heading the study suggested adding Portland cement to the cold RAP mix.

The results were encouraging. Lab tests showed the mixture had a higher resistance to wheel rutting and indicated the modified RAP could be used on roads with an ADT as much as 5,000, as well as those with a higher percentage of truck traffic.

Research showed for best results, the cement should be added to the RAP at a rate of 20 pounds per ton. So the District purchased a portable cement silo to add the Portland cement to the material belt of the pug mill at a controlled rate.

The pilot program went into the application phase in June, when the modified RAP was placed on Route 208 in Venango County. It was also used for 700 tons of base repair near the Venango County Maintenance Building, as well as a section of Route 8 in Cherrytree Township.

During the pilot, only millings from the Barkeyville stockpile location in Venango County were used. This is because the lab study used millings from that pile as well. The millings came from previous work on Interstate 80 in Mercer County.

“We’re just sticking our toes in the water this year,” said Doug Schofield, assistant district executive of maintenance. “Should it show the levels of durability we are hoping for, we will expand the program in years to come.”

As part of the evaluation process, samples of the modified RAP mixture and core samples of the roadways will be gathered for study by the District as well as Bureau of Maintenance and Operations.

The program has the potential to have a large impact on the cost and timeline for replacing secondary roadways throughout District 1. Even with the additional expense of the cement, the modified RAP costs are predicted to stay well below the price of virgin hot asphalt.

“When considering the mountains of millings that will be produced through the Decade of Investment program, the success of this RAP project could mean more cost-efficient repairs to roadways throughout the District in the coming years,” said Garrett Westover, Venango County manager.
PennDOT’s Live Free Ride Alive team recently rolled into Thunder in the Valley in Johnstown to help spread the word about motorcycle safety. The four-day event began on Thursday June 25 and ran through Sunday June 28. Johnstown was the second of six stops for the Live Free Ride Alive team throughout the 2016 riding season.

PennDOT personnel and rider coaches from across the region helped staff the booth over the weekend to interact with attendees on the importance of rider safety.

The Live Free Ride Alive booth is an interactive customer experience where customers can fill out a survey, sign up for a free Pennsylvania Motorcycle Safety Program (PAMSP) rider safety course or spin the safety wheel to test their knowledge on basics of riding a motorcycle.

Another attraction at the Live free Ride Alive booth is the SKIDBIKE™; a tool designed to teach a rider to properly manage traction through throttle and braking control. The instructor can simulate adverse traction environment (wet roads, dirt/gravel, bald tires, etc.) by raising or lowering the wheels inside the carriage system. According to Bobby Fitzmayer, public relations coordinator for the Pennsylvania Motorcycle Safety Program, “Pennsylvania is the only state in all of North America that has SKIDBIKE™ at the moment. There are three units and we take it to the various LFRA events and other special events as it is available to showcase it and let people know that it is out there. The curriculum for the SKIDBIKE™ is still being developed and we hope to have it in classes as soon as possible.”

You can meet the Live Free Ride Alive team and try the SKIDBIKE™ at these upcoming venues:

- Lansdale Bike Night, September 12
- York Bike Night, September 25

Learn more about Live Free Ride alive at www.livefreeridealive.com and the PAMSP at www.pamsp.com

“The Live Free Ride Alive program is aimed at promoting motorcycle safety to motorcyclists across the Commonwealth by providing education on the critical components necessary for the safe operation of a motorcycle such as being properly licensed, wearing the appropriate gear, refraining from drinking and riding, and understanding bike control skills so as to navigate the highways and byways in a safe fashion.”

- John Zimmerman, PennDOT Driver Qualification Section Manager
What does being the Deputy Secretary for Planning entail? Jim Ritzman, P.E.

What was your top highlight of 2015 and why?
A top highlight was the roll out of a PennDOT project website. www.projects.penndot.gov/projects/PAProjects.aspx
The reason I chose this as an accomplishment to highlight is because it embodies several of our key focus areas: collaboration, transparency and stewardship. This website is a simple way for everyone (residents, stakeholders, and PennDOT) to visualize the lengthy list of priorities and commitments we have made, as well as measure our progress towards meeting them.

What are your priorities for 2016?
Planning has a rather broad range of diverse priorities. I’ll choose just a few to highlight in this article. At the Secretary’s request, we developed a Transportation Investment Plan that accompanies our Financial Guidance and our Procedural Guidance for the 2017 Transportation Improvement Program update. The purpose of the Transportation Investment Plan is to make ongoing assessments and re-evaluate data associated with our Transportation Investment decisions ensuring that each dollar invested is being directed in a fashion that meets our strategic decisions and that enhances the overall performance of the commonwealth’s transportation system. The second priority that I’d like to highlight is something that we’re calling Plan 360°. It’s a way for PennDOT to enhance our community collaboration in our planning process. We want to ensure that when a project scope of work is developed we have considered a number of perspectives including: safety issues/concerns, bicycle/pedestrian considerations, transit/multi-modal considerations, storm water management, planned development and land uses, among other things. I believe that Plan 360° will revolutionize the way we engage the local government/community and result in a much better project scope.

If you could spend the rest of your life with those you love on any place on the planet, where would it be?
Home - three miles outside of Thompsontown in Juniata County, nestled in the Juniata river valley is the Ritzman residence which is packed so full of great memories where my wife and I watched our two daughters grow into beautiful young ladies. Between simple memories of lightning bugs, home cooked meals, butterflies, soccer balls flying, and grass-stained knees, I can’t think of any place I’d rather be.