

Profiles in Service: PennDOT Highlights Innovation, Customer Service through COVID-19

Harrisburg, PA – The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) today highlighted ways in which Pennsylvanians and business partners have seen continued or enhanced services during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Throughout the pandemic we have provided critical services with safety for our customers and our team at the forefront," PennDOT Secretary Yassmin Gramian said. "Whether in the field or teleworking, I'm proud of how we're showing innovation and generosity in these difficult times."

In addition to operations that continued or have restarted since the pandemic began, PennDOT's team members working remotely have continued or adapted business practices. The telework transition and need for social distancing has brought some in-person options online, such as [some permit applications administered by staff like Stephanie Marek in the department's northeast region](#).

"From the beginning – since many of my customers are truck drivers and are out on the road – I gave them my personal cell phone number as a fax for them wasn't an option," Marek explained. "They were able to take a photo of the permit application and send it to my phone so that I could issue a permit. The customers were so appreciative of this service."

Permit customers were also very happy to know that they did not have to leave their offices and drive to the District Office to have a permit issued, keeping them socially distant and safe.

Additionally, to continue core business functions such as issuing and inspecting access to roadways via highway occupancy permits, the department developed a committee to allow permitting and utility work through the pandemic. A [virtual inspection was developed](#), which allows PennDOT to verify if specific work is being done correctly on jobs, such as backfilling, paving, testing, and work-zone set ups.

King of Prussia-based District 6 Traffic Control Specialist Manager Fran Hanney was part of an internal PennDOT committee that developed the new inspection policies.

"We live in an age of technology," said Hanney. "I brainstormed how we could let these activities continue while still protecting workers."

The new inspection consists of the permittee having daily communication with PennDOT Permit staff through pictures and a virtual form that needs to be filled out and emailed. If a permittee does not send the required pictures or paperwork, they are aware that their work can be denied and shut down for failure to comply with the virtual inspection.

Recognizing that public transportation is critical – especially for seniors or persons with disabilities – PennDOT worked with transit agencies and partners statewide to keep employees and passengers safe and adjust schedules. Transit providers' role in Pennsylvanians' quality of life was underscored as they took additional steps to check on their customers, including [outreach efforts by ACCESS in the Pittsburgh area](#).

With PennDOT's help, changes in ACCESS' day-to-day services evolved to fit riders' specific needs. Instead of having to call and make reservations ahead of time, customers, most of them elderly, were able to request same-day ride service. In addition, rather than booking two separate trips, riders could safely travel to places like the ATM, the post office, or senior centers for grab-and-go meals and return home in one trip.

ACCESS staff also made over 1,000 wellness check-in calls to provide information on acquiring meals, prescriptions, emergency contact information, and the option to receive additional check-in calls. There was also time to "just chat," as people shared their feelings of loneliness surrounding the pandemic.

PennDOT's continuous modernization and quality improvement efforts have continued and expanded through the pandemic. Staff involved in facilitating meetings or organizational reviews and changes identified best practices [to keep](#)

[improvements and collaboration going through a telework environment](#). Statewide judging and recognition for the department's [Innovations Challenge for high school students also transitioned online](#) to ensure the students' hard work was recognized and rewarded.

With an eye toward educating and recruiting its future workforce and customers, the department continued its youth outreach and created new resources. PennDOT developed an [Activities for Kids page](#) to offer transportation and STEM-related activities for students and families. In the department's northwest region, plans to offer [opportunities for local scouts had to transition online](#) due to COVID-19 and 60 youth participated in the virtual format.

Beyond daily operations PennDOT staff have given of their time and resources to help their teams and communities weather the pandemic. [Tammy Chisea in Chester County](#) donated 100 masks to team members in the county and [Amy Costabile](#) in the department's Uniontown-based District 12 partnered with her mother to make and donate masks in their community.

"Sewing is a hobby, but I always end up making things for other people and giving them away because it makes me happy to see others happy...", " says Chiesa. "I will continue to do this until the crisis is over."

"Our story is just one of so many who have come to together to help one another and our community," Costabile said. "There have been so many sewers and quilters who have been making masks and we are happy to be even a small part of this contribution."

Information on PennDOT's actions during COVID-19 and current customer and business-partner guidance is available on the department's [COVID-19 page](#) at www.penndot.gov. Additional PennDOT COVID-19 stories can be viewed [on the department blog](#).