



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
August 11, 2022

PennDOT, Pa. Turnpike, RIDC of Southwestern PA to Collaborate on State-of-the-Art Safety, Training and Research Facility

Mount Pleasant, PA – Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) Secretary Yassmin Gramian today announced that the department, the Pa. Turnpike Commission, and the Regional Industrial Development Corporation (RIDC) of Southwestern PA are partnering on site planning and design for the Pennsylvania Safety, Transportation and Research Track, or [PennSTART](#) — a state-of-the-art facility envisioned to benefit emergency responders, transportation technology companies, and research institutions while supporting the local economy.

"As highway safety and transportation technologies advance, our teams, first responders, students and researchers should also be learning about these tools," Gramian said. "PennSTART will provide access to innovative technologies for testing and education."

In addition to allowing Automated Vehicle (AV) testing and development, PennSTART's aim is to address safety, training, and research needs in six key areas: traffic incident management (TIM); tolling and intelligent transportation systems (ITS) technology; work zones; commercial vehicles; transit vehicles; and AV and other emerging technologies.

When a final agreement is reached, the facility would be built at and adjacent to the RIDC Westmoreland site in Mount Pleasant. Originally a 2.8 million-square-foot manufacturing facility, through state, local, non-profit, and private partnership, RIDC Westmoreland was converted into a multi-tenant advanced manufacturing complex home to over 1,000 jobs at AV companies, contract manufacturers, and more, as well as on-site workforce development provider Westmoreland Community College Advanced Technology Center.

"Providing real-world training for Pennsylvania's 54,000 incident responders is crucial to enhance the safety of our highways for responders and travelers alike — especially as we continue to see more speeding and distracted-driving incidents," said PTC Chief Technology Officer Robert Taylor. "Fact is, the classroom alone cannot effectively prepare police, fire, medical, and towing personnel for the dangers they encounter at an incident scene. PennSTART will serve as Pennsylvania's first statewide hub for Traffic Incident Management training so these heroes can experience lifelike incidents in a controlled environment."

Examples of technologies for which safety and operational testing as well as training could be conducted at the facility include:

- TIM training;
- testing and hands-on training for new ITS, tolling and signal equipment;
- safe, simulated training for higher-speed and mobile work-zone operations;
- safety certification training opportunities;
- simulated environments for temporary traffic control device testing and evaluation;

- smart truck-parking applications and other opportunities for commercial-vehicle technology partnerships; and
- controlled environments to test various AVs and other emerging technologies for transit buses, infrastructure equipment and other applications.

In studying TIM in Pennsylvania, a joint operational policy and other recommendations were identified in a [Traffic Incident Management report](#) by the Pennsylvania State Transportation Advisory Committee. Additionally, a feasibility study reviewing and identifying the need for a TIM training center was conducted by the PTC with funding assistance through the Pennsylvania [State Transportation Innovations Council](#), a collaboration among PennDOT, the PTC, Federal Highway Administration, and other transportation stakeholders.

The PennSTART facility represents the next in a series of steps that PennDOT, the PTC and other partners have taken to improve TIM. In 2016, the agencies held a TIM Summit with state agencies and dozens of responder groups to discuss and establish policies and partnerships to improve TIM in Pennsylvania. In January 2017, the Pennsylvania Traffic Incident Management Enhancement (PennTIME) initiative was formed, with [five commonwealth agencies formalizing an interagency agreement](#) in 2018. Since PennTIME was formed, over 20,000 responders have been trained in TIM compared to roughly 6,000 before PennTIME, ranking Pennsylvania third in the country for the total number of responders trained.

Building on the growing technology and AV industries in the region, PennSTART also aims to support jobs and business development. A [report issued in September 2021](#) by the RIDC and the Greater Pittsburgh Chamber of Commerce found that “the estimated direct employment footprint of Pittsburgh’s autonomy sector totals over 6,300 jobs” with “...an additional 8,604 full- or part-time indirect jobs” in the region dependent on the industry. The direct-employment footprint alone provides “an estimated \$651 million in labor income, [and] \$34.7 million in state and local tax revenues.”

“Our region already has a thriving cluster of autonomous technology companies and is one of the national leaders in the development of driverless vehicles,” said Donald F. Smith, Jr., RIDC President. “Today’s PennSTART announcement is the fulfillment of one of the recommendations outlined in a joint RIDC—Greater Pittsburgh Chamber of Commerce report on how to facilitate the growth and impact of the industry. Southwestern Pennsylvania has a long history of successful public-private partnerships to advance our region, and we are gratified to be able to partner with PennDOT and the Turnpike Commission to develop this project as a regional asset that will continue to attract companies, jobs and investment.”

Additionally, the facility will meet one of the recommendations in the same regional report: “A multi-purpose, multi-user test and demonstration facility for autonomous mobile systems to be located within the City of Pittsburgh or close adjacent municipality that is highly convenient for use by the existing cluster of businesses, the university cluster in Oakland, and emerging entrepreneurial enterprises.”

“Westmoreland County is excited to support PennDOT, the Turnpike Commission and the RIDC on this significant capital improvement and important initiative. Improving safety on our roads and highways that will ultimately protect our residents and loved ones is paramount and we welcome this opportunity to be based here in the county.” said County Commissioner Sean Kertes.

AVs were born in Pennsylvania at Carnegie Mellon University (CMU) in Pittsburgh, and the university's work with this technology was highlighted by Dr. Raj Rajkumar of CMU.

"On behalf of the CMU community, I wish to congratulate Secretary Gramian for her efforts to make Pennsylvania a leader in implementing innovative vehicle technologies with a strong focus on safety," said Farnam Jahanian, President of Carnegie Mellon University. "CMU is pleased to be a birthplace of autonomous vehicle technology dating back to 1983 and won the 2007 DARPA Urban Challenge that helped to trigger today's global race to autonomy. This new testbed will benefit today's researchers, industry and policymakers in moving towards safer and more efficient transportation, while helping to strengthen our regional economy and workforce."

CMU is among the [eight companies authorized to test automated vehicles](#) in Pennsylvania, with testing authorized for a total of 56 counties among all testers. Pennsylvania is [among the nation's leaders](#) in facilitating this industry's growth while considering the safety of all users. For example, in 2016 PennDOT assembled the [Autonomous Vehicle Policy Task Force](#) which issued a testing policy that same year. This government, industry, and stakeholder collaboration was further formalized through Act 117 of 2018 which established the [Highly Automated Vehicle Advisory Committee](#) which "identifies recommendations for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania with the purpose of enhancing the safe and efficient movement of people and goods by advancing connected and automated vehicle technology."

Beyond technical discussions of safety, these groups are also focused on ensuring potential labor changes and opportunities are considered. The commonwealth is in active collaboration with local, national, and international experts on these topics for consultation while looking toward coming technological changes.

PennSTART information can be found on [the initiative website](#). Learn more about automated vehicles in Pennsylvania on [PennDOT's website](#).

Subscribe to statewide PennDOT news and traffic alerts at www.penndot.pa.gov/news or choose a region under "[Regional Offices](#)." Information about the state's infrastructure and results the department is delivering for Pennsylvanians can be found at www.penndot.pa.gov/results. Find PennDOT's planned and active construction projects at www.projects.penndot.gov.

Follow PennDOT on [Twitter](#) and like the department on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).

MEDIA CONTACTS: PennDOT: Alexis Campbell, 717-783-8800 or alecampbel@pa.gov
PTC: Carl DeFebo, cdefebo@paturnpike.com

###