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PennDOT, Pa. Turnpike, Penn State University to Collaborate On State-of-the-Art Safety, Training and Research Facility

Facility would offer much-needed operational, training opportunities for PA, Mid-Atlantic.

PITTSBURGH, PA. (APRIL 10, 2018) – Pennsylvania Department of Transportation Secretary and Pa. Turnpike Commission (PTC) Chair Leslie S. Richards today announced at the [Pennsylvania Automated Vehicle Summit](#) that the two agencies are partnering with Penn State University (Penn State) to commence 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 organizations and research institutions.

The aim of PennSTART 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 connected and automated vehicles. Information on the facility, including a draft rendering and video simulation, is available at www.PennSTART.org.

“As we make advancements in highway safety and transportation technologies, we need to be sure that our teams, researchers and students and first-responder partners have as much knowledge as possible about these tools as they develop,” Richards said. “PennSTART will provide Pennsylvania and the Mid-Atlantic region with access to innovative technologies for testing and education purposes.”

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 connected and automated vehicle technologies for transit buses, infrastructure equipment and other applications.

“We as highway operators have a responsibility to adapt to growing traffic and emerging technology in a thoughtful way while also being mindful of the speed at which these changes are taking place in our industry,” said PTC CEO Mark P. Compton. “The testing and training that will be available at PennSTART will give the commonwealth a huge head-start on ensuring the continued safety of travelers and responders on our highways both today and well into the future.”

“Penn State is pleased to partner with PennDOT and the PTC to begin exploring potential sites and design specifications for this much needed facility,” said Penn State Vice President for Research Neil Sharkey. “As envisioned, the PennSTART facility would provide a wonderful facility for teaching and research while ensuring the safety of our highway workers, improving traffic flow and advancing safe vehicle automation.”

The need for better and collaborative TIM training, a joint operational policy and other recommendations were identified in a Traffic Incident Management report by the Pennsylvania State Transportation Advisory Committee. Additionally, 2018 Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) data shows that more than 54,000 emergency/incident responders in Pennsylvania need to be trained on Traffic Incident Management compared to roughly 9,000 who have been trained.

A feasibility study reviewing 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, FHWA, and other transportation stakeholders. More information on the council is available at www.penndot.gov/innovation. The feasibility study ultimately identified the need for a safety, training and research facility and served as the pathway for the PennSTART partnership.

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 the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency, Pennsylvania State Police and participants from dozens of responder groups to discuss and establish policies and partnerships to improve TIM in Pennsylvania. As a result, the Pennsylvania Traffic Incident Management Enhancement initiative was formed in 2017, and a joint operational policy outlining training, technology, quick incident clearance principles and more was developed.