

Testimony for Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission COO Craig Shuey to Senate Transportation Committee Regarding Winter Preparedness and Modernization

Chairman Rafferty, Chairman Sabatina and Transportation Committee members, on behalf of our Commissioners and the entire Turnpike team, I am pleased to provide an update on our on-going efforts to improve the Commission's winter-weather planning and operating procedures. I'd like to start by welcoming back the veterans of this Committee to a new legislative session and I would like to congratulate Senator Sabatina on his becoming the Committee's Democratic Chairman.

Our top priority at the Commission has always been – and will always be – safety, for our employees, our customers and our business partners. I can say with absolute certainty that we are better-prepared for any event that might arise this year than ever before. And I can say, again with absolute certainty, that we are likely to learn something new this year that will help us next winter. This is a continuous process and we recognize that we can always do things better.

We have made some significant changes in our procedures for preparing for storms and in our on-going response to a storm or other significant event. In the past 12 months, after a thorough review of all our operations and resources, the Commission has implemented 18 new strategies and tools to help keep our customers safe and our roadway open in a major storm.

We have been focused on three broad areas:

- Improving internal procedures to make sure that we have the right personnel, equipment and supplies in place and in time for a significant weather event.
- Improving and modernizing communications and interactions with our partners, including first responders, other state agencies, local officials and volunteer first responders.
- Making sure that our customer's needs are being met and that means their need to know exactly what is going on as well as access to food and water.

Within those three areas, I would like to focus on just some of the major improvements we've made in recent months.

First, we have dramatically strengthened our weather forecasting systems and improved what I would call our situational awareness capabilities. We are now able to process and integrate more than one weather forecast into our planning process. The fact is that different forecasters use different models. State and local agencies do not all rely on the same forecasts. As a result of changes that we have made in our Operations Center, we are now seeing multiple forecasts in real time. We are sharing more information and receiving more information from our partners at the state and local level. With more information and data, we can deploy resources more quickly and effectively. We have improved our ability to share information across all of our departments,

the Pennsylvania State Police, local first responders and other important partners such as our towing company partners during an event. When we have personnel or partners on the ground, we now know that they can share with all of our partners what they are seeing.

Second, we have changed the way that we manage our existing and proposed emergency access ramps, gates and median barriers across the system.

Third, we've improved our motorist assistance plan, specifically for those rare instances when the PA State Police or local officials direct the Commission to keep motorists on our system where they are safer than they would be on local roads. This year, we are prepared to provide food and water in the unlikely event that customers are directed to stay put because that is the safest option.

We have enhanced our ability to communicate with our customers – both passenger cars as well as commercial vehicles and buses – through improved use of crowdsourcing technologies such as Waze and Twitter.

We also partnered with PEMA, PennDOT and the PA State Police to develop and implement the 511PACONNECT SYSTEM, a new tool that is designed to deliver important news and information to stranded motorists. The system works in a similar fashion to the Amber Alerts system. In addition to providing information, motorists can use their phone to enter information such as the number of occupants in the vehicle that is shared with first responders.

As I mentioned at the beginning of my testimony, modernizing our operations is an on-going process. Currently, we are developing a connected-vehicle program for snow-maintenance operations which will dramatically improve communications and coordination for our crew out on the road in a storm. We are going to initiate a study to consider installation of hurricane gates to prevent traffic from entering our system during weather emergencies. We are also developing smart work zones, which ultimately will make it safer for our snow plows and maintenance crews; first responders and motorists to move through these zones in the event of an emergency.

Mr. Chairman, again, I want to thank you and your colleagues for the opportunity to provide this update today. I recognize that I touched on several different initiatives and I am sure that some members have questions. We will also provide detailed information to staff and to your office after the hearing.

Thank you