

Beyond the Roadway: Building Trust Through Strategic Public Engagement and Stakeholder Communications



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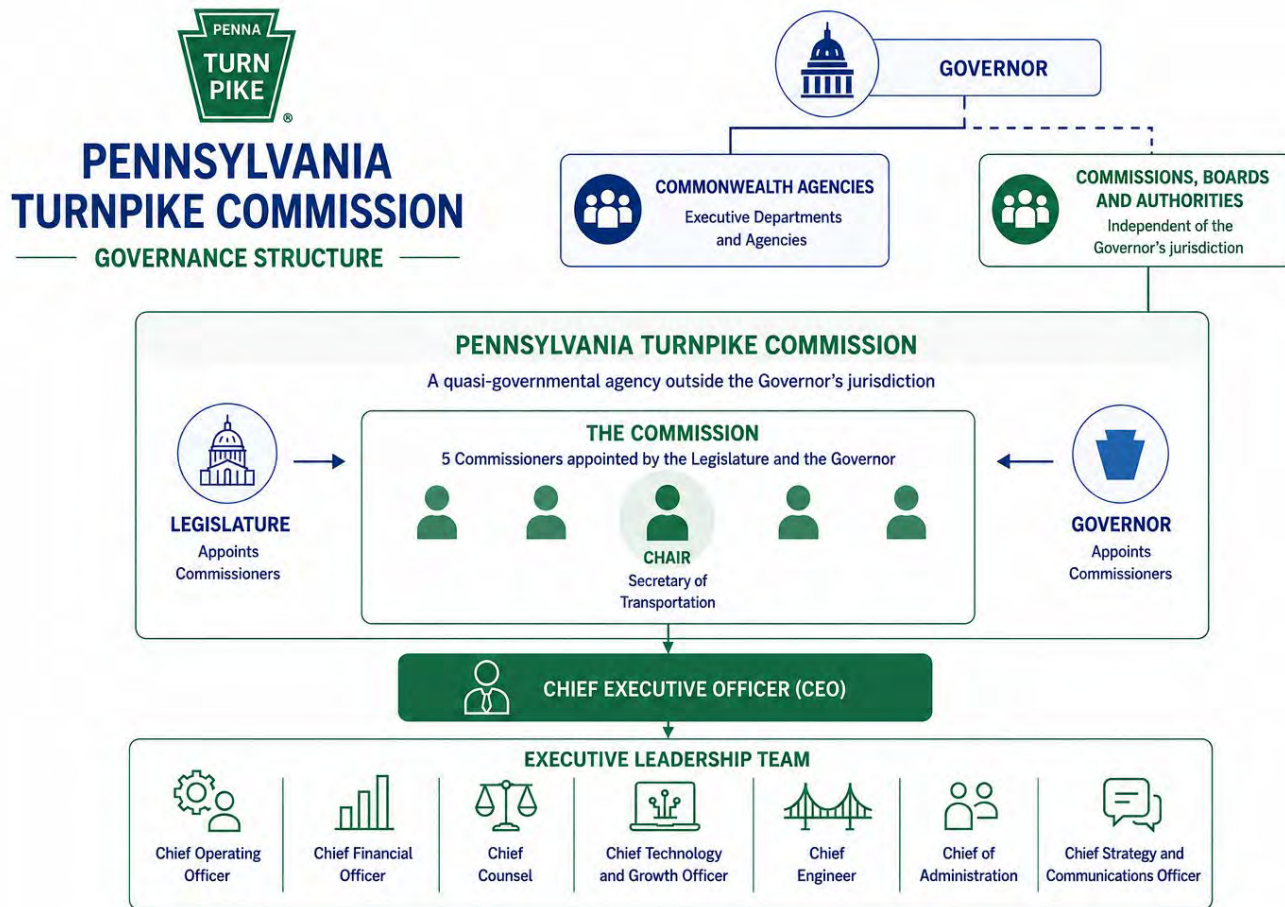
Overall Takeaways

- **Build trust through transparency.** If you don't tell your story, someone else will—and they're unlikely to get it right.
- **Shape the digital narrative continuously.** Today's reputation is influenced by search, AI, social media, and third-party voices as much as traditional news.
- **Make communications part of strategy.** Early, proactive stakeholder engagement leads to better decisions, stronger partnerships, and more successful outcomes.

The PA Turnpike Commission is more than a roadway.

- A billion-dollar enterprise driving our state and national economies.
- Generates, collects, and manages \$1.8 billion annually.
- Second-largest tolling agency in terms of miles.
- Predates the Interstate Highway System.
- Operates separately from Pennsylvania Department of Transportation.
- Manages roadways, bridges and tunnels.
- Committed to innovation, growth and sustainability.







565+
Miles



140
Facilities



856
Bridges



10
Tunnels



80+
Interchanges



1,400
Employees



8
Pay to Play
Indictments



20
Years of Toll
Increases



Always
Under construction



Most
Expensive



If you aren't talking about you someone else will.



Grow your sphere of influence through information share and partnership.



Get ahead, be proactive, don't wonder...act.

Case Studies for Change



Toll Increases and Revenue Loss: Filling the void, Advocacy building



CHALLENGE

- Annual Toll Increase began in 2009, after 55 years of virtually static tolls.
 - Due to Act 44 Legislative Mandate to pay DOT \$450M annually to fill budget gaps on transportation needs.
- Public assumption it was due to mismanagement; setting the record straight meant criticizing the legislature.
- Commission in a defensive posture due to indictments; didn't defend.
- Result ingrained hatred for Commission, solidified narrative of corruption and mismanagement



We weren't talking about ourselves, but everyone else was.

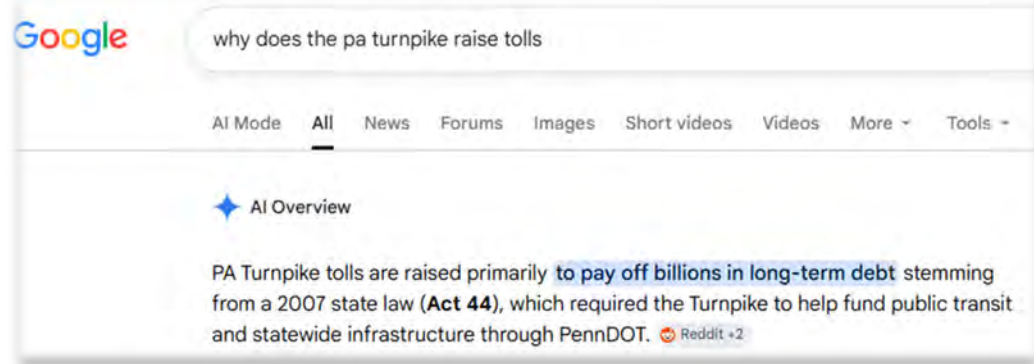
ACTION

- Began talking about toll increases and telling the story of Act 44 everywhere and anywhere
 - Social, digital, media relations
 - Never talked about tolls without talking about Act 44 – “Act 44 Toll Increase”
 - Removed the ‘scandalous’ ‘secret’ implication
- Leaned heavily on our financial SUCCESS; didn’t give into negative narrative.
 - Don’t believe the narrative and don’t give in to the negativity.
 - Financial feat managing the \$6B in imposed debt.



OUTCOME

- Defense on social media channels started
- News Media included Act 44 in all coverage of toll increases; correctly attributed the actions
 - Reported as routine, no longer inflammatory
- Our information overcame the mis-information through consistency, repetition and discipline.
- Legislature felt informed and no longer required bi-annual hearings on the topic.
- Flipped Legislature to a partner vs. adversary not only on toll increases but also Toll Leakage



PRINCIPLES IN ACTION



When we left a void, it **didn't stop the stories**, it just left out our voice. Silence creates **mis-trust** and the impression of **misconduct**.



By providing information and talking about our issues, we removed the mystique, **regained Legislative trust**. By **being present**, we established partnerships instead of adversaries.



Proactive and sustained communications resulted in **our story**, instead of mis-information, **taking center stage** in the news media and digital media.

“Most Expensive Road in the World” Digital Assault



CHALLENGE

- An insurance company "survey" labeled the PA Turnpike the **"Most Expensive Toll Road in the World."**
- News outlets repeatedly cited one another rather than verifying the underlying data
- At the same time... a national airline claimed it was cheaper to fly than to drive the PA Turnpike
- The claim was amplified through:
 - News websites
 - Blogs
 - Social media
 - Search engines
 - AI-generated summaries

The logo for the Pittsburgh Courier, featuring the word "Pittsburgh" in red and "Courier" in red, with a small "NEW" tag above "Pittsburgh".

Frontier Airlines offering roundtrip flights between Philadelphia and Pittsburgh for Just \$36.50 – Half the cost of taking the turnpike



In today's digital environment, misinformation spreads faster than corrections.

ACTION

- Expanded proactive media relations coverage
 - Fact-based articles, blogs, FAQs, data-driven
 - Shareable graphics and videos
- Increased positive digital content
 - Leveraged social influencers
- Optimized Commission content
 - FAQ pages designed for modern search behavior
- Generalized Engine Optimization (GEO)
 - Developed content specifically for ChatGPT, Gemini, Copilot



We stopped trying to win one news cycle and started influencing the entire digital information ecosystem.

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February 25, 2025 **Tolls** **Finance**

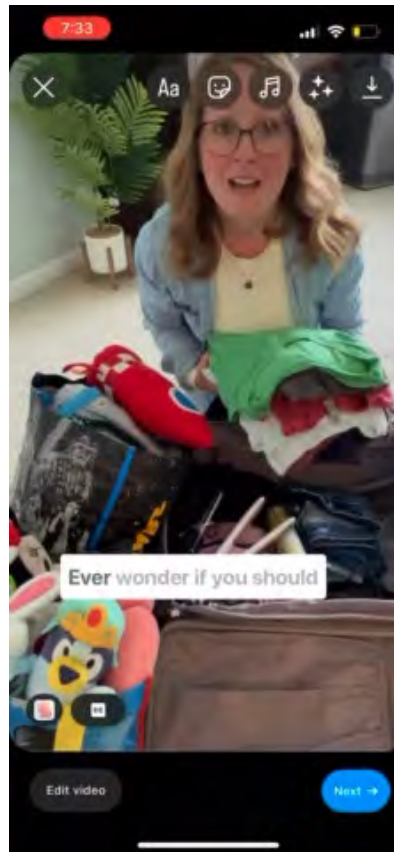
The Pennsylvania Turnpike Costs: A Comparison to America's Most Expensive Toll Roads



The Pennsylvania Turnpike's per-mile rates rank mid-tier compared to other toll roads, bridges and tunnels. While surveys might suggest otherwise, the "most expensive turnpike" assertions are simply not true.

Why partner with social influencers?

- Reach new audiences
- Humanize the PA Turnpike
- Increase trust through 3rd party voices
- Reinforce the value of your toll dollars
 - Safety Patrol & response
 - Traffic Ops Center
 - State Police Troop
 - 17 Service Plazas with fuel, food, and restrooms
 - EV charging
 - Pet Areas



OUTCOME

- Changing the narrative takes persistence
- Search results increasingly surface Commission FAQs and blogs
- Positive content now competes with – and outranks – misleading articles
- Reporters call us first – and reference data
- Third-party resources reinforce accurate info

TRIB | LIVE

Contrary to popular perception, Pennsylvania does not have the most expensive toll road in the country.

The state's E-ZPass rates are the 20th highest out of the country's 47 state toll roads and fall two cents below the national average of 19 cents per mile for a passenger vehicle, according to the turnpike commission.

Pa. Turnpike toll rate comp

The Pennsylvania Turnpike has the 20th highest toll rate of the 47 state toll roads nationwide.



Toll agency (State)	Cost per mile for passenger cars	Cost per mile for 5-axis trucks
1. Pocahontas 896 (VA)	.68	1.16
2. Northwest Parkway (CA)	.65	2.59
3. Route 73/San Joaquin (CO)	.62	2.50
4. Route 241/Foothill (CA)	.49	1.94
5. Dulles Toll Road/Route 267 (VA)	.43	1.11



We stopped trying to win one news cycle and started influencing the entire digital information ecosystem.



The proof is in the data.

Toll Rate Peer Comparison*							
#	Toll Agency (State)	\$ per mile		#	Toll Agency (State)	\$ per mile	
		Passenger Car	5-Axle Truck			Passenger Car	5-Axle Truck
1.	(VA) Pocahontas 895	\$0.68	\$1.16	25.	(NJ) Atlantic CityExpy	\$0.14	\$0.54
2.	(CA) Northwest Pky	\$0.65	\$2.59	26.	(FL) SR 874 Don Shula Expy	\$0.13	\$0.26
3.	(CO) Rt 73 (San Joaquin)	\$0.62	\$2.50	27.	(IL) I-355 (Veterans Mem. Hwy)	\$0.13	\$1.09
4.	(CA) Rt 241 (Foothill)	\$0.49	\$1.94	28.	(FL) Toll 869 - Sawgrass Expy	\$0.11	\$0.42
5.	(VA) Dulles Toll Rd (SR 267)	\$0.43	\$1.11	29.	(WV) West Virginia Tpke	\$0.10	\$0.41
6.	(VA) Dulles Greenway	\$0.41	\$1.25	30.	(IN) Indiana Toll Road	\$0.10	\$0.53
7.	(TX) 183A Toll Rd	\$0.38	\$1.51	31.	(NH) Blue Star Turnpike	\$0.09	\$0.31
8.	(CO) E-470	\$0.30	\$1.15	32.	(FL) Florida's Turnpike Mainline	\$0.07	\$0.21
9.	(DE) JFK Memr. Hwy (I-95)	\$0.29	\$0.66	33.	(OH) Ohio Tpke	\$0.07	\$0.22
10.	(SC) Greenville Southern Conn. (I-185)	\$0.27	\$0.95	34.	(OK) Indian Nation Turnpike	\$0.07	\$0.22
11.	(VA) Powhite Pkwy (SR 76)	\$0.26	\$0.38	35.	(NJ) Garden State Parkway	\$0.07	\$0.34
12.	(VA) Chesapeake Expy (Rt 168)	\$0.25	\$0.31	36.	(ME) Maine Turnpike	\$0.06	\$0.25
13.	(NC) Triangle Expressway	\$0.24	\$0.96	37.	(OK) Turner Turnpike	\$0.06	\$0.26
14.	(TX) SR 130 - Central TX Tpke	\$0.22	\$0.78	38.	(MD) JFK Memr. Hwy (I-95)	\$0.06	\$0.48
15.	(TX) SR 45 North - Central TX Tpke	\$0.20	\$0.81	39.	(IL) I-94/I-294/I-80 (Tri-State Twy)	\$0.06	\$0.20
16.	(TX) Dallas North Tollway	\$0.20	\$0.80	40.	(MA) MassPike	\$0.05	\$0.54
17.	(FL) SR 878 Snapper Creek Expy	\$0.18	\$0.35	41.	(IL) I-88 (Ronald Regan Mem. Hwy)	\$0.05	\$0.57
18.	(NJ) New Jersey Tpke	\$0.17	\$0.57	42.	(NY) NYS Thruway (I-87/I-90)	\$0.05	\$0.31
19.	(FL) SR 924 Gratigny Pky	\$0.17	\$0.35	43.	(IL) I-90 (Jane Addams Tollway)	\$0.05	\$0.56
20.	(PA) PA Tpke (I-76/I-70/I-276)	\$0.17	\$0.67	44.	(KS) Kansas Turnpike	\$0.05	\$0.14
21.	(NC) Monroe Expressway	\$0.16	\$0.64	45.	(DE) DE Tpke - SR 1	\$0.04	\$0.15
22.	(FL) SR 836 – Dolphin Expy	\$0.16	\$0.32	46.	(NH) Central New Hampshire Turnpike	\$0.04	\$0.16
23.	(FL) SR 112 Airport Expy	\$0.16	\$0.31	47.	(NH) Spaulding Turnpike	\$0.03	\$0.16
24.	(TX) Sam Houston Toll Rd	\$0.15	\$0.73	Average		\$0.19	\$0.66

Source: Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission 2025 Traffic and Toll Revenue CDM Smith Bring Down Letter.

*Rate comparison reflects E-ZPass toll rates and does not contemplate Toll By Plate pricing difference.

PRINCIPLES IN ACTION



Be proactive, not reactive. We used credible **data to correct misinformation**.



Use trusted, third-party voices to reinforce credibility.



Create owned content where people get their news – **including AI**.

Roadway Projects: Balancing risk with public sentiment and need



CHALLENGE

- 85-year-old roadway undergoing reconstruction and modernization – ORT, total recon, demo
- Projects generate concerns about eminent domain, noise, environment, and traffic disruptions
- Small groups of opponents shape the narrative
- Communication processes relied more heavily on engineering processes
- Engineers and consultants serving as communicators



'We don't want it' Strong opposition voiced against Turnpike project to cut mountain

by Stoker Wieczorek | Thu, September 26, 2024 at 10:33 PM

Updated Fri, September 27, 2024 at 11:55 AM



When communications are driven by technical processes instead of stakeholder needs, information gaps allow others to shape the narrative.

ACTION

- Communications became part of project planning and decision-making
- Build relationships before construction begins
- Lead with project benefits
- Legislative resources
- Expanded outreach beyond directly impacted residents
- Proactive media and social strategy
- Sentiment tracking



The Allegheny Mountain Realignment Project

The Allegheny Mountain Realignment Project aims to modernize a key section of the Pennsylvania Turnpike in Somerset County, replacing the Allegheny Tunnel, which is deteriorating and is increasingly challenging to maintain, with a new seven-lane road to meet today's mobility and safety standards.

The Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission (PA Turnpike) has been evaluating this project and working with the community for more than 20 years.

After evaluating several options, including rehabilitation of the current tunnel, replacing the tunnel proved to be the safest and most cost effective solution. The project is now in preliminary engineering and design, with ongoing data collection and public input through 2028.

Why It Matters: This segment has a crash rate roughly three times higher than similar segments statewide due to the constraints of narrow shoulders and limited medians, and its successful completion would reduce long-standing operational constraints, support growing freight demands, and enhance traveler experience.

The Allegheny Mountain Realignment Project reflects a proactive effort to bring aging transportation infrastructure up to 21st-century standards – improving safety, efficiency, and economic connectivity across a critical east-west corridor.

Key Benefits

Enhanced Safety

Reduces crashes, improves incident response times, and enhances safety for motorists, first responders and highway workers by realigning the road and improving its design.

Improved Mobility and Reduced Congestion

Builds a modern alignment, additional travel lanes and a dedicated truck climbing lane to ease congestion caused by capacity limits at the existing tunnel – especially important in high-use and peak travel periods.

Economic and Freight Efficiency

Removes hazardous material detours onto local roads, reducing community impacts, improving freight mobility and supporting regional commerce.

Long-Term Infrastructure Sustainability

Addresses aging tunnels nearing the end of their useful life by providing a strategic, long-term infrastructure solution that avoids costly, disruptive maintenance and short-term fixes.



Engaging stakeholders early reduces misinformation and builds trust.

OUTCOME

- More consistent, customer-focused messaging
- Building relationships before projects begin
- Telling our story in the media and on social
- Communications is part of project delivery
- Better prepared elected officials and community partners to answer constituent questions



Effective communications begin long before construction starts.

February 19, 2026 **Travel** **Maintenance & Construction**

The Allegheny Mountain Realignment Project: Enhancing Safety, Access and Mobility



PRINCIPLES IN ACTION



Early communication builds trust before the project starts.



Customized communications increase understanding among **diverse audiences**.



Transparency reduces uncertainty and **misinformation**.

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Questions?

