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PennDOT's 'Innovations Challenge'

By PennDot

HARRISBURG - PennDOT's 'Innovations Challenge' Asks Pennsylvania High School Students to Develop Solution to Address Bridge Strikes

Submission deadline for the tenth annual challenge is January 29, 2027.

Harrisburg, PA—The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) announced today that high school students from around the state are invited to participate in this year's PennDOT Innovations Challenge, which encourages students to use their problem-solving, creative and strategic-thinking abilities to solve real-world transportation challenges in a competition among their peers. The Innovations Challenge is open to all Pennsylvania students in grades 9-12.

Pennsylvania's transportation network includes thousands of bridges and tunnels that safely connect communities every day. However, many of these structures were built decades ago, when commercial vehicles, recreational vehicles (RVs), and truck trailers were significantly smaller than they are today. As vehicles have gotten larger, the risk of them striking low-clearance bridges and tunnels has increased. In recent years, more than 600 Pennsylvania bridges have been struck by over-height vehicles. Even when these incidents cause only minor damage, they often result in lane closures, traffic congestion, emergency response, expensive repairs, and disruptions for businesses, schools, emergency services, and the traveling public.

Bridge hits undermine the progress that has been made in improving Pennsylvania's infrastructure. Under Governor Josh Shapiro's Administration, 21,852 road miles have been improved statewide, and work has advanced on 1,988 state and local bridges. The Governor's 2026-27 enacted budget will drive out an additional \$775 million over the next two fiscal years for shovel-ready projects to repair state-owned roads across Pennsylvania.

"Bridge strikes are not only costly and time consuming, but they are a safety hazard to Pennsylvania travelers," said PennDOT Secretary Mike Carroll. "We're looking to our most ambitious and creative youth to generate some innovative solutions to this all-too-common issue."

This year, teams are challenged to develop an innovative solution to help prevent over-height vehicles from striking bridges and tunnels. Proposals should focus on identifying potential hazards before a collision occurs while improving safety, protecting infrastructure, and minimizing disruptions to travelers and local communities.

Regional Innovations Challenge winners will be invited to present their solutions to Secretary Carroll and a panel of judges, who will determine the statewide winner. PennDOT is partnering with several organizations to provide a monetary award to the statewide winning team to be announced on the Innovations Challenge webpage later.

For complete Innovations Challenge details, visit our webpage <https://www.pa.gov/agencies/pennidot/research-planning-and-innovation/innovation-at-pennidot/innovations-challenge>. The submission deadline is Friday, Jan. 29, 2027.



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