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Motorists Encouraged to Take Steps for Safer Thanksgiving, Winter Travel
New 511PA Tool Offered for Thanksgiving Travel Decisions
Harrisburg, PA (November 23, 2015)

As Thanksgiving approaches, Pennsylvania Department of Transportation Secretary Leslie S. Richards today urged drivers to take steps now for a safe holiday travel period and winter season. Richards announced a new tool on www.511PA.com that allows users to see how traffic speeds on the Wednesday before and Sunday after Thanksgiving in 2013 and 2014 compare to average traffic conditions.

“With Thanksgiving being one of the busiest travel periods during the year, it can be a challenge to decide when to begin your trip,” Richards said. “This page is one more way we’re putting as much information as possible into drivers’ hands so they can make informed travel decisions.” The “Historic Holiday Traffic” page allows users to choose their region and view an hour-by-hour, color-coded visual of how traffic speeds on these travel periods compare to the average speed at the same time and day of week. The information is provided for roughly 2,900 highway miles as part of the data supplying the statewide speed data for 511PA. In addition to planning for traffic impacts, Richards noted that vehicle preparation is key to safe travel.

“Snowflakes may not be falling right now, but now is the time to make sure drivers and their vehicles are ready for emergencies on our roadways,” Richards said at a media event today. “Taking these steps will help us all start the winter season on the right foot.”

With many motorists traveling Pennsylvania highways this holiday and to prepare for the months ahead, drivers should have their vehicle serviced by a mechanic they trust. A properly trained mechanic can check the cooling system, battery, hoses, drive belts, tires and wiper blades to ensure they are in good condition and functioning properly. Throughout the season, motorists should frequently check all fluid levels, lights and wiper blades.

Tires should also be checked often for the correct level of air pressure and adequate tire-tread depth to perform on ice and snow. A quick way to check tread depth is to insert a penny in the tread groove with Lincoln’s head upside down. If you can see the entire head, the tires are worn and traction will suffer. If you live in an area prone to heavy snow, drivers may want to consider using dedicated snow tires or carrying a set of tire chains. At a minimum, all-season tires should be rated for use in mud and snow.

“Once vehicles are travel-ready, drivers should be prepared for travel emergencies, whether weather or vehicle-related,” Richards said. “Especially if long-distance travel is planned, motorists should always carry an emergency kit.”

An emergency kit should include items such as non-perishable food, water, first-aid supplies, warm clothes, a blanket, cell phone charger and a small snow shovel. However, motorists should tailor their kits to any specific needs that they or their families may have. Consider adding such items as baby supplies, extra medication, pet supplies, or even children's games.

“Weather and road conditions can quickly take a turn for the worse during winter months,” said Richard D. Flinn, Jr., director of the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency. “Motorists should anticipate traffic delays and allow plenty of time to get where they’re going, and restock their emergency kit immediately after using items in it.” Motorists can check conditions on more than 40,000 roadway miles, including color-coded winter conditions on 2,900 miles, by visiting www.511PA.com. 511PA, which is free and available 24 hours a day, provides traffic delay warnings, weather forecasts, traffic speed information, and access to more than 770 traffic cameras.

511PA is also available through a smartphone application for iPhone and Android devices, by calling 5-1-1, or by following regional Twitter alerts accessible on the 511PA website. The “Historic Holiday Traffic” player is currently only available on desktop computers or tablets that support Flash.

For more information on PennDOT's winter preparations and additional winter-driving resources for motorists, visit the department's winter Web page, ww.PennDOT.gov/winter. The public can join the discussion on a safe holiday season using the hashtag #PASafeHoliday and find winter information with the #PAWinter hashtag.

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