511 Pennsylvania Frequently Asked Questions

Contents

511 Pennsylvania Frequently Asked Questions

General

What is 511PA?

511PA is Pennsylvania's official travel information service which provides travelers with reliable, current traffic and weather information, as well as links to other transportation services. 511PA is designed to help motorists reach their destination in the most efficient manner when traveling in Pennsylvania.

What is the coverage area of 511PA?

Phone/Personal Alerts (Core Network)

The 511PA core network covers all Interstates (including the Pennsylvania Turnpike) and select US and State Routes for roughly 2,900 miles of roadway. Traffic incidents, construction alerts, traffic speeds, and winter road conditions are reported on all roadways within the core network. For ease of use, the network is broken into eight geographical regions.

Here is a complete list of roads covered as part of the 511PA core network.

Website (Extended Network)

The 511PA extended network covers all PennDOT and Pennsylvania Turnpike operated roadways for roughly 40,000 miles of roadway. Traffic incidents and construction alerts are reported on all roadways and traffic speeds are reported on approximately 15,000 miles of roadway.

Why aren't other routes available under the 511 Core Network?

To ensure that only accurate and pertinent information is provided to travelers, PennDOT chose only roadways with reliable speed data, road condition reporting, and traffic cameras. However, PennDOT is constantly exploring the potential expansion of the core network as more reliable data is made available.   In the meantime, to see information on statewide roadways, you can visit the Web map and website at www.511pa.com.

What types of services are available to the traveler on 511PA?

 With 511PA, travelers can find such information such as:

- Traffic conditions;
- Traffic Speeds;
- Live traffic camera images;
- Highway construction updates;
- Winter road conditions;
- Weather conditions and alerts; and
- Links to other travel resources.

511PA will continually evolve, so look for other services in the future.

511 Pennsylvania Frequently Asked Questions

How does the information available from 511PA differ from other travel information sources?

511PA gives travelers statewide traffic coverage and does not just focus on the major markets (i.e. Philadelphia and Pittsburgh). 511 is always there, 24 hours per day, seven days per week, so travelers don't have to wait for other traffic reports. The 511PA system provides personalized traffic information tailored specifically for each traveler. Users also have access to PennDOT Closed-Circuit TVs and weather information.

Where does the information originate?

In an effort to provide the most reliable information to travelers, 511PA does not update until PennDOT is able to verify that an incident is occurring either through its traffic camera network or through confirmed reports from state and local police. Crashes and other delays beyond PennDOT's control, such as vehicle breakdowns, are not immediately available on the system and travelers may encounter traffic delays before that information is posted on 511PA. Other sources of information include the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission, the National Weather Service, and private traffic information services. EV charging station locations are provided by the Alternative Fuel Data Center.

How often is the information updated?

Information contained within the 511PA system is updated at various rates.

- Incidents – conditions are updated as soon as PennDOT is made aware of an incident that affects the road network.
- Construction – roadwork is reported before construction begins and is immediately updated when PennDOT is made aware of change in conditions.
- Traffic Speeds – all speeds are reported in near real time.
- Winter Road Conditions – plow truck drivers report observed conditions on regular intervals.
- Traffic Cameras – the "live" traffic images are updated every five seconds.

Is the information accurate?

PennDOT provides this information as a public service based upon reports collected from PennDOT staff and other sources. However, these reports are based on the information available at the time of publication and cannot be guaranteed as to accuracy or timeliness. Actual conditions may vary from those reported, though every effort is made to keep information comprehensive and current.

As weather and road conditions change rapidly, the information reported through 511PA should not be used as the only factor in determining your travel decisions. Motorists are cautioned to be alert to changing conditions and adjust their driving accordingly.

What is the service area for 511PA?

The 511PA system is available statewide.

How can I help make the system better?

The more the system is used, the better information we have to learn about what is important to travelers around Pennsylvania. Specific suggestions are welcome through the "online feedback form"

found in the "Contact" section found at the bottom of every webpage or via the 511PA email
511pa@pa.gov.

How do I access 511PA?

Information is available through 511PA by dialing 5-1-1 from any phone or by visiting www.511PA.com on your computer or your mobile device.

Does 511PA utilize any form of social media?

Yes, you can also follow any of the 511PA regional Twitter pages. 511PA tweets include news releases and traffic advisories, along with all traffic and construction events on the 511PA network in that region.

You can access these regional pages from the link on the 511PA Web page:

http://www.dot.state.pa.us/Internet/pdnews.nsf/centerTwitter?OpenPage

What if I want specific information on a state route?

While PennDOT is committed to customer satisfaction, there are specific questions that cannot be answered through 511. Specific inquiries such as the following should be directed to the PennDOT District Office in that region:

- Route suggestions;
- Specific road conditions;
- Alternate directions;
- Local traffic questions; and
- Regional traffic advisories for roadways not on the 511PA roadway network.

Users can access contact information for each PennDOT District Office through the PennDOT District Map. The map can be found on the website by clicking "travel conditions", and then clicking "additional advisories"

What if my question was not answered?

If you still have a question, users can reach PennDOT via the Contact Us page found at www.511pa.com/contactUs.aspx or email us at 511PA@pa.gov.

Phone System

What is the 511PA phone system?

511PA has an interactive, voice-activated travel information system that can be accessed by calling 511. PennDOT reminds motorists not to call 511PA while driving. Motorists should safely pull off the road before calling the system, or check online for travel delays before starting your trip.

How can I access the 511PA telephone system?

Just dial 5-1-1 from any phone-landline or cellular-in Pennsylvania. If you are outside Pennsylvania, call 1-877-511-PENN (7366).

511 Pennsylvania Frequently Asked Questions

Will I be greeted by a person or answering service?

511PA is an automated attendant that will walk the user through what services are available and even offer help with using the service if needed.

What does each call cost?

Calling 511PA is free. However, local airtime minutes or roaming charges will apply (if applicable) as charged by your wireless carrier.

When can I call 511PA?

The system is available 24 hours per day, seven days per week.

What language does 511PA understand and speak?

The system is programmed to respond to English. While common accents will most likely be understood, the system may not recognize callers with certain speech patterns. At any point in the system, users can press "0" get receive touch-tone options.

What is 511's relationship to 9-1-1?

511 is a traveler information number and 9-1-1 is for true emergencies that require police or medical attention. Use 9-1-1 only for serious emergencies. 511 can be used whenever you want.

Are there shortcuts for navigating through the system quickly?

Using a sophisticated voice-recognition system, 511 allows users to navigate completely hands-free. Also, users can interrupt the prompts at any time and make their request; there is no need to wait for the system to finish a question before you answer.

For even faster and more efficient navigation, use the following commands:

If you want to….	And are using voice recognition	And are using touchtone option
Go to main menu	Say "main menu"	Press 98
Switch regions	Say "switch regions"	Press 97
Switch to statewide	Say "statewide"	Press 96
Switch between voice & touchtone	Press 0	Press 0
Leave a comment	Press 77	Press 77
Hear a list again	Say "Repeat"	Press 99
Skip an advisory	Say "Next"	Press 1
Stop advisory playback	Say "Stop"	Press 2
Hear available choices	Say "what are my choices"	Press 99
Get information for other PA roads (not on the phone system)	Visit www.511pa.com	

What can I do when the system cannot recognize what I am saying?

The system might have a difficulty responding to your request if:

- you said something that the system is not programmed to recognize at that particular menu (e.g. requesting a roadway not contained within that region);
- it cannot understand your voice; or
- there is background noise, such as a radio, people talking near you, or road noise that prevents the system from understanding you.
- you are using a speakerphone setting instead of a hands-free device such as a Bluetooth earpiece.

If the system is having problems recognizing your voice, try the following:

- Speak as clearly as possible
- Minimize background noise
- Ask for help at any time by saying "Help", the system automatically gives help specific to the question just asked. You can also say "What are my choices?" to get a list of all choices recognized at that menu
- If you're using a cell phone and you have a low signal, try calling back when you get a better one.

Why can't I connect to the 511PA phone system?

Both landline and wireless telephone carriers provide access to the 511PA service though the 511 dialing code. Some office telephone systems (PBXs) may need to be reprogrammed to allow the three-digit 511 code. If you dial 511 from inside your office and get a fast busy signal, please check with your office manager or telephone system administrator to ensure that 511 is allowed through your PBX.

If you are unable to reach 511PA by dialing 511 from any phone, your telephone carrier may not yet support this service. Callers can still access 511PA by dialing 1-877-511-PENN (7366). If you do discover a carrier that does not support 511, please inform PennDOT at 511pa@pa.gov.

How do I report roadway problems?

For information related to roadway concerns including: reporting pothole locations, storm water and drainage concerns, traffic-related concerns, or property damage related to PennDOT operations, visit your local Customer Care Center website. Additionally, you can report potholes by calling 1-800-FIX-ROAD.

I have suggestions on how to improve the 511PA phone system. How can I provide them?

To leave feedback, dial 77 at any time during your call.

511 Pennsylvania Frequently Asked Questions

511 Web

How do I find information for the highway/road I'm interested in?

There are two ways to access information on a particular roadway.

- On the homepage a map is displayed. Click and drag on the map to re-center it on a particular location. Zoom in to the region by using the zoom control on the left-hand side of the map, or use the mouse's scroll wheel. Select what information you wish to view from the legend at the top of the map. Click on appropriate icons to view detail.
- From the "Travel Conditions" menu, select "Possible Travel Delays." Users can select a region and sort the information "Last Updated" or "Facility." This menu item is also available from the homepage, above the map as the "Alerts as Text" icon.
- From the "Travel Conditions" menu, select "Additional Advisories." Users can select a region and get press releases from the local District. Local press release may provide additional information such as impacts to local roadways and detour information.

Can I get real-time public transportation information on this website?

PennDOT is exploring ways to include real-time transit information in 511. In the meantime, PennDOT has gathered resources for many transportation modes, including transit, biking, walking and even car and van pooling, and created the website www.PACommutes.com. You can learn about services for seniors and persons with disabilities, as well as the many ways you can get around Pennsylvania, whether you're a daily commuter or visiting the commonwealth.

Why are there no alerts listed on the 511 homepage when there are incidents on the traffic map?

Currently, the alert ticker on the 511 homepage is reserved for major statewide events or events that PennDOT deems relevant to public safety such as a speed restriction due to winter weather conditions. To ensure the public does not become accustomed to news always being in the ticker, PennDOT reserves the space for the aforementioned circumstances.

Why are the traffic cameras still images and not streaming video?

We are in the process of implementing streaming video feeds into the 511 system.

I traveled through a construction zone but it was not reported on 511. Why?

A work zone is only listed in 511 if the construction activity directly impacts traffic (i.e. full road closures and/or lane restrictions). However, if a traffic disruption is identified within the work zone by Traffic Management Center staff, a construction event may be reported until traffic returns to normal flow.

Can I save my map view so that it appears that way each time I use 511?

Yes, users can save a personalized map view on the map screen. Once a user clicks on the "Save Map View" button, a cookie will be created and store in the users browser. Every time the users access the traffic, the map positioning, zoom level, and overlays will be the same as when they save the views.

511 Pennsylvania Frequently Asked Questions

I moved the map, how do I restore my saved view?
Click the "Go to Map View" button to restore the map to your personalized settings.

How do I reset my personalized map view?
Click the "Save Map View" button and old setting will be overridden.

How do I remove the personalized map view?
Click the "Clear Saved View" button (the trash can icon).

Why isn't my personalized map view being saved?
Ensure that your browser settings allow cookies to be saved. If a user blocks cookies or clears their cookies, 511 cannot recall the user's personalized map view.

What browsers is the 511PA website compatible with?
The 511PA website is designed to work on most major browsers including Google Chrome, Microsoft Internet Explorer, Mozilla Firefox, Apple Safari, and Opera.

Personalized Traveler Alerts

What is 511PA Personalized Traveler Alerts?
511PA Personalized Traveler Alerts is a free service that notifies subscribers of accidents, incidents and construction on select state highways and toll roads they choose. Alerts are sent to subscribers' cell phones or email accounts.

How do I subscribe?
Subscribing to 511PA Personalized Traveler Alerts is easy! Follow these step by step directions:

Step 1: Set up Account

- Under the "Personal Alerts" menu, Click "New User"
- Enter a Username and Password
- Enter your First and Last Name
- Enter a valid email address in at least one of the addresses
- Click "Submit"

Step 2: Add Traffic Profile

- After Step 1, or Under the "Personal Alerts" menu, click "Login" and enter your username and password.
- Click "Add Traffic Profile"
- Select Roadway, Direction, Start Point and End Point, then click "Add Segment"
- Repeat for as many segments needed for your route.
- Check the day(s) you wish to receive notifications
- Select the beginning and ending time periods during the specified days you wish to receive alerts.
- Select the email where you would like alerts to be sent.

511 Pennsylvania Frequently Asked Questions

- • Enter a nickname for the profile
- • Click "Add Profile"
- • Additional profiles can be added by clicking "Add Traffic Profile" again.

For more information, visit the "Using the Alerting Service" page under "Using 511" menu of the website. The information gathered for this service remains private.

Can you send 511PA Personalized Traveler Alerts to more than one email address?

Yes, 511PA Personalized Traveler Alerts allows an individual to create a profile with one or two notification addresses. Alerts can be sent to multiple notification addresses if the user sets up separate profiles in his or her account that cover the same segment but have different notification addresses or if the user creates separate accounts. Please note that each email address registered to 511PA Personalized Traveler Alerts may be associated with only one account.

Can I receive 511PA Personalized Traveler Alerts to both an email address and Text messages?

Yes. However, please do not use your mobile device to read these messages while driving. Any carrier costs associated with receiving the on your mobile device, are the subscriber's responsibility as this is not a PennDOT fee. PennDOT does not charge for delivery.

How do I receive text (SMS) alerts on my phone?

In order to receive text (SMS) alerts to a phone, you must use the email address format your carrier provides.   Formats for a number of common carriers are listed below, where phone number = your 10-digit mobile phone number:

- - T-Mobile: phonenumber@tmomail.net
- - AT&T: phonenumber@txt.att.net
- - Sprint: phonenumber@messaging.sprintpcs.com
- - Verizon: phonenumber@vtext.com

Contact your carrier to find out what format you need to use if your carrier is not listed above.

How many email addresses can I sign up?

Subscribers may provide two notification addresses per account.

What is a Profile and how many can I have?

A Profile is a route that is used to reach a destination. A subscriber to 511PA Personalized Traveler Alerts can maintain as many profiles as they wish.

How do I determine my Profile?

A typical Profile would take you from your home to your office.

- • Click "Add Traffic Profile"
- • Select Roadway, Direction, Start Point and End Point, then click "Add Segment"
- • Repeat for as many segments needed for your route.

- Check the day(s) on which you wish to receive notifications
- Select the beginning and ending time periods during the specified days you wish to receive alerts.
- Select the email where you would like alerts to be sent.
- Enter a nickname for the profile
- Click "Add Profile"
- Additional profiles can be added by clicking "Add Traffic Profile" again.

You will receive real time information on incidents and construction during this timeframe. For more information, visit the "Using the Alerting Service" page under "Using 511" menu of the website. PennDOT is not responsible for inadvertent errors, omissions or delayed delivery of PA Personalized Traveler Alert messages.

I subscribed, but I entered the wrong email address. How do I change my email address?

You may log in to your 511PA Personalized Traveler Alerts account using your username and password and select the "View, Edit My Acct. Info" menu option. You may change your email address in this menu area.

I subscribed, but I want to change my profile's routes, days or times. What should I do now?

Log in to your 511PA Personalized Traveler Alerts account using your username and password. Click on the "View, Edit my Traffic Profiles" link. You will find a list of profile(s) that you have created. You must select the "Edit" button next to the profile name that you wish to change. Your profile details will be displayed for editing purposes. In order to change a segment, remove the segment(s) about which you no longer desire notification. Add new segment(s) about which you wish to receive notification. In order to change your days for notification, select the day(s) that you wish to change. In order to change the time period for which you would like to be notified, select time(s) from the dropdown menu. When you have changed the days and/or times, select the "Save" button.

Is there a way to confirm my subscription to 511PA Personalized Traveler Alerts?

No, but you may log in to your account and review the information.

How do I retrieve a forgotten Username or Password?

Go to the 511PA Personalized Traveler Alerts login page.

- Click on the link on the left-side of the screen under "Forgot your username of password?"
- The system will require a notification address that matches a notification address of your account.
- Enter the email address and select "Submit."

The system will notify you of your Username and Password via the address you provided. The password can be readjusted after you log back into the system by accessing the "Change Password" feature.

511 Pennsylvania Frequently Asked Questions

How do I unsubscribe from the 511PA Personalized Traveler Alerts?

Log in to your 511PA Personalized Traveler Alerts account using your username and password. Select the "Unsubscribe" option. Confirm your desire to unsubscribe. Upon confirmation 511PA Personalized Traveler Alerts will stop contacting you within 24 hours.

My email address has changed. How can I continue to receive 511PA Personalized Traveler Alerts?

You may log in to your 511PA Personalized Traveler Alerts account using your username and password, select the "View, Edit My Acct. Info" option and change your email address.

What will happen to personal information that I provide?

The information is stored in a secure database for notification purposes only.

I am not receiving the 511PA Personalized Traveler Alerts. Why?

You can start receiving alerts by taking the following steps:

- Check your profile(s) and ensure that the profile is active and covers your preferred alert area and time period. If the profile appears to fit these criteria, please provide specific information in the Feedback area of 511PA Personalized Traveler Alerts. PennDOT will investigate the situation.
- If you viewed alerts in the Possible Travel Delays list but did not receive the alerts in your notification account, your notification account may have rejected the messages. You may wish to contact your service provider and state that you did not receive alerts that were sent to you from PA-Alert@511pa.com.
- Check your SPAM folder to see if your Internet Service Provider (ISP) is filtering the messages. Follow your ISP's instructions in order to prevent your ISP from filtering the messages.

Can I sign up for alerts other than travel alerts?

No, not through 511PA. However, users can sign up for other alerts such as amber alerts, weather advisories, and statewide notifications at https://alert.pa.gov.

511 Winter Road Conditions

When can I get information on winter road conditions from 511PA?

Winter road conditions are available on 511PA typically between Nov. 1 and April 30.

Where does the road condition information come from?

Winter road conditions are reported by PennDOT and PA Turnpike Commission maintenance staff based on current field conditions. Although drivers may experience varying conditions at isolated locations, 511PA reports the predominant road conditions within a county for each 511PA network roadway. Any winter road conditions on PA turnpike roads are passed from their reporting software to 511PA.

Which roads does 511PA report winter road conditions for?

Winter road conditions are available for all roads on the 511PA Core Roadway Network.

511 Pennsylvania Frequently Asked Questions

How are winter road conditions depicted?

When available, winter road conditions are reported on the 511PA telephone service under the Traffic and Road Conditions menu. Winter road conditions are also displayed on the 511PA website Traffic Map. When reported, a snowflake icon for Winter Road Conditions will be available in the map legend.

Clicking the check box for the snowflake icon will activate the winter road ❄ ☑ Winter Road Conditions conditions map layer. Different colors will appear on 511PA network roadways in the region you are viewing to reflect the current road conditions.

Note: Winter road conditions for PA Turnpike roadways are displayed differently on the Traffic Map. A separate icon will be shown on the map to report winter road conditions for the four districts of the PA Turnpike. When you click on this icon, a pop-up box will appear describing the conditions for the PA Turnpike routes in that region.

What do the various road conditions mean?

Wet/Freezing Conditions: Wet pavement surface is the general condition with air temperatures near or below freezing. There are occasional areas having snow or ice accumulations resulting from drifting, sheltering, cold spots, frozen melt-water, etc.

Snow/Slush Covered: Accumulations of loose snow or slush are regularly found on the pavement surface. Light to moderate snow cover may be present in some areas (up to 2 inches on secondary routes).

Snow Packed/Significant Snow Cover: The pavement surface has continuous stretches of packed snow with or without loose snow on top of packed snow and ice. Significant snow accumulations are present in some areas (2 – 5in).

Icy: The pavement surface is predominantly covered with ice and packed snow. There may be loose snow or sleet on top of the icy or packed snow surface.

Impassable: The road is temporarily impassable to most or all vehicles. This may be the result of severe weather (low visibility, blowing snow, etc.) or road conditions [drifting, excessive unplowed snow (5+ inches), avalanche potential or actuality, glare ice, etc.]

Why can't the winter weather conditions and travel speeds be viewed at the same time?

Unfortunately, when both layers are displayed simultaneously, the map appears cluttered. As a result, the two layers can never appear at the same time to ensure that the user is able to obtain pertinent information as quickly and concisely as possible.

511 Pennsylvania Frequently Asked Questions

511PA Mobile Website

Does 511PA have a mobile website?
Yes. Users can access the mobile website by going to 511pa.com via most wireless providers. The website will automatically re-size to appear on a smartphone or tablet-sized browser.

What services are available on the mobile website?
The mobile website contains all of the same information and functionality as the standard website.

How do I find information regarding a specific roadway on the mobile website?
The mobile website functions the same as the standard website. The navigation menu will be available by tapping on the blue bars on the top left of the screen.

Why doesn't the camera feed automatically refresh for me?
The camera images will generally auto-refresh for up to one minute. At the one-minute mark, a blue "refresh" link will appear at the top right corner of the camera image. Click the "refresh" link to see camera images again refresh automatically for the next one minute. The auto-refresh feature will only work on mobile devices with browsers that support JavaScript. If a phone meets the technical requirements, but still does not automatically refresh, please ensure that JavaScript or Ajax is enabled in the preferences.