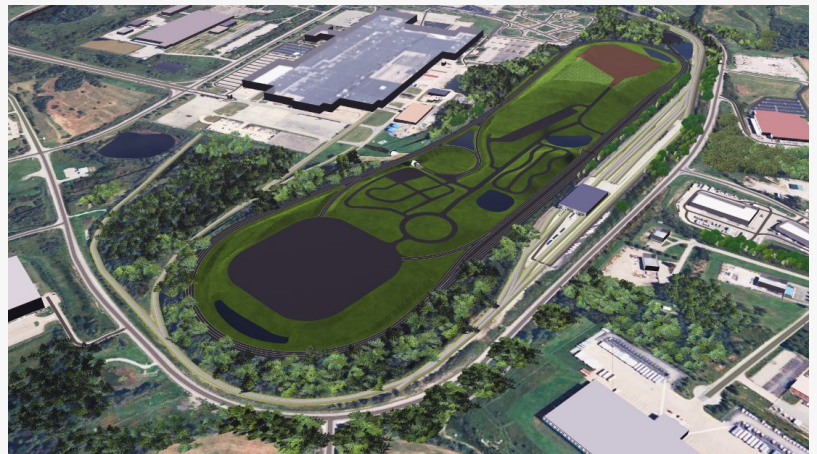


Construction Begins on PennSTART – Testing and Research Facility for Autonomous Tech Industry and First Responders

State-of-the-art testing facility designed to accelerate innovation in emerging transportation technology

PITTSBURGH, PA, UNITED STATES, December 8, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Construction has begun on PennSTART, a closed loop, state-of-the-art testing facility designed to accelerate innovation in emerging [transportation](#) technology, improve the safety and efficiency of transportation infrastructure, enhance traffic incident management training, and support regional economic development.



Site plan for PennSTART test track at RIDC Westmoreland Innovation Park

Located at RIDC's Westmoreland Innovation Center in Mount Pleasant, PennSTART is a partnership of Regional Industrial Development Corp. (RIDC), Westmoreland County Industrial Development Corp. (WCIDC), PennDOT, the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission, and Safety21, the US DOT National University Transportation Center for Safety.

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*Donald F. Smith, Jr., President
of RIDC*

Planned as a leading regional hub for advancing transportation technology and training across key sectors such as connected vehicles, traffic management, and autonomous technologies, PennSTART will not only serve local users, but provide Southwestern Pennsylvania with a new catalytic asset for attracting companies and jobs from around the country.

Consisting of a high-speed track, signalized and unsignalized, urban and rural environments,

PennSTART will serve entities testing and training with connected and automated vehicles and autonomous technologies; commercial and transit vehicles; off-road and aerial vehicles; field robotics; and traffic incident management, tolling, ITS and traffic signals. It will serve as Pennsylvania's first statewide hub for Traffic Incident Management (TIM) training so responders can experience lifelike incidents in a controlled environment.

The total cost of the first phase of the project, which includes the two-mile test track, is \$30 million. Sources of funding include RIDC, PennDOT, the Turnpike Commission, Henry L. Hillman Foundation, and Pennsylvania's Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program (RACP). Planning began after the concept was recommended in the Forefront Report – which highlighted the opportunity for growth of the autonomous technology industry – sponsored by RIDC and the Greater Pittsburgh Chamber of Commerce in 2021.



Construction vehicles beginning work on PennSTART, at RIDC Westmoreland Innovation Park. Photo courtesy WCIDC

RIDC President Donald F. Smith, Jr.: "PennSTART is the kind of catalytic asset our region needs to compete with other regions to attract businesses and jobs. There is national demand for projects like PennSTART, which will leverage our existing assets in autonomous technologies, research universities, energy, workforce, and central location. We are also fortunate to have an administration under Governor Shapiro, that is supportive of economic development, particularly the Office of Transformation and Opportunity, led by Ben Kirshner, and Department of Community and Economic Development, led by Rick Siger."

"PennSTART reflects many of the Office of Transformation and Opportunity's core values—it's collaborative, forward-looking and will make us more competitive in the growing field of [autonomous vehicles](#)," said Chief Transformation Officer Ben Kirshner. "My team is proud to support PennSTART through our PA Permit Fast Track program."

"As technologies change, the ways that drivers and first responders interact with transportation infrastructure change as well," said PennDOT Secretary Mike Carroll. "PennSTART will be the testing ground for next-gen innovations designed to make our roads safer and more connected."

"Having a facility like PennSTART that provides real-world incident management training for first

responders is game changing,” said PA Turnpike CEO Mark Compton. “We are excited to be able to move beyond the classroom to effectively prepare police, fire, medical, and towing personnel for the dangers they encounter during an incident – like distracted or aggressive drivers. Collaboration with all agencies will lead to successful incident management – and in return, enhanced safety and improved emergency response for our first responders and traveling public.”

“Through decades of strategic investment in the WCIDC industrial park system, Westmoreland County has created a business environment that’s ready to support innovation and growth,” said county commissioner Sean Kertes. “PennSTART’s decision to establish itself amid four of our industrial parks demonstrates how well-positioned we are to support projects that shape the future.”

“When other states have infrastructure in the ground where startups can test their autonomous technologies, those companies tend to stay and set up shop,” said David K. Roger, president of Henry L. Hillman Foundation. “PennSTART brings that tangible infrastructure to southwestern Pennsylvania. It allows transportation technology startups to see our region not only as a leader in research and development, but a long-term place to grow a business and build a cutting-edge workforce.”

Theresa Mayer, Vice President for Research, Carnegie Mellon University: “Through Safety21 — the US DOT National University Transportation Center for Safety — Carnegie Mellon University is proud to partner on development of a regional asset that advances cutting-edge transportation technology research and innovation and provides hands-on training for the future workforce. By giving researchers, companies and students a place to safely test, refine and deploy emerging technologies, PennSTART will accelerate solutions that will make transportation safer, more efficient and innovative, and continue to strengthen Southwestern Pennsylvania’s position as a national leader in autonomous vehicles.”

To continue positioning PennSTART for success, Peter Castelli has joined RIDC as its Director of PennSTART. Castelli is an engineering and operations leader with over 20 years of experience driving innovation and safety in the automotive, autonomous vehicle, and transportation industries. Over the past decade he has held key leadership roles at various autonomous vehicle companies and earlier in his career, he spent over a decade at Ford Motor Company.

PennSTART’s Board of Directors is chaired by RIDC Senior Vice President Timothy White and includes:

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