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STATE POLICE

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Wolf Administration, AARP Highlight Safety for Mature Drivers

Programs help keep Pennsylvanians ages 65 or older connected to communities

Harrisburg, PA – With nearly a quarter of Pennsylvania's licensed drivers 65 years of age or older, the Pennsylvania departments of Transportation (PennDOT), Aging (PDA) and the Pennsylvania State Police (PSP), along with the AARP, hosted an event today at The Manor at Oakridge, a Holiday by Atria community in Harrisburg, to highlight the unique challenges faced by older drivers during Older Driver Safety Awareness Week, which is observed December 5-9.

"Mobility is essential to quality of life at any age," said Kurt Myers, PennDOT Deputy Secretary for Driver and Vehicle Services. "Many older drivers have a lifetime of valuable driving experience to draw from, and PennDOT continually seeks to balance the safety of our roadways with the need for independence and autonomy."

Approximately 25% of Pennsylvania's 9.1 million licensed drivers are 65 and older. In 2021 there were more than 19,700 crashes involving at least one driver aged 65 or older, which resulted in over 300 total fatalities. This represents about 17% of all crashes and about 25% of all fatalities.

"As Pennsylvania's aging population continues to grow, the Wolf Administration is committed to ensuring that older adults have the resources they need to remain active in and connected to their communities," said Secretary of Aging Robert Torres. "Driver safety awareness is a big part of that picture and if older adults need to make adjustments, accessible and available transportation alternatives become key to getting around. Pennsylvania is fortunate that our lottery proceeds help to fund these alternative services."

Representatives from PennDOT, PDA, PSP, AARP and others provided information to help older Pennsylvanians extend their years on the road, and to make them aware of other transportation options available to them.

Pennsylvania has a network of shared-ride service providers dedicated to keeping older adults mobile, safe, and engaged in their community. This free transportation program allows citizens ages 65 or older to ride for free on a local, fixed-route service whenever local public transportation is operating. During FY 2020-21, there were 1.7 million Senior Shared Rides.

Additionally, working with the PA Department of Human Services and transit agencies, PennDOT recently developed an online tool called Find My Ride that allows older drivers to access free ride services online. Find My Ride allows transit agencies to process applications more efficiently, so users can access benefits more quickly. Find My Ride can be found

at findmyride.penndot.pa.gov. You can also find it at www.penndot.pa.gov by clicking on Travel in PA, then Public Transit Options.

“Along with the unique challenges already faced by older drivers, winter weather conditions, longer nights, and heavy holiday traffic create challenges for drivers of all ages,” said Lieutenant Adam Reed, Director of the Communications Office with the Pennsylvania State Police. “Before getting behind the wheel be sure you are up to date on eye exams and understand how your prescribed medications could affect your driving. Remember to buckle up every time!”

While every person ages differently, aging typically brings certain -- sometimes subtle -- physical, visual, and cognitive changes that could impair an older person’s ability to drive safely. Older drivers and their families should work together to identify potential issues that may affect driving, outline courses of action to assist the older driver, and plan for when it’s time to hang up the keys.

Signs that can indicate it may be time to limit or stop driving altogether include:

- Feeling uncomfortable, fearful, or nervous when driving;
- Unexplained dents/scrapes on the car, fences, mailboxes, or garage doors;
- Frequently getting lost and frequent “close calls” (i.e. almost crashing);
- Slower response times, particularly to unexpected situations;
- Difficulty paying attention to signs or staying in the lane of traffic; and
- Trouble judging gaps at intersections or highway entrance/exit ramps.

The Wolf Administration encourages older drivers and their loved ones to review PennDOT’s Seniors Driving Safely publication series, which can be downloaded for free from the PennDOT Driver and Vehicle Services website. These publications help older drivers assess their abilities and offer guidance on next steps if their medical condition is reported to PennDOT. The series also includes a publication designed to guide family and friends of older drivers in what can sometimes be difficult conversations about deciding to stop driving, as well as information for healthcare providers on PennDOT’s medical reporting program.

The following safe-driving habits, which should be routine at any age, are especially useful to older drivers:

- Plan ahead: lengthy car trips should be made during daylight hours. Morning may be best because most people aren’t as tired as they are in the afternoon.
- Don’t drive in rush-hour traffic if you can avoid it. Plan trips after 9:00 AM or before 5:00 PM. Know what roads near home are most congested and avoid them.
- When driving long distances, especially in winter, call ahead for weather and road condition updates.
- Look ahead. Good drivers get a jump on trouble by looking far down the road and making adjustments before encountering problems that may involve other vehicles, pedestrians, bicyclists or animals.
- Maintain a safe speed. This depends on what the road is like, how well the driver can see, how much traffic there is and how fast traffic is moving.
- Keep a safe distance from the vehicle ahead of you. The PA Driver’s Manual advises that you should always keep a 4-second gap between you and the vehicle in front of you.

Additional information on older driver safety and mobility resources is available at both PennDOT Driver and Vehicle Services and the Department of Aging websites.

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