



STRIP DISTRICT BUSINESS ASSOCIATION

Promote • Protect • Preserve

Mayor Ed Gainey
City of Pittsburgh
Office of the Mayor
414 Grant St # 512,
Pittsburgh, PA 15219

May 31, 2024

Re: Penn Avenue Rightsizing (22nd to 31st Street)

Dear Mayor Gainey,

We, the Strip District Business Association, are writing to you on behalf of the vibrant and diverse business community that is the lifeblood of Penn Avenue. We are deeply concerned about the proposed Penn Avenue Rightsizing project. The adjustments between 22nd and 31st street—removing an inbound travel lane, creating a dedicated bike lane, maintaining parking lanes while adding loading zones—could disrupt the economic health and accessibility that are crucial pillars of the Strip District's vitality.

The Strip District is celebrated in Pittsburgh's history, serving as a vibrant hub of commerce, culture, and community since the 19th century. Originally an industrial zone lined with factories, mills, and warehouses, the Strip evolved into a bustling marketplace renowned for its ethnic diversity and entrepreneurial spirit. Over the decades, it has become a home for fresh produce markets, specialty food stores, unique boutiques, and an array of dining options that attract locals and visitors alike. This rich tapestry of historical significance and cultural heritage makes the Strip District a crucial economic engine for Pittsburgh and a cherished landmark that embodies the city's resilience. Family traditions are deeply rooted in the Strip District. Generations established and maintain businesses that contribute to the area's unique charm and economic vitality. These long-

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standing enterprises are more than just commercial ventures; they are integral threads in the fabric of the community. Our businesses represent the perseverance and hard work of those who have built their lives here. With this in mind, we would like to express our concerns regarding the proposed changes under the Penn Avenue Rightsizing project.

During the community meeting on May 1, DOMI Assistant Director of Policy & Planning, Angie Martinez said DOMI's mission and the goal of Vision Zero is to end serious injuries and roadway fatalities. She highlighted Penn Avenue's "*high frequency of crashes*" and "*substantial number of fatalities*" as reasons why Penn Avenue is a safety concern for cars, cyclists, and pedestrians. It appears DOMI's analysis is based on outdated and irrelevant data to justify the "*rightsizing*" of Penn Avenue. Based on the Government's crash data dashboard, the accident statistics for Penn Avenue (22nd to 31st Street) over a **five-year period** (2019-2023) indicate that this section is **not unsafe for cyclists and pedestrians**.¹

- There have been 74 accidents with **no fatalities** or **accidents involving cyclists**.
- The overwhelming majority of accidents involved only cars (71 in total or 96%), with 97% of accidents causing **no (70%) or minor (27%) injuries**.
- Two car accidents with serious injuries did occur-one car hit a fixed object in the dark, and the other was a collision at an angle; **both accidents** occurred on 27th Street.
- Nearly half of **all accidents occurred at night** and were **concentrated at three corners**: 25th, 27th, and 30th Streets.
- Recent infrastructure upgrades seem to work; accidents have declined by 21% from 2022 to 2023.

By addressing DOMI's misrepresentations, we aim to ensure a more accurate and balanced understanding of the safety and mobility concerns on this corridor of Penn Avenue. A similar project on Broad Street did not have the intended results-the reduction to one lane and the introduction of bike lanes did not increase safety (38 accidents over a 5-year period) and reduced speed by only 9%.² We care deeply about ensuring customers, residents, and workers can travel, spend time, and live safely in the Strip District. We seek to work collaboratively to find safe solutions in our area's thriving economy. However, we believe the proposed modifications will lead to **(I) increased traffic congestion** and **(II) economic loss and loss of tax revenue for the City**.

¹ [Crash Data Dashboard \(arcgis.com\)](https://pittsburghpa.gov/domi/traffic-calming-data)

² [Crash Data Dashboard \(arcgis.com\); https://pittsburghpa.gov/domi/traffic-calming-data](https://pittsburghpa.gov/domi/traffic-calming-data)



(I) Increased Traffic Congestion

Reducing inbound lanes from two to one will likely lead to significant traffic congestion and backups, exacerbating peak-hour congestion and causing substantial delays and frustration for motorists and businesses. DOMI's traffic model relied on data from 2017 that does not account for the ongoing and projected growth of the Strip District, including new residential and commercial developments.^{3 4} With more people living in the Strip District than ever, adequate traffic flow is essential. Liberty Avenue HSIP, currently a four-lane road, will be reduced to one lane for inbound and outbound traffic, likely increasing congestion on Penn Avenue as travelers seek alternate routes to and through the city. This dual downsizing will result in the loss of three essential lanes in a small area of the Strip District, just as the District is poised for significant expansion.⁵ Our experience shows that business on the Strip declines when access is restricted. We see this during events nearby, including parade staging, running events, and Open Streets, which impact street closures and the availability of normal access to the business shopping district.

While the reconfiguration of curbside loading zones aims to improve traffic flow, it falls short of meeting the needs of businesses and disrupts the delivery and pickup of goods. Frequent stops by delivery companies such as Amazon and FedEx will likely overwhelm the limited dedicated loading zones, forcing these trucks to stop in the travel lane in front of businesses and residences. In addition, curbside loading zones are not large enough for tractor trailers, which will also be forced to block traffic. Reducing Penn Avenue to a single travel lane will make it nearly impossible for delivery trucks to maneuver, further complicating traffic flow. Semi-trucks, such as Sysco, already struggle to turn onto and from Penn Avenue—a problem that will be exacerbated by reducing or eliminating turning lanes. Businesses in the Strip District depend on efficient delivery systems, and any interruptions or delays can severely impact their ability to meet customer demands. Similarly, PRT buses, which make stops along Penn Avenue, will cause further backups. The transportation model cited by DOMI Assistant Director Angie Martinez was based on data with significantly reduced traffic numbers and does not accurately reflect current or future traffic conditions. The model's optimistic projections grossly underestimate the potential congestion issues.

³ Some planned and ongoing developments on Penn Ave. (note that list is not exhaustive): Penn 23 Condominiums (2330 Penn Ave; under construction), Forte Condominiums (2635 Penn Ave; recently opened), The Franklin on Penn Apartments (2815 Penn Ave, recently opened); in addition, Penn Ave now hosts The Refinery Condominiums (2545 Penn Ave), 1627 on the Strip Apartments (1627 Penn Ave), and Mulberry Lofts Apartments (3205 Penn Ave).

⁴ stripdistrictneighbors.org/pdfs/SOSD_2023_FINAL_ForWeb.pdf

⁵ Loss of two lanes on Liberty Avenue and one lane on Penn Ave.



(II) Economic Impact on the Strip District and the City of Pittsburgh

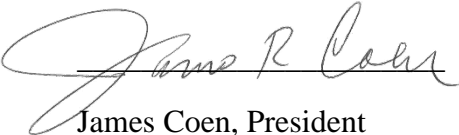
The Strip is a prominent destination, attracting almost 7 million visitors to the Penn Avenue business district annually.⁶ In 2023, Pittsburgh's tourism industry achieved a recordbreaking milestone, with the city's overall tourism economic impact reaching \$6.4 billion. Thanks to its vibrant array of markets, restaurants, and cultural attractions, the Strip District plays a vital role in drawing tourists, significantly contributing to Pittsburgh's cyclical recovery and growth. However, a Strip District characterized by traffic congestion, restricted access, and logistical challenges for business operations and emergency vehicles will undermine the future of the Strip District. This will impact both businesses and the broader community. As for Pittsburgh's tourist industry, frustrated visitors and tourists will be less likely to return.

Compounding the urgency of this issue, the city controller's forecast predicts operating losses exceeding \$23 million in both 2025 and 2026, with the city's reserve fund plummeting from over \$100 million at the beginning of this year to a deficit by 2027. In this context, the city should prioritize a business-friendly climate to boost tax revenues and maintain a balanced budget. Such an approach would enable reinvestment in essential upgrades and improvements, ensuring Pittsburgh remains a livable city for all.

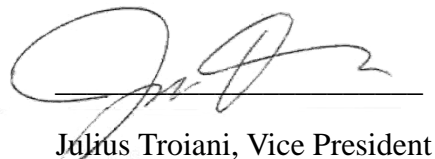
Considering these concerns, we respectfully request that the City of Pittsburgh reconsider the current Penn Avenue Rightsizing project and further consult with the small business community. We believe a more balanced approach can be developed to improve safety and mobility without compromising the Strip District's economic health and accessibility. By working together, we can find solutions that benefit all stakeholders and ensure our community's continued success and vibrancy.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to a constructive dialogue and a mutually beneficial resolution.

Sincerely,



James Coen, President



Julius Troiani, Vice President

⁶ stripdistrictneighbors.org/pdfs/SOSD_2023_FINAL_ForWeb.pdf

