



ALLEGHENY INSTITUTE

FOR PUBLIC POLICY

August 26, 2026

Allegheny Institute Op-Ed

660 words

About those NFL Draft numbers...

By Colin McNickle

VisitPittsburgh's estimate of a \$177 million economic impact from the city's hosting of the NFL Draft is not independently verifiable, says a researcher at the Allegheny Institute for Public Policy.

"By all accounts the three-day event went well," says Jake Haulk, president-emeritus of the Pittsburgh think tank (in *Policy Brief Vol. 26, No. 31*). "Recently, an estimate of the economic impact was released by a firm which has done similar studies for other cities that have hosted the NFL Draft.

"Succinctly, the report indicates the draft and related activities produced \$177 million in economic activity. The important question: Is the \$177 million estimate of economic benefits reasonable?" he asks.

And the answer is it's difficult to determine given the paucity of study details.

"Because only a short summary of the underlying economic analysis was provided by VisitPittsburgh, well after the company's release of the three-day impact, it is not known what specific assumptions the study made and what variables were used in calculating the impact," Haulk says.

While some numbers can be gleaned to gauge the draft's economic impact, more technically known as "value-added," they only represent a small fraction of the claimed benefits.

To wit, Haulk says that in April 2025, hotel tax collections were \$3.8 million, representing \$54.3 million in hotel revenue. In April 2026, the hotel tax brought in \$4.8 million, representing \$68.6 million in revenue for an increase over April 2025 of \$14.6 million.

But, "If all the increase in monthly hotel revenue was attributable to the three days of the draft, that would amount to only 8.3 percent of the impact report's estimated \$177 million," the Ph.D. economist reminds.

Then there's retail sales tax collections. An April 2026 increase is *below* the average percentage change and even further below the March 2026 increase in tax revenue, show data from the Regional Asset District (RAD).

"Many factors could have led to the weaker April growth compared to a year earlier, but it remains significant that the much talked about NFL Draft that attracted so many people to the North Shore/Downtown in April produced slower than average monthly growth in sales tax revenue than the other first five months of 2026," the think tank researcher says.

As far as the city's parking tax goes, April 2026 revenue was 8.9 percent lower than in April 2025—and that is with the higher rates charged by parking garage operators during draft week.

"This supports the conclusion that fewer people drove into the city, during not just the three draft days, but most of that week, likely reducing retail sales in areas just outside the draft footprint such as the Strip District, Lawrenceville and the South Side," Haulk says.

And he reminds that while the three-day NFL Draft in Pittsburgh saw a large number of people attend the event (800,000 estimated), it is likely that the majority were repeat attendees, so the number of different people was likely far lower.

Free Pittsburgh Regional Transit fares bolstered PRT's ridership numbers. About \$14 million from the taxpayer kitty was used to support the draft.

"Based solely on economic measures, the NFL Draft had little positive impact on city or county revenues in April 2026 compared to hoped-for gains," Haulk says. "It was a three-day event. That is only 10 percent of the month."

Haulk says the only real lasting impact from the draft will be felt in the change in growth rates for population and jobs in the city and county in the next few years.

"But as mentioned in an earlier *Policy Brief*, that hasn't happened to many other cities after their turn as host. As predicted, any significant economic gains to the city or county were just a temporary upturn," Haulk concludes.

Colin McNickle is communications and marketing director at the Allegheny Institute for Public Policy (cmcnickle@alleghenyinstitute.org).

Op-Eds may be reprinted as long as proper attribution is given.

Allegheny Institute for Public Policy
305 Mt. Lebanon Blvd.* Suite 208* Pittsburgh PA 15234
Phone (412) 440-0079
E-mail: aipp@alleghenyinstitute.org
Website: www.alleghenyinstitute.org
X: [AlleghenyInsti1](https://www.alleghenyinstitute.org)