



NFL draft impact in Pittsburgh

Introduction: In April 2026, the NFL held its annual player draft in the City of Pittsburgh. Allegheny County, the city and the state contributed a combined estimated [\\$14 million](#) to prepare for, and assist in, the NFL's Draft proceedings. By all accounts the three-day event went well. 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?

To answer that this *Policy Brief* examines three issues with the estimate. 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.

The report's estimate of a three-day impact of \$177 million is analyzed from a three-day perspective, representing an average of \$59 million in impact per day. Obviously, the company's estimate could be for each day but since the daily details and methodology have not been provided to the public, it is reasonable to proceed by assuming each day had close to the same impact, although it is more likely that the first day had the biggest impact with lesser impacts on successive days.

Detailed analysis

First, from a gross domestic product approach, it is assumed the study was using impact to mean value added. The Gross Domestic Product for Allegheny County in 2024 ([most recent data available](#)) was \$132.9 billion. Assuming a two-year increase of 5 percent to \$139 billion owing to price increases and some productivity gains, the per worker output from just under 630,000 employees would be \$221,587. On a daily basis, that amounts to roughly \$607 in output per employee. Thus \$59 million per day would suggest the equivalent of 97,199 employees working per day.

If the \$59 million did not refer to real final output but included all intermediate transactions the estimate of workers needed could be cut in half but would still be a huge number. Unfortunately, because the underlying study that produced the report's findings is not publicly available, it is not possible to answer the question.

Hotel impact

The report as summarized and issued publicly has little to say about increased hotel revenue. Allegheny County's hotel tax is 7 percent. 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. 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.

Tax data

Another way of evaluating the draft impact on economic activity is to examine retail sales tax collections for months in 2026 compared to months in 2025. Data for monthly sales tax collections are found on the Regional Asset District (RAD) [website](#) which keeps track of the county's one percent sales tax add-on.

The following table shows the percentage increase in RAD sales tax revenue for the first five months of 2026 compared to the first five months in 2025.

Monthly collections in 2026 compared to 2025.

Month	2025 (millions)	2026 (millions)	percentage change
January	\$9.9	\$10.2	3.1
February	\$9.7	\$10.3	5.4
March	\$11.4	\$12.1	5.6
April	\$11.3	\$11.7	4.2
May	\$11.5	\$12.0	4.8

The five-month average change is 4.6 percent.

April's increase is below the average percentage change and even further below the March increase in tax revenue.

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. It is possible countywide retail outlets, other than restaurants or specialty shops Downtown, could have seen a drop-off in sales during the three days the NFL was in town.

Moreover, the city's parking tax revenue for April 2026 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.

Summary

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. And a large share arrived on public transportation. Moreover, many people who normally drive into Downtown to work did not drive in as reflected in the drop in parking tax revenue.

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. It was a three-day event. That is only 10 percent of the month. The only real lasting impact 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.

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