

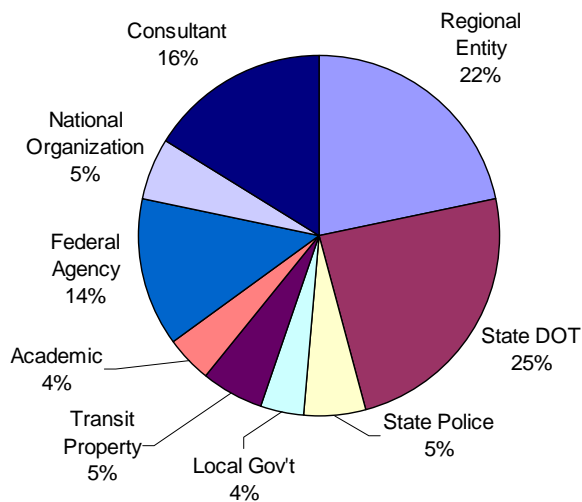
# NATIONAL WORKSHOP TO ADVANCE REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION OPERATIONS

Washington, D.C.

December 10-12, 2008

## National Workshop Attracts “Thought Leaders” in Transportation Operations

Seventy-four leaders in transportation systems management and operations (TSM&O) convened on December 10-12, 2008, to identify ways to advance regional transportation operations and improve regional transportation system performance. Well over half of the participants came from regional entities and State agencies, including metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), State transportation departments and State



The workshop represented key TSM&O stakeholders.

police. The participants represented jurisdictions from across the United States and Ontario, Canada. Sponsored by the Transportation Research Board (TRB) Regional Transportation Systems Management and Operations (RTSMO) Committee and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) in cooperation with the National Traffic Incident Management Coalition (NTIMC), the workshop sought to achieve the following objectives:

- Formulate new and innovative approaches to regional operations;
- Identify the opportunities, challenges, and benefits of regional approaches to regional operations; and
- Formulate a research and programmatic agenda for advancing regional operations.

**Mark Norman**, Director of TRB Technical Activities, welcomed participants to the workshop, emphasizing the emerging economic stimulus legislation

and the likelihood that it would include significant funding for transportation infrastructure.



Workshop participants during small group exercise.

## Kick-Off Panel Motivates Thinking

**Walter Kraft**, TRB RTSMO Committee chair, introduced the first of four panels, observing that we are experiencing a paradigm “shift from steel and concrete to operations” as agencies seek to operate highways much as we currently operate airlines, buses, and trains—a new approach that requires innovation and flexible thinking.

The first panel offered four perspectives representing, respectively, Federal, State department of transportation (DOT), public safety, and regional operations entities. **Robert Arnold**, Director of FHWA’s Office of Transportation Operations, challenged participants to anticipate customer needs even before customers are aware of them. “How can we provide the reliable transportation that customers want at the lowest reasonable cost?” he asked.

**Brian Rowback**, Regional Director for Region 1 at the New York State DOT, sees “operations” from a global perspective. We need to appreciate and understand how to “move people and not cars; move freight and not trucks,” he told participants. We must go beyond freeways and include arterials, our “economic driveways... where we shop and where we work,” and understand how best to manage lanes—HOT, toll, etc.—and their revenue derivatives.

**Capt. Henry DeVries**, New York State Police and active in the I-95 Corridor Coalition, spoke to regional operations from a law enforcement perspective. He

asserted that traffic incident management (TIM) is one of the best ways to bring together regional players—tow & recovery, police, fire, EMS, and DOTs— because they have similar goals and objectives. A regional TIM approach helps tie agencies and jurisdictions together by raising awareness of what each does, where activities overlap, and how better coordination can improve performance.

**Matt Edelman**, TRANSCOM Executive Director, spoke to the inevitable conflicting realities among jurisdictions and agencies within a region. Legal, jurisdictional, and fiscal realities present constraints and conflicts



**Matt Edelman**, TRANSCOM Executive Director, addresses participants.

that must be acknowledged and addressed. Regional boundaries extend beyond jurisdictional boundaries, yet elected officials serve their constituencies. He emphasized that we need to integrate self-interest and regionalism so that independent entities realize value from acting in the regional interests. We must have “tolerance for chaos and ambiguity and get things done anyway.”

## **Workshop Design Stimulates Participation**

The workshop was designed to maximize participation by using a sequence of moderated panels followed by breakout groups. Breakout groups responded to specific questions related to the workshop objectives and “conversation circles” enabled participants to engage in meaningful dialogue about the topics discussed.

Panel participants considered three aspects of regional operations. The first aspect was referred to as “Answering the ‘Who? What? and How?’ of Regional Operations” and encompassed organizing and planning for regional operations. The second aspect focused on implementing regional operations strategies, known as “Making Regional Operations a Reality.” The last aspect considered measuring regional operations performance, titled “Monitoring Performance to Gauge Success.”

Notional regional scenarios provided the context for discussing these topics, including regional incident management, regional recurring congestion, interagency communications, and traveler information.



Workshop design focused on three aspects of regional transportation operations.

## **Hampton Roads Participants Trigger Discussion on “Getting Organized”**

In telling their story, the three panelists from the Hampton Roads, Virginia region illustrated how regional collaboration often comes about. **Camelia Ravanbakht**, Ph.D., Deputy Executive Director, Hampton Roads Metropolitan Planning Organization, remembered that “many years ago, with the introduction of ISTEA, some traffic engineers said ‘we really need to get together and exchange phone numbers.’ After that, everything else is history.” **Lt. Scott Fee**, Virginia State Police officer and a native of the region, reiterated “the need to partner up with the other entities because we just didn’t have everything we needed to address the problems.”

**Stephany Hanshaw**, Facility Manager, Hampton Roads Smart Traffic Center, Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT), illustrated the difference between “buy-in” and “commitment” by comparing the “contributions” of the chicken and the pig to a ham and egg breakfast! Hanshaw also noted that VDOT made operations and emergency response a priority on a regional basis, noting that their Regional Concept for Transportation Operations provides the framework that built consensus among all of the stakeholders in the region around a common set of goals and objectives.

During the discussion, panelists recounted their early meetings as an intelligent transportation systems (ITS) group, which consisted primarily of traffic engineers in the area. In the beginning, first responders were not at the table. The group also had difficulty getting the attention of elected officials in the area – until an MPO board member, stuck in traffic for hours due to an incident, asked the MPO staff to “start coordinating and cooperating with all the agencies—first responders and others—so that we can have a better incident management plan.” Agencies now work together

routinely and individuals “check their egos at the door” so that they can move beyond individual or agency views and look for regional solutions that improve safety and mobility. This requires agencies to take a step back and see that they are not competing and, in most cases, are working toward the same objectives even though they have different roles and responsibilities.

## “Who? What? and How?” Breakout Groups Report to the Conversation Circle

A facilitator opened the conversation circle by asking participants what they see as the greatest challenges in organizing and planning for operations on a regional basis.

Representative responses included:

- Get the right host, but be sensitive to the local culture;
- Sell the concept with peer-to-peer education; visit places where a regional approach has worked before;
- Establish top level champions but recognize the need for both top-down and bottom-up support;
- Make sure all participants understand the benefits of investing time in regional collaboration;
- Make sure the conveners are credible;



Participants develop recommendations for regional traffic incident management.

- Find out what the group wants out of the collaboration and start with key projects with broad support (e.g., TIM);
- Get something done quickly to keep motivation high and focused while developing and sustaining champions;
- Make sure participants can “speak for their organization and not just ‘warm a seat’”; and
- Look for quid pro quo to keep agencies on board; make sure they see how they benefit from what they contribute.

The conversation circle closed with one participant acknowledging the challenges we face, noting that “We haven’t mainstreamed our business. I deliver a non-traditional business in a traditional organization...Change happens one retirement at a time.”

## Inputs from Experience — Practitioner Panelists Tell Their Stories

Panelists in this session were charged with helping workshop participants think through the essentials of implementing regional operations strategies that achieve regionally significant objectives.

*Chris Gutierrez*, President, Kansas City SmartPort, Inc., emphasized the importance of creating opportunity for the private sector and making public policy consistent with transport needs so that freight can move safely, securely, and efficiently.



Workshop facilitator leads a panel in discussions on making regional operations a reality.

*Richard Steeg*, Northern Virginia Regional Operations Director for the Virginia Department of Transportation, told the panel that regional organizations recognize the need for greater regional awareness and credible, timely information to stakeholders. He noted that agencies in the area individually do an excellent job and are now “connecting the dots” through more effective collaboration on a regional basis.

*Mark Miller*, Operations Emergency Management Coordinator, Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, was running the operations control center during the September 11, 2001 attack on the Pentagon. He and others acknowledged that despite the lessons of 9/11, they were not doing enough to coordinate incident management and emergency response. He noted that much progress has been made, but there is still room for improvement, especially in information sharing. “We need to be joined at the hip,” sharing information with those who need it, he added.

*T.J. Nedrow*, Washington State Department of Transportation and Chair, Washington Traffic Incident Management Coalition, reiterated the earlier theme of finding more effective ways of moving people and goods, not vehicles. He focused on traffic incident management as a key function for bringing agencies together around a common objective. Nedrow cited as the number one issue “how we communicate succinctly and with the right people and give them the right data and plan that allows them to use data to the best advantage.” He further asserted that “people don’t want

to know and don't care what you know until they know that you care...tell them why it is important that they be [at the table]."

**Faisal Saleem**, ITS Supervisor and AZTech Project Manager, Maricopa County Department of Transportation, described the evolution of the AZTech initiative, which enables agencies to share camera images, adjust signal timing on local roads, and share data and traffic plans on a real-time basis, among other services. Saleem noted the AZTech is now in its third generation of leadership and emphasized that the key to dealing with constructively with several agencies is developing mutual trust, which is a necessary prerequisite to developing successful teams and tools.

## **Keys to Sustaining Operations Success are Managed Change, Regional Authority, and Mutual Trust**

Luncheon speaker **Steve Lockwood**, Vice President at PB Consult, presented findings from his current Strategic Highway Research Program II (SHRP2) project where he is identifying key factors that lead to success in implementing and sustaining operations improvements. Lockwood stated that effective operations depends on the right culture, effective organizations, well-planned and executed processes, and properly aligned partnerships. Lockwood pointed to a variant of the Capability Maturity Model typically used to assess software development as a framework to show how operations can move from "ad hoc" to "managed" to "integrated" as local and regional entities restructure and mainstream operations into their way of doing business.

Complementing Lockwood's comments, **Steve Gayle**, Director, Binghamton (NY) Metropolitan Transportation Study, suggested that metropolitan areas be given the option to form "mini-DOTs" or metropolitan transportation authorities, allowing access to local funding and tolling authority. MPOs by nature have a broader view, taking into consideration all modes across jurisdictions, and can take a larger role in active system management.

**Capt. Tom Martin**, Virginia State Police, added that we often confuse our customers and senior decisionmakers by using language that means different things at different

times. Words like "region", "operations", and even "people" (i.e., which people?) are used in ambiguous



**Captain Tom Martin, Virginia State Police gives commentary during lunch.**

ways. Martin's bottom line was that regional operations depends most on *what people do* and the one quality that influences what people do *together* is mutual trust. According to Martin, "without trust we will never make regional operations a reality."

## **"Making Regional Operations a Reality" Conversation Circle**

A second conversation circle focused on results from breakout groups that looked closely at keys to implementing operations strategies that cross agency and jurisdictional boundaries. Some of the main points made in the conversation circle include:

- Seek early results—within the first two or three meetings;
- Establish formal agreements that outline agreement on where entities are autonomous and where to communicate;
- Maintain momentum by taking "small bites"—small successes motivate stakeholders to take on larger hurdles;
- Make a "virtue" from a crisis by seizing the opportunity to identify what works and what doesn't;
- Build on existing institutional resources and report progress to keep everyone informed;
- "You've got to go out and do stuff. You can't steer the bus unless it's moving.";
- Use the daily events we *know* we are going to deal with to develop relationships for dealing with major events;
- Establish time limited agreements that move from plans to accomplishments; and
- Bring partners in early to get them on board.

## **Performance Measurement Panel Confirms Value of Getting Feedback**

The third component of the workshop focused on monitoring performance to gauge success in advancing regional transportation operations.

**Thomas George**, Executive Director, Niagara International Transportation Technology Coalition (NITTEC), described the "report cards" that NITTEC submits to its member agencies to show how well they are doing. George also noted that part of what is measured is different from what customers expect; e.g., percentage of responders trained, resource utilization from a regional perspective, etc.

**Daniela Bremmer**, Director of Strategic Assessment Office, Washington State Department of Transportation, acknowledge that performance measurement



**Daniela Bremmer, WSDOT discusses performance measures.**

is not easy to do. She conceded that different partners have different performance measuring systems, but these systems need to be compatible. Agencies need to be clear on the purpose for collecting and managing data and use data to improve system performance. “Data will only get better if you use it,” she said.

**Mark Hallenbeck**, Director, Washington State Transportation Center, agreed, noting “no one ever wants to just spend money on data collection.” Well run businesses collect data because it tells them what to buy and, similarly, transportation owners and operators need to be accountable with incentives and disincentives for operating the system competently. Performance data is collected from the system because that is how you manage the system – reporting is built into what system owners and operators do day to day.



Participants make connections across organizations.

**Tim Lomax**, Research Engineer, Texas Transportation Institute (TTI), cautioned against using performance measures that lack meaning to customers – vehicle miles traveled, for example. System users care about time with family, he noted. “We don’t talk about the stuff people care about; why are we surprised that people don’t care about us?” he added.

## **Arlington County Board Member Challenges Participants to “Make the Case”**

**The Honorable Christopher Zimmerman**, Member, Arlington County Board, Virginia, opened the workshop on Friday morning with comments from his personal experience as an elected official who must make difficult decisions regarding public services and the use of public funds to provide these services. Zimmerman, who sees transportation as a major concern in the region, pointed out the context in which transportation decision are made. Importantly, Zimmerman pointed out that

transportation planners and operators must “make the case” for investments in transportation improvements. He further challenged participants to develop relationships with elected officials. Part of making the case is having good, informal relationships with elected officials. Elected officials need facts to convince their constituencies that they are making good decisions, so “factoids are really great stuff for us.” Useful facts that connect problems to solutions that have been tried and proven successful help communicate needs and solutions effectively.

## **Workshop Wrap-Up Summarizes Key Observations and Actions**

**John Mason**, former mayor of the City of Fairfax, Virginia and chair of the Transportation Planning Board of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Government, summarized the workshop by reviewing common themes and significant points made over the course of the workshop.

Mason closed the workshop with a few personal comments drawn from both his observations and his own experience. His conclusions were:

- The glass is half full . . . but we have a long way to go before regional operations measure up to our expectations.
- We must advance beyond talking to ourselves. Without the engagement of decisionmakers, the transformation we are encouraging will not happen.
- The “process” must be fixed; taking years to process an approved and funded project makes no sense.
- The new Administration, with a likely focus on climate and energy, must be seen as an opportunity.
- The issue of “requirement” versus “best practice” must be addressed. It’s not likely that there will be universal acceptance of fundamental cultural, institutional, and investment strategies predicated only on advice. MPOs, in particular, tend to be sensitive to what “hoops” they must jump through. Reauthorization offers the opportunity to address this.

Learn more about Regional Transportation Systems Management and Operations at the FHWA Planning for Operations website at <http://plan4operations.dot.gov/>. For more information about related FHWA programs and initiatives, contact Wayne Berman at [wayne.berman@dot.gov](mailto:wayne.berman@dot.gov) or 202.366.4069.