

## Submitting a Paper to TRB and What Happens Afterwards

### Basics

Papers submitted to TRB by August 1 of each year are considered for presentation at the subsequent TRB Annual Meeting (held in January) and for publication in the *Transportation Research Record: Journal of the Transportation Research Board* (TRR). Each author decides whether the paper should be considered for presentation and TRR publication, TRR publication only, or presentation only.

TRB only reviews complete papers—abstracts are not accepted or considered.

TRB runs a single-blind peer-review process: the paper reviewers know who wrote the paper, but the authors do not know who reviewed the paper. The initial review takes place during August and September. In mid-October, authors are notified as to whether their papers were accepted for presentation at the TRB Annual Meeting. Simultaneously, authors are notified as to whether their paper is under consideration for publication in the TRR. Papers considered for TRR publication undergo a rereview process, which takes place from mid-November to late January.

TRB's paper review process is fast and efficient. Papers are submitted, reviewed, and published in approximately 1 year. Strict adherence to deadlines and rules is necessary to handle the large number of papers in a short time.

The initial presentation review and TRR publication review take place simultaneously; however, the decisions on presentation and TRR publication are separate. A paper may be accepted for presentation and rejected for TRR publication or vice versa. Presentations at the Annual Meeting can take place in workshops, lectern sessions, poster sessions, or committee meetings. Papers are assigned to the committee event that most closely fits the paper topic and content.

### Submittal Details

Before submitting a paper to TRB, authors should take the following steps:

- Read the author guidelines before beginning—papers are expected in a certain format, and they are subject to size constraints. The guidelines can be found at <http://www.trb.org/guidelines/authors.pdf>.
- Ensure that the paper is within the 7,500-word limit (remember that each figure and table counts as 250 words). This limit applies to all papers, *including those submitted for presentation only*.
- Ensure that the appropriate references and citations to earlier work have been provided. Completed research in transportation can be searched through TRB's Transportation Research Information Services at <http://ntlsearch.bts.gov/tris/index.do>. In addition, authors submitting

papers to TRB are granted temporary access to electronic versions of TRRs dating back to 1996. For more information, go to <http://www.trb.org/Finance/Public/TRRJournalOnline1.aspx>.

- Check spelling and grammar—they matter to the reviewers. The large volume of papers that must be reviewed (3,700 in 2009) puts papers with unclear language at a disadvantage.
- Ensure that the paper is complete—abstract, literature review findings, conclusions, and references must be included.

The TRB paper review process is highly competitive. Approximately 60 percent of the papers submitted to TRB are accepted for presentation, and only 25 percent are accepted for publication. Adhering to the rules and submitting a clear, well-written paper are essential for success.

TRB uses electronic submission software that can be found on its website ([www.TRB.org](http://www.TRB.org)) under the Annual Meeting tab. The paper submission webpage opens on June 1 of each year. For a paper to be considered for presentation at the next year's Annual Meeting or for publication in the next year's TRR, it must be submitted by August 1. All papers must be in PDF and in the format outlined in Information for Authors at (<http://onlinepubs.trb.org/onlinepubs/am/2010/authors.pdf>).

In submitting a paper, authors must provide the following information or make the following decisions:

- Paper word count, number of tables and figures, and final word count.
- All coauthors and their contact information. The corresponding author must also be specified—this will be the author receiving all official correspondence.
- Are you submitting the paper for presentation and TRR publication, TRR publication only, or presentation only?
- Are all the authors 35 years of age or younger, in which case the paper would be eligible for a Burggraf Award? If so, the birth dates of all the authors must be provided.
- Has the paper been submitted elsewhere? This is critical and does not rule out the paper for presentation or publication. Submission of the paper elsewhere must be disclosed!
- Have you obtained the necessary permissions for any use of copyrighted material included in the paper?
- If the paper is accepted for presentation or TRR publication, do you want the paper to be included on the Annual Meeting Compendium DVD?
- Do you have suggestions concerning the review of the paper? The recommendation can cite a subject area, a TRB standing committee, or a specific call for papers. This information is not required but may be helpful to TRB staff in making the paper review assignment.

After a paper is submitted, a six-digit control number is assigned to it. The first two digits represent the year (e.g., 2010 would be 10), and the last four digits are a simple sequential number starting at 0001 and ending with the last paper submitted. The number is used for tracking the paper through the process.

### **Paper Review Process**

A TRB staff member assigns each paper to a TRB standing committee for review. Staff use the information provided by the author and their knowledge of the various committees and of the expertise of committees' pools of reviewers. In some instances, given the subject matter or other circumstances, TRB staff will assign a paper to a committee different from the one requested by the author.

Each paper assigned to a committee is then reviewed to ensure that it fits with the committee, that it is within the word limit, and that its content is appropriate for TRB. The paper is then assigned to at least three reviewers from the committee's reviewer pool. The reviewer pools include committee members, and friends and outside experts, with expertise in the committee topic area. The individuals are members of academia, practitioners, consultants, and agency staff, with the mix depending on the topic area of the committee.

Finally, reviewers quickly check the papers they are assigned for length, topic, and content. They also check to ensure that they personally have the expertise to review the paper.

The practice of obtaining at least three reviews for each paper ensures that each paper receives a balanced review. Presentation and TRR publication recommendations are developed on the basis of the paper reviews and the limits on presentation and publication. The recommendations are discussed with TRB staff before they are finalized.

After the initial review is complete, the processes for presentation and publication diverge.

#### *Presentation at the TRB Annual Meeting*

Authors presenting at the Annual Meeting should consult the guidelines for preparing presentation materials. For those presenting in a lectern session, the guidelines for speakers will be helpful (see <http://www.trb.org/Guidelines/AVAidsSpeaker2009.pdf>). For those presenting in a poster session, the poster guidelines will be helpful (see <http://www.trb.org/Guidelines/AuthorPosterGuidelines2009.pdf>).

Authors have the opportunity to update their paper, regardless of the publication decision, for inclusion on the Annual Meeting Compendium DVD. TRB recommends addressing the reviewer comments to provide the best possible paper on the Annual Meeting Compendium DVD.

### *Publication in a TRR*

If your paper was not accepted for publication, you are now free to submit it to another journal. If you choose to resubmit it to TRB for the next year, please revise it substantially first. In particular, carefully address the reviewer comments. Receiving the same paper with the same flaws a second time is highly irritating to committees and reviewers.

If your paper was accepted for TRR publication, you have an opportunity to update it for inclusion on the Annual Meeting Compendium DVD. TRB recommends that you address the TRR review comments. The final publication e-mails are sent in mid-February, and the final papers are due in mid-March. This is another opportunity to improve your papers.

If the committee requested a revised version of the paper for review, the process is similar to that described in the paragraph above. The main difference is that you *must* revise the paper to respond to the reviewer comments and submit the new version for the Annual Meeting Compendium DVD. You *must* prepare a summary of how you responded to the reviewer comments with changes in the paper and e-mail the summary directly to the paper review coordinator. The committee and TRB will inform you of the final publication decision in early February. If your paper is accepted, the final e-mail will guide you through the process.

If the committee deferred the TRR publication decision, following the steps above for papers to be rereviewed is advisable. By revising your paper and providing a summary of the changes you have made, you impress on the committee your interest in publication and offer an improved paper for them to judge.

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

#### *How do I convert my paper to PDF?*

TRB requires a paper to be submitted in PDF. Conversion to PDF is a standard function in most word processing software, and many converters are available online.

#### *The deadline for submitting a paper is August 1, but when is the earliest I can submit a paper?*

The paper submittal website opens each year on June 1. Although authors have until August 1 to submit their papers, avoiding the last-minute rush experienced in the last few days of July and on August 1 is recommended. Typically, half of the papers TRB receives each year are submitted in the last 3 days. The high traffic on the paper website during those days guarantees that the submittal process will take substantially longer.

#### *Is it difficult to work through the submittal software?*

The process is fairly simple, and step-by-step instructions may be found at <http://onlinepubs.trb.org/onlinepubs/am/2010/authors.pdf>.

*If I think the paper would be of interest to more than one committee, should I submit it several times and recommend different committees for each submittal?*  
Do not submit a paper more than once—TRB will only assign one version of a paper to one committee.

*How do I know that the submission process worked?*

An e-mail confirmation is sent back once the submittal process is complete and the paper is logged in. If you do not receive an e-mail, please contact TRB staff at [bschwartz@nas.edu](mailto:bschwartz@nas.edu). Please save all correspondence relating to your paper until the entire process of review, presentation, and publication is complete.

*Do I know which committee is reviewing my paper?*

Authors are not informed of which committee is reviewing their paper until the review is complete. The information is withheld to ensure that the committee volunteers are not “lobbied” during the review process.

*When and how will I hear the results of the review process?*

You will not hear from the committee until after the paper is reviewed and a recommendation is made. Authors are notified of recommendations in mid-October. The decision, with information on presentation and publication details, is sent by TRB toward the end of October. All notifications are by e-mail.

*What information will the notification e-mail contain?*

The recommendation e-mail from the chair contains a presentation recommendation (the options are Accept or Reject) and a TRR publication recommendation (the options are Publish, Do Not Publish, Requires Revision and/or Rereview for Publication, or To Be Determined). This e-mail also contains the results of the peer review, including comments and suggestions from the reviewers.

The e-mail from the TRB staff member will contain some or all of the following, depending on whether the paper was submitted for presentation, TRR publication, or both:

- Information on the session the paper will be presented in (this could be a workshop, lectern session, poster session, or committee meeting). Information on the session moderator and other presentations will be included.
- Information on registering for the Annual Meeting.
- Information on updating the paper and resubmitting it for inclusion on the Annual Meeting Compendium DVD and possibly for rereview.
- Information on the TRB publication process.

*What if I don't think the paper was assigned to the correct committee for review?*

Although you may disagree with the assignment, TRB staff and volunteers take every precaution to ensure that papers go to an appropriate committee. Each paper is carefully scrutinized by a TRB staff member before it is assigned to a committee. The committee's review chair and individual reviewers also have an opportunity to ensure the availability of ample expertise to review the paper. Many factors are considered in the assignment of a paper to a committee. To ensure equity and balance in the review process, it is critical that the authors not have a final say in the assignment.

*Is there any recourse if I think the review process or recommendations are flawed?*

Typically, we only hear complaints if the paper was rejected for presentation or TRR publication. If your paper is rejected, remember that the process is highly competitive and that the committees look for papers that will advance the profession and have long-term value. You can learn much from the reviewers and the process regardless of the outcome.

If you really believe that there is a flaw in the review of your paper, you can contact the paper review coordinator to ask for clarification or explanation. Asking *politely* will be much more useful. You can also contact the program officer responsible for the committee that reviewed your paper. However, alteration of a decision is extremely rare.

*If my paper is recommended for presentation but not for TRR publication, will it still be included on the Annual Meeting Compendium DVD?*

Yes, all papers presented at the Annual Meeting are included on the Annual Meeting Compendium DVD, unless the author specifically asks that the paper not be included.

*Will page proofs be provided for a paper that is published?*

Page proofs are not automatically provided; however, an author may request them for a fee.

*What is the time frame for a TRB paper through publication?*

<b>June 1</b>	Paper submission website opens
<b>August 1</b>	Deadline for submission of the full paper in PDF
<b>September 15</b>	Deadline for reviewers to complete paper reviews
<b>October 15</b>	Deadline for chairs to send review recommendations to authors
<b>November 15</b>	Deadline for paper resubmission for inclusion on the Annual Meeting Compendium DVD or rereview
<b>Early February</b>	Final author notification on TRR publication
<b>March 15</b>	Authors resubmit in final format