

# The Benefits of Attending the TRB Annual Meeting

## *Utah Department of Transportation's Experience*

The Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT) has developed and implemented a process for tracking benefits that accrue to the Department as a result of UDOT personnel attending the Annual Meeting of the Transportation Research Board.

The research division of UDOT's Project Development Group coordinates and tracks the progress of the implementation of key ideas gleaned from the Annual Meeting by UDOT personnel. Since the 2003 beginning of the tracking process, UDOT has realized millions of dollars in savings by implementing innovative ideas for contracting methods, safety improvements, accelerated bridge construction, and other areas, proving the value (both in terms of funds and progress) of regularly sending a small team of UDOT leaders to the Annual Meeting.

Because TRB's Annual Meeting covers all modes of transportation and has a large number of technical sessions, presentations, committee meetings, workshops, and poster sessions, UDOT's benefits tracking process helps focus the efforts of its attendees in gathering innovative, cost-saving ideas as well as their resolve to implement them in their areas of practice. The process continues to be improved and consists of the following main steps:

1. Attendees are strategically selected;
2. A preconference coordination meeting conveys UDOT's expectation that each attendee will return from the meeting with at least two ideas for implementation;
3. Attendees meet during the Annual Meeting to share ideas and coordinate efforts;
4. Attendees take notes on presentations and meetings;
5. Written summaries of implementable ideas are provided by attendees to the research division at a post-conference meeting;
6. Attendees' ideas are presented to UDOT executive management, including implementation plans and summaries of expected benefits and savings;
7. Quarterly reports are submitted by attendees to the research division on the progress made in implementing their ideas, including actual cost savings to UDOT; and
8. The research division compiles a master spreadsheet and tracks the implementation of ideas for all UDOT attendees (beginning in 2003).

Forty-nine UDOT employees have attended the TRB Annual Meeting between 2003 and 2009, introducing a total of 269 initiatives to UDOT, 136 of which were implemented as of September 2009. A total of approximately \$374 million in cost savings to UDOT was estimated by attendees for the implementation of ideas, and more than \$189 million in actual savings to UDOT has been reported from their implementation. Attendees also report difficult-to-quantify, nontangible benefits from the Annual Meeting, including information transfer, networking activities, and the ability to develop and maintain technical competency by attending technical and poster sessions.

### **UDOT Experience, 2003 to 2009**

- **49 UDOT employees have attended the TRB Annual Meeting**
- **Employees have proposed 269 initiatives —136 have been implemented to date**
- **UDOT estimates \$374 million in cost savings and more than \$189 million in actual savings from these initiatives**
- **Nontangible benefits include information transfer, networking, and improved technical competency**