

## WESTERN STATES HIGHWAY EQUIPMENT MANAGERS CONFERENCE, PHOENIX, ARIZONA, 1995

---

*Dwight R. Berkey*  
*Oregon Department of Transportation*

The Western States Highway Equipment Managers Conference was held in Phoenix, Arizona on September 27-29, 1995. Nine western states sent representatives to the conference. They were Montana, Nevada, Wyoming, Oregon, Arizona, Utah, Idaho, Washington and Colorado. California, Alaska, Hawaii, Texas and New Mexico were unable to attend.

The Western States group was formed in 1969 by Oregon, Washington and California equipment managers interested in fostering advancement in their field and sharing knowledge and experiences in an endeavor to become more efficient and effective. The conference's main topics included fleet administration, personnel matters and training, equipment specifications and procurement, equipment usage and allocation, snow removal equipment, alternative fuels, equipment support and repair costs. Following are brief summaries of the topics discussed during the conference.

- *Fleet Administration* - Discussed were the pros and cons of fleet privatization, downsizing and right-sizing, repair shop outsourcing, and data used to make prudent fleet management decisions. The group shared wisdom gained through shrinking tax revenues.

- *Personnel Matters and Training* - Caltrans, even though they did not attend the meeting, provided the information regarding several methods of driver and equipment operator training. They have an equipment-training academy that serves several operating functions within the department to train personnel on maintenance, care and operation of equipment. Oregon has a similar training academy and shared that information with the group. Other topics included wages, staffing levels, classifications, and career ladders.

- *Equipment Specifications and Procurement* - Western States Highway Equipment Managers discussed their equipment replacement methodology as well as procurement concerns and life cycle costing methods. Arizona is required by statute to use total-cost bidding. Idaho uses total-cost bidding with guaranteed buy-back. Idaho has purchased motor graders, loaders, tractor-trailers, and backhoes using the total-cost bidding and guaranteed buy-back method. Idaho figures they have saved almost \$4 million dollars in maintenance and

depreciation over the last four years. Also, several states shared their tandem-axle wing plow truck specifications.

- *Equipment Usage and Allocation* - Discussion under this topic included how equipment usage is collected and used to allocate fleet to end-users. Most states seem to use an equal dollar amount allocated to their customers. Declining revenues have affected fleet replacement and do not seem to meet the need in most states.

- *Snow Removal Equipment and Procedures* - Information was presented with discussion on the following topics: rear crash attenuators on snowplows, underbody (mid-mount) snowplows, liquid de-icers, side-discharge belt snow loaders, strobe versus rotolight usage during snow removal operations, power-angling snowplows, salt-dispensing controllers, infra-red sensors to detect accurate road temperatures, auger/sanders, snowplowing speed, and engine transmission life and cost in heavy-duty snowplow trucks.

- *Alternative Fuels* - There was much discussion about the advantages and disadvantages, cost, usage, converting equipment and fueling sites including remote locations.

- *Equipment Support and Repair Costs* - The group discussed personnel support costs to maintain vehicles along with costs relating to automatic transmissions in plow trucks, cost per mile, overhead, fuel and insurance, operating and repair costs.

The Western States group also discussed many miscellaneous equipment and repair related topics. This forum has been invaluable over the years in promoting information sharing, good will and contacts with other states. A post-conference tour provided the attendees with a four-hour tour of the General Motors desert proving ground facility. The equipment managers were able to participate first-hand in the anti-lock brakes and handling demonstration.

The 1996 Western States Highway Equipment Managers Conference is to be hosted in September 1996 by the Nevada DOT in Reno. As always, this group encourages and invites other interested states to attend. The group is looking forward to another successful conference in 1996.