

The Look, Sound, and Feel of a TRB Conference in New Jersey

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The New Jersey Department of Transportation decided to hold a "TRB Mini-Conference" using an agenda selected from presentations and papers given at the 1984 TRB Annual Meeting in January. This technique of information sharing and discussion had the potential of being the best alternative to actually attending the Annual Meeting. The New Jersey DOT held nine panel sessions covering 47 presentations from the meeting; general categories included safety and operations, design, and maintenance. The panel sessions lasted from 45 minutes to 1½ hours for a period of 2 days. More than 250 participants attended the sessions, 90 percent of which favored a repeat of the "TRB Mini-Conference" next year.

OBJECTIVE

Despite New Jersey's proximity to Washington, D.C., and the TRB Annual Meeting, only a small number of the New Jersey DOT professional staff are able to attend each year. Over the years, several alternative techniques, ranging from written to oral reports, were considered in an effort to share the information disseminated at the Annual Meeting with DOT staff. The preprints of the papers presented were also made

Before the TRB Annual Meeting each January, the Chief Administrative Officers of the State Highway and Transportation Departments face difficult decisions with respect to the numbers and kinds of individuals whose travel can be supported to attend the Annual Meeting. Because the cost of travel is related to the distance from the meeting site, the decisions are more difficult in those states more distant from Washington, D.C. Several states will be envious of the New Jersey Department of Transportation, which reports in the accompanying article that it was able to send 25 staff members to all or part of the 1984 Annual Meeting. This level of attendance reflects, at least partly, its nearness to Washington, but also its desire to cover the meeting fully.

Few would disagree that substantial attendance and participation in the TRB Annual Meeting pays dividends. In the *AASHTO Quarterly* (April 1982), Pennsylvania Department of Transportation Secretary Thomas D. Larson stated that one of the ways to make more effective use of the states' investment in TRB was to support attendance at the Annual Meeting. He said, "The agenda is so rich that even though travel costs are high, attendance can have a high benefit-cost ratio and there are a variety of cost reduction techniques that allow participation in the meeting without an unmanageable investment. Above all, be selective both in terms of who attends and what they do before, during, and after attendance."

In the accompanying article prepared by members of the staff of the New Jersey DOT, it is obvious that Larson's admonition has been followed. Clearly, New Jersey planned its participation in the Annual Meeting in advance in order to cover those sessions of major interest to their department. More important, however, is the action that they planned before and took after the Annual Meeting in making the benefits available to a much larger audience within their department.

To any who have attended an Annual Meeting it is obvious that a certain number of staff members must be in attendance in order to have a reasonable threshold for covering concurrent sessions of interest. The use of the preprints that TRB provides to every state soon after the Annual Meeting greatly enhances presentations and discussions by those who were fortunate enough to be able to attend the meeting in person.

I believe that the managers in the New Jersey DOT responsible for planning and conducting the TRB Mini-Conference after the 1984 Annual Meeting are deserving of commendation. Their example appears appropriate for consideration by every state highway and transportation department in the coming years as a means of maximizing the transfer of new research findings into practice by professional staff members.

—John A. Clements
Commissioner
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Planners for the TRB Mini-Conference include Dawn Landacre and Eugene Reilly.

available to staff. Even so, it was believed that the efforts to give the staff an adequate appreciation of the substance in Washington were not sufficient this year. The concept of a "TRB Mini-Conference" was proposed to replicate the actual 1984 TRB Annual Meeting as the best possible environment to both present the concepts and induce dialogue. The Division of Research and Demonstration was to plan and implement the entire program.

PLANNING

From the beginning, TRB staff members were extremely helpful in planning the mini-conference. Although no TRB staff attended the mini-conference, their support in expediting material distribution contributed to the success of the program.

The managers of the New Jersey DOT gave their wholehearted support to this effort. They were well aware of the importance of the TRB Annual Meeting and concurred in sharing the findings of the meeting with more of the department's staff than was normally permissible. With the program having the additional support of the department's engineering and operations chief engineers and directors, it was decided that a pilot mini-conference would be held this year.

The conference was to be limited to the maintenance, design, and safety and operation functions of the department; staff for the mini-conference was selected from these areas along with

staff from the research area. The topics to be covered were initially chosen by the Chief Engineers of Design and Maintenance. Approximately 60 presentations/committee sessions were selected from the tentative program mailed by TRB in early December 1983. The selection of topics was based on suitability for panels, staff interest, and appropriateness of information for DOT staff. Subsequently, the participants were queried for suggestions regarding the topics, and concurrence was reached on the sessions to be covered by New Jersey DOT staff at the 1984 TRB Annual Meeting. A total of 25 DOT staff

members attended two or more sessions at the Annual Meeting both for the purpose of hearing the presentations and for the purpose of talking to the authors to obtain sufficient information to replicate the presentation. Obviously the staff attending the Annual Meeting were knowledgeable in the areas they covered and on which they were subsequently to speak at the mini-conference.

Two weeks before the annual meeting, the most important aspects of the conference were resolved. A decision was made to have more sessions of limited duration instead of fewer sessions of longer duration. Since the mini-conference was organized by the Division of Research and Demonstration, it was decided that the panels would be moderated by personnel from this division. The format was to be one of presentation and panel discussion. A training session for the panel moderators was conducted, which included techniques for inducing and generating panel and audience discussion.

An important aspect of the pilot mini-conference was the use of an evaluation form developed after much discussion. Figure 1 is the form used to evaluate each session.

Richard Hollinger of the New Jersey DOT is a panelist at the TRB Mini-Conference.



The final program was determined in late January after the TRB Annual Meeting. There would be nine panels with three to four staff members on each panel. The sessions were scheduled consecutively to allow staff members to attend as many as they wanted to. In addition, sessions on similar topics were scheduled consecutively, so that staff would be able to stay for those topics they were interested in without having to come and go. The moderators and presenters for each session met separately before the conference to discuss which topics would be best suited for presentation by the panel as well as the format of the presentation. It was decided not to require the use of elaborate visual aids.

The mini-conference meeting dates were set to allow time for the preprints of the papers presented at the TRB Annual Meeting to be received and reviewed by the panelists. One month before the mini-conference was held, copies of the agenda were distributed to DOT staff through the Division Directors. This method of distribution was chosen because of the limited seating that would (by design) be available and to expedite a formal registration procedure that would provide impetus for this exchange of information.



Eugene Reilly makes presentation at Panel Session at the TRB Mini-Conference held by the New Jersey Department of Transportation.

FORMAT

The moderator introduced each panel with a description of TRB's function, each presentation, and the general format of the panel. Limiting the sessions to 45 minutes to 1½ hours in duration resulted in a fast pace that was designed to maintain the interest of the attendees. The final agenda of the sessions and the list of participants is shown in Figure 2. Similar topics were grouped in back-to-back sessions to reduce

the audience turnover. The sessions of the first day were primarily focused on maintenance, the second day's sessions centered on safety and operations.

The panelists were asked to keep their presentations limited to about 5 minutes. A presentation was to be followed by about 5 minutes of panel discussion (allowance was made for up to an additional 5 minutes of audience discussion). Although this format was not strictly adhered to, open discussion after a brief presentation generally occurred. Because the sessions were held consecutively, panel moderators generally concluded each session within the scheduled time. Each session ended with a request by the moderator for attendees to complete the evaluation form.

RESULTS

The attendance at the panel sessions varied—from a high of 40 to a low of 25. In all there were 260 attendees. The most encouraging feedback was that more than 90 percent in attendance responded that they had gained new information from the sessions. In addition, 90 percent of those in attendance stated that they would attend another TRB mini-conference if one were to be held next year. Twenty-five percent of the responses indicated that sufficient detail was not given by the panel members in their presentations. This is attributed to

The Mini-Conference sessions were well attended by New Jersey DOT staff.



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TRB MINI-CONFERENCE EVALUATION

The NJDOT is unique in the nation, in having its Division of Research and Demonstration present the first TRB Mini-Conference. Your views of this experience will be very helpful. PLEASE INDICATE your response to the following questions about the session you just attended.

| | Circle One | | | | |
|--|------------|---|---|----|---|
| | YES | | | NO | |
| Did you gain any new information from this session? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | * |
| Were the topics discussed in sufficient detail by the panel members? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | * |
| Would you attend another TRB Mini-Conference next year? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | * |
| Which among the following Transportation areas would you prefer to see covered in the future? | | | | | |
| CHECK ALL THAT APPLY | | | | | |
| <u>Planning and Administration</u> | | | <u>Operations and Safety</u> | | |
| 9 <input type="checkbox"/> Administration 10 <input type="checkbox"/> Planning 11 <input type="checkbox"/> Forecasting 12 <input type="checkbox"/> Finance 13 <input type="checkbox"/> Socioeconomics 14 <input type="checkbox"/> User Needs 15 <input type="checkbox"/> Energy and Environment 16 <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ | | | 28 <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation Safety 29 <input type="checkbox"/> Human Factors 30 <input type="checkbox"/> Vehicle Characteristics 31 <input type="checkbox"/> Operations and Traffic Control 32 <input type="checkbox"/> Traffic Flow, Capacity and Measurements 33 <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ | | |
| <u>Design</u> | | | <u>Materials and Construction</u> | | |
| 17 <input type="checkbox"/> Facilities Design 18 <input type="checkbox"/> Hydrology and Hydraulics 19 <input type="checkbox"/> Environmental Design 20 <input type="checkbox"/> Pavement Design and Performance 21 <input type="checkbox"/> Structures Design and Performance 22 <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ | | | 34 <input type="checkbox"/> Bituminous Materials & Mixes 35 <input type="checkbox"/> Cement and Concrete 36 <input type="checkbox"/> Construction 37 <input type="checkbox"/> General Materials 38 <input type="checkbox"/> Mineral Aggregates 39 <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ | | |
| <u>Maintenance and Equipment</u> | | | <u>Soils, Geology, and Foundations</u> | | |
| 23 <input type="checkbox"/> Maintenance 24 <input type="checkbox"/> Construction and Maintenance 25 <input type="checkbox"/> Equipment 26 <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ | | | 40 <input type="checkbox"/> Soil Exploration & Classification 41 <input type="checkbox"/> Soil Foundations 42 <input type="checkbox"/> Soil and Rock Mechanics 43 <input type="checkbox"/> Soil Science 44 <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ | | |
| <u>Transportation Law</u> | | | <u>Other</u> | | |
| 27 <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation Law | | | 45 <input type="checkbox"/> _____ | | |

Thank you for your help in evaluating the TRB Mini-Conference.

Written topic reports, made available by the Transportation Research Board, can be obtained through your Bureau Chief or Director.

Figure 1. Form used to evaluate TRB Mini-Conference held by the New Jersey Department of Transportation.

tight time schedules. In response to the question on the areas attendees would like to have included in future mini-conferences, the following areas were requested (in the order of the largest number of responses): pavement design and performance, maintenance, transportation safety, operations and traffic control, traffic flow capacity and measurements, bituminous materials and mixes, cement and concrete, and construction.

One of the more interesting combinations of responses was for transportation law and pedestrian and roadside safety. The response for transportation law was also high in conjunction with traffic operations and control and roadway delineation. The liability issue appears to be high on the list of many operations personnel.

Although the conference was limited to the maintenance, design, and safety and operations areas, all of the transpor-

tation areas shown in Figure 1 were checked. It is noteworthy that there was such a wide distribution of areas of interest when the panel discussions were relatively narrow in scope.

PANELIST DEBRIEFING

A debriefing session for the panelists was conducted at the conclusion of the mini-conference. Approximately 12 presenters and moderators were in attendance. The debriefing was a brainstorming activity with focus on such subjects as what was right with the program, what was wrong with the program, the kind of feedback received, and suggestions for future mini-conferences.

On the positive side, the group approved of the brevity of presentations, the heavy involvement of nonresearch persons, the opportunity for the audience to become aware of the activities of other states, the positive image for the Transportation Research Board, the identification of more progressive thinkers by virtue of the topics selected, and the give and take of the discussions.

Suggestions for improvement include scheduling the mini-conference sooner after the TRB Annual Meeting, greater promotion of the program leading to increased attendance, greater use of visual aids and handouts, shortening of some presentations, use of a preconference survey to aid planning, a summarization of each panel discussion, awareness on the part of panel participants of the other presentations, increased interaction between audience and panelists, and clear and precise direction on how and where to obtain additional information.

With a view toward the future, panel participants concluded that attention needs to be given to the methodology and criteria for selection of New Jersey DOT attendees to the TRB Annual Meeting, an enhanced role for the moderators of the mini-conference sessions, and the need for prepublication abstracts.

In regard to initiation of similar mini-conferences by other state DOTs, it is believed that the program promotes a professionalism unique to the department and its image. Suggestions for de-

**TRB MINI-CONFERENCE
ROOM 140, MAIN BUILDING**

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 7, 1984

**PAVEMENT MAINTENANCE
MODERATOR: J. Croteau
9:00-10:15**

Measuring & Evaluating Rideability in Pavements - J. Croteau
Monitoring and Evaluating Pavements - A. Jumikis
The use of Models for Pavement Management - J. Croteau
Potholes and Safety - A. Jumikis

**MAINTENANCE ORGANIZATION AND FUNDING
MODERATOR: J. Croteau
10:30-12:00**

Maintenance Organization - K. Immordino
Highway Management System - M. Kjetsaa
Contract Maintenance - J. Dunn
Restricted Maintenance Funds - K. Immordino
Allocation of Maintenance Funds - M. Kjetsaa
Using Computers to Assign Personnel - N. Cifelli
Safety Improvements Through Games - N. Cifelli

**BRIDGE AND CULVERT MAINTENANCE
MODERATOR: J. Croteau
1:00-1:45**

Designing Bridges for Earthquakes - R. Pege
Bridge Deck Expansion Joints - D. Noxon
Steel Bridge Erection Plans - R. Pege
Bridge Maintenance Management - D. Noxon
Durability of Coated Corrugated Metal Pipe - C. Younger
Durability of Portland Cement Concrete Pipe - F. Bogdan

**CONCRETE USES AND PROTECTION
MODERATOR: E. Reilly
2:00-3:00**

Cathodic Protection of Bridge Substructures - C. Younger
Superplasticized Fiber-Reinforced Concrete - R. Pege
Latex Modified Shotcrete - R. Pege
Bridge Deck Membrane Systems - C. Younger
Bonus Payments in Portland Cement Concrete Specs - R. Weed

**STATISTICAL AND ECONOMIC ANALYSES
MODERATOR: R. Hollinger
3:15-4:15**

Identifying Hazardous Locations - R. Barros
Using New Accident Exposure Methods - W. Mullowney
Reexamining Analyses of Before and After Studies - R. Barros
Economic Analysis of Highway Investments - R. Weed
Availability of Computer Programs for Transportation Services - R. Weed

THURSDAY, MARCH 8, 1984

**ROADWAY DELINEATION
MODERATOR: R. Hollinger
9:00-10:15**

Guide Sign Reflectorization - A. W. Roberts
Pavement Marking Materials - K. Brodtkman
Roadway Lane Striping - A. Alaimo
Pavement Delineation - A. W. Roberts

**TRAFFIC OPERATIONS & CONTROL
MODERATOR: R. Hollinger
10:30-12:00**

Accidents and Performance of Right-Turn-On-Red - T. Davis
Emergency and Safety Considerations of Control Devices - W. Mullowney
Experiences With Speed Humps - J. Kochenour
Doubles Trailers and the Highway System - N. Deitch

**PEDESTRIAN & ROADSIDE SAFETY
MODERATOR: R. Hollinger
1:15-2:45**

Investigating New Designs for Traffic Barriers - W. Szalaj
Risk Management and Maintenance - T. Davis
Highway Work Zones - T. Davis
Pedestrian Space Concept & Sidewalk/Crosswalk Design - F. Bogdan
Pedestrian Exposure Measures - J. Kochenour
Innovative Pedestrian Signals - F. Bogdan
Mid-Block Crosswalks - J. Kochenour

**HIGHWAY CAPACITY & GEOMETRICS
MODERATOR: E. Reilly
3:00-4:15**

Level of Service Concept in Operations - W. Caddell
R-R-R Practices and Safety - J. Morrison
AASHTO Policy on Geometric Design - E. Dayton
Management Teams Required for Traffic Diversions - T. Batz
Two-Way Left Turn Lanes and Safety - J. Morrison

Figure 2. Final agenda of the TRB Mini-Conference.

velopment of a similar program by state agencies include: The entire package can be prepared and presented to management focusing on the training aspects of TRB as an incentive or reward for newly appointed or promoted staff personnel. Results and future intentions

should be enumerated for management. New concepts presented should be tracked through the department toward implementation. The department can stimulate and urge staff members to write papers, to work toward awards, or to work at sessions at the TRB An-

nual Meeting; or engineering students from state universities could be invited to the mini-conference. Topics could be added that would be appropriate for the entire department, and invitations to participate could be extended to all divisions.

LOOKING TO FUTURE MINI-CONFERENCES

The following conclusions were reached on holding more successful conferences in the future.

1. A successful conference is all in the planning; the execution will flow smoothly thereafter.

2. Widespread publicity and mailings are essential to get greater exposure.

3. Conferencing experts are needed to assist in the planning; many details will not occur to the uninitiated line managers responsible for focusing on content.

4. All panelists and moderators should be given a minimum amount of instructions on the appropriate techniques for presentations and discussions.

5. Paper abstracts would be useful for both the publication of the agenda and the attendees' information.

6. Evaluation forms are useful to judge the effectiveness of each panel

and the requirements for subsequent mini-conferences.

7. Panelists, in addition to presenters, should be knowledgeable in the topics covered in their sessions. Presenters should review the TRB preprints of the papers as well as possibly discuss the papers with the authors.

8. All of the department's operations should be considered for coverage in the conference.

CONCLUSION

The results of the first mini-conference far exceeded our expectations. Apprehension over becoming the "expert" evaporated as panelists and audience found common ground for discussion on the topics. The unresolved problems were conceded to need further study—which appeared to be the case for most topics and is a prime reason for conferences of this nature to continue in the future.