

# Technology Transfer Hits the Road

GEORGE D. CROMMES

The Northwest Technology Transfer Center is part of the Rural Technical Assistance Program (RTAP) under the Federal Highway Administration. The center, which officially opened in December 1983, is housed in the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) State Aid Office. An advisory committee provides guidance to the center's activities, which focus on a coordinated technology transfer program responsive to local rural transportation agencies. Particular attention is given to technical information for bridges, roads, and rural public transportation in Washington and Idaho.

The basic activities of the technology transfer program are

- Maintenance of an extensive mailing list,
- Publication of a quarterly newsletter,
- Provision of technical literature and information,

- Holding of workshops and seminars, and

- Periodic evaluations of the program's effectiveness.

In addition, the center has conducted the following activities: published "Operating Tips," a centerfold for a newsletter on specific subjects; developed a transportation resource directory for Washington and Idaho; prepared training films on using the Transportation Research Information Services (TRIS); and initiated a van program similar to Bob Krull's "Road Show" in FHWA's Region 9.

The most important activity of the Northwest Technology Transfer Center is the van program. The purpose of the program is to provide face-to-face technology transfer to users at their place of work. Two fully equipped Dodge maxivans, each carrying two monitors, one video cassette recorder, 69 video tapes, "best reference materials," and assorted support items, are used in the program. A video catalog and video menu supplement and support the van program. The video menu groups tapes by general categories, titles, overall ratings, and length. The existing collection of 69 video tapes provides a wide choice of subject matter. Pavement maintenance, equip-

ment operation, and safety appear to be the most popular subjects. Strong interest has also been expressed in the topics of tort liability, traffic control, base stabilization, and a variety of construction and maintenance activities.

The manager of the center directs the van program. Other staff include the van program scheduler, who schedules the trainers and makes travel accommodations for them, and contacts the local agencies. The coordinator at the host agency invites other public agencies to the training program. Usually four or five agencies are represented at the numerous individual training sessions. The current two trainers—a retired Idaho transportation district administrator and a retired Benton County, Washington, road superintendent—are experts on their subjects and communicate well with their audiences.

Participants at the training sessions vary considerably in their educational levels and jobs. For example, a session's participants may include engineers, technicians, road supervisors, equipment operators, mechanics, general laborers, and clerical or administrative staff. With such a diverse group, varied interests in transportation would be expected. The center has found, however, that a truck driver is as concerned with

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*George D. Crommes is manager of the Northwest Technology Transfer Center in Olympia, Washington.*



George Crommes (*left*), Manager, Northwest Technology Transfer Center, with van driver-trainer Ralph Weidner.



Technology transfer van is loaded with a variety of equipment before departing to a session.



Robert Butler, host coordinator, arrives for training session in Bingham County, Idaho.

his agency's tort liabilities as is the city or county administrator. The average class size is 15 to 16 participants.

In addition at a training session, multiple jurisdictions may be represented—for example, counties, cities, the state, the Forest Service, and Indian agencies. Various viewpoints are expressed

and a considerable exchange of ideas usually occurs. This is technology transfer at its best—the sharing of ideas among people. By completing an evaluation form, each attendee provides tape and course ratings and general comments, information that can be used to make modifications to the program.

The van program generally operates in the spring and fall of each year because the work load in the summers and winters allows little time for local agency personnel to attend training sessions. Since the spring of 1985, trainers have held more than 125 sessions in Washington and Idaho, serving more than 160 agencies and providing training to more than 1,800 participants.

Specific observations that can be drawn from the operation of the center's van program include the following:

- Participants prefer to obtain training at their place of work than at central locations.
- Because training and travel funds are scarce at most agencies, the van program appears to satisfy the need for training with little travel required.
- The best prepared tapes, regardless of subject matter, generally receive the best ratings.
- There appears to be little correlation between the ratings given to various tapes and the job description of the participants. For example, a video tape on bituminous seal coats will be rated similarly by truck drivers and engineers.
- The personalities of the trainers and their skills can have a major impact on the class ratings. Accomplished trainers are sensitive to the audience and provide opportunities for audience participation and discussion.
- Informally structured sessions are preferred to very structured ones. Adequate time should be allowed between tapes for questions and the exchange of ideas.
- An ideal mobile training session would have 15 to 30 participants from multiple jurisdictions and would last 4 to 6 hours.

The technology transfer van program of the Northwest Technology Transfer Center has been successful in providing face-to-face technology transfer in Washington and Idaho. Good materials, skillful people, and a receptive audience in need of technical training at low costs have provided the seeds for a successful van program.