



"HATS OFF" to TRB Representatives

ROBERT E. SPICHER

Volunteers from government, industry, and academia play an important role in accomplishing the work of the Transportation Research Board. Contributions of the volunteers on the 175 standing committees and task forces in the Technical Activities Division, the study committees in the Special Projects Division, the National Cooperative Highway Research Program Panels in the Cooperative Research Programs, and the Executive Committee allow TRB's relatively small staff to greatly increase its effectiveness and outreach.

However, some of the men and women who serve as TRB representatives in each of the transportation departments of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico; 165 universities; 45 transit agencies; and other organizations are volunteers who are not as well known in the TRB community. Although "volunteer" may be a misnomer because they are providing a service to their employers as well as to TRB, this part of their job usually is voluntary or falls under the category of "other duties as assigned." TRB representatives provide an invaluable service that is relatively unknown and seldom recognized.

Robert E. Spicher is director, Technical Activities Division, TRB.

Principal Links

The state representative is the principal link between the state highway or transportation department and TRB. A representative is appointed by TRB for an indefinite term on the recommendation of the state chief administrative officer. Through this link, the state is informed of TRB activities and of research in progress elsewhere, and TRB is informed of issues and problems facing the state and of the state's research activities.



G. P. Jayaprakash, TRB engineer of soils, geology, and foundations (left), is introduced to John Davis, director, Division of Highways, DelDOT, by state representative Oscar Sebastian during a state visit.

TRB representatives at universities, transit agencies, and other organizations (for example, TRB Sustaining and Contributing Affiliates) perform similar roles. These appointments are also based on the recommendation of a top official, but are usually for a three-year term. Reappointments are common because of a desire for continuity.

Duties of representatives are shown in the accompanying box. The list is long and requires a considerable amount of time and effort to do well. An additional service for which TRB is grateful is the representatives' assistance in keeping top level management and others apprised of the role of TRB. The relatively short term of office of many state CAOs makes this "educational" aspect of the representative's job doubly important, especially when the CAO is asked to sign a contract for TRB support.

Several TRB representatives were asked to comment on how they view their responsibilities. The following excerpts from their responses more clearly describe the nature and value of their participation.



Charles E. Dougan



Richard L. Stewart



G. Scott Rutherford



Vukan R. Vuchic



James C. Echols

Smooth Flow of Information

"The most important aspect of my role is [maintaining] the smooth flow of information," says Oscar L. Sebastian of the Delaware Department of Transportation, referring to information on research in progress and to technology to be transferred. He has submitted problem statements to TRB on behalf of DelDOT personnel, which may often help solve problems common to several state transportation agencies.

"Also on the 'giving' end, I have submitted abstracts on studies being conducted by DelDOT, which may or may not be useful information to other organizations," he says. "The 'receiving' side outstrips the other," he continues, because Transportation Research Information Services searches readily satisfy requests for information or problem-solving assistance from DelDOT technical staff. "The rapid turnaround enables prompt response to administrators, managers, and engineers, which helps them in their decision making."

Sebastian has intensified efforts to gain more participation in TRB activities by all levels of technical staff. As a result, DelDOT has sent staff members on overnight stays and on day trips to TRB annual meetings. Sebastian also has invited TRB staff members to give presentations to local audiences, and he notes that their participation in DelDOT's technology transfer (T²) presentation program has been greatly appreciated.

"The annual state visits by TRB personnel are, to me, a very important aspect of TRB activities. It is during these visits that

I am able to arrange interviews with key people in DelDOT, who learn more about TRB from the TRB visitor."

Charles E. Dougan of the Connecticut Department of Transportation views his role as the state's TRB representative as one of facilitator and communicator.

"As a facilitator, I try to assure that TRB paperwork, including the NCHRP Agreement, reaches the right offices and receives appropriate and timely attention," he comments.

He says that while wearing his communicator hat, he explains the role of TRB and its relationship to NCHRP, TRIS, AASHTO, and the Strategic Highway Research Program.

He notes that the department uses TRB resources to solve complex problems. For example, contacts on tort liability became important when the Mianus River Bridge collapsed. In addition, TRIS was used to seek the best methods of pavement repair.

"These are only two examples [of] how the Board provides information and solutions to pressing needs and problems. The list appears endless," Dougan says.

Richard L. Stewart of the South Carolina Department of Highways and Public Transportation says, "My primary objective is to see that the department realizes the maximum benefits possible" from its investment in TRB.

In thinking back over the 15 years that he has been a TRB representative, Stewart believes he has come nearer the accomplishment of his objective by encouraging attendance at the TRB Annual Meeting and participation on TRB committees.

"If I am able to do this, TRB sells itself,

and everything else falls into place. Usually, if you can get [people] to that first meeting, they are so impressed by the vast array of knowledge and research on display that they want to be involved and become a part of TRB. Once you achieve this involvement, the benefits come back to the department many times over."

Bridging Research and Practice

G. Scott Rutherford of the University of Washington explains that universities with transportation programs come to depend on their close relationship with TRB for substantial program assistance, including publications, conferences, and committee activities that provide information and professional development for faculty and students.

"As the university's TRB representative, I am able to assist in connecting TRB with the university community. Designating university representatives makes it clear that TRB thinks we are an important element of TRB activities; we appreciate that recognition," he says.

The University of Pennsylvania's Vukan R. Vuchic finds the annual visit to the university by TRB staff to be useful.

"The meetings I arrange with other faculty and students during this visit not only provide the opportunity to disseminate current research information but also the opportunity to introduce more people to TRB," he says. "The value of TRB to the university, and to the transportation community in general, is that it



Joel Woodhull



Michael W. Roshek



Eugene F. Reilly

provides the needed interface between research and practice. TRB has a greater breadth of coverage of the various transportation disciplines and modes than most organizations, and as a result provides a tremendous resource to practitioners and researchers."

Conduits for Research

James C. Echols of the Tidewater Transportation District Commission in Norfolk, Virginia, sees his role as twofold. He explains that his responsibilities are "to pass along to my agency the current state of research as it relates to a transit operating agency and to pass along to associates at TRB the current status of research needs and operating outlook for a regional transit system."

He comments, "Our program has benefited greatly from exchanging ideas at TRB meetings and then coming home and implementing new or changing old ways of providing transit service."

Joel Woodhull of the Southern California Rapid Transit District views his role in the same way.

"As the TRB representative, I have a two-way role. I try to serve as the conduit for research reports, bringing to management's attention what is going on in the research community, and conversely, serving as the point of contact for researchers wanting information about this large organization."

He adds, "Public transit agencies lead a hand-to-mouth existence, as does most of the transportation research community. Transit organizations don't under-

take much research themselves, and what little research gets accomplished elsewhere would likely go unreported or gather dust on a shelf if it were not for TRB. In our work in policy analysis, we depend in large measure on research done elsewhere, in a variety of fields."

Going the Extra Mile

The representatives undertake responsibilities above and beyond their basic duties. Michael W. Roshek of the Utah Department of Transportation has circulated a questionnaire to the entire depart-

ment to identify needs that can be developed into areas for research and to inform department directors about these needs. He also helps to bring research activities to the attention of construction, preconstruction, and maintenance groups.

Eugene F. Reilly of the New Jersey Department of Transportation organizes and conducts a mini-TRB Annual Meeting in the state to disseminate information obtained at the Annual Meeting in Washington each January. Other states hold similar meetings, and some prepare special reports containing Annual Meeting papers of interest to their departments. They also prepare extensive summaries of TRB services to demonstrate to new CAOs that investing in TRB is a worthwhile expenditure of resources.

What can TRB do for these deserving volunteers? We decided to send them *more* research papers to distribute next year. We will seek their help in identifying *more* people to serve on committees. We will be even *more* aggressive in encouraging them to submit articles for *TR News*. And, once in a while, we will stop to say thanks.

TRB Reps

- Maintain awareness of general procedures concerning the operation of the committees, the National Cooperative Highway Research Program, the various computer-based information services, and other special activities of the Board.
- Keep others in organization informed of TRB activities and services.
- Maintain collection of TRB publications.
- Recommend qualified people for membership on TRB committees and panels.
- Provide summaries of ongoing research projects and report initiation of new research to the Board's information services.
- Update and return selective distribution forms for TRB publications annually.
- Coordinate response to TRB questionnaires.
- Assist TRB staff members in scheduling meetings with organization personnel during field visits.
- Submit items for consideration for *TR News*.
- Encourage the offer of papers for TRB meetings and publications.
- Submit to the Board's executive director suggestions for improving TRB services.

Note: This list contains duties of TRB state representatives; representatives in other organizations have similar duties. A listing of TRB representatives can be found in the TRB Directory. Copies of the 1990 directory will be available from TRB in September for \$30 each.