
STATE TRANSPORTATION LIBRARIES GO ON-LINE

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The volume of transportation research results currently available in print and electronic form is staggering. A total of 50,000 new transportation titles are published in the United States each year. Another 58,000 titles are published in Great Britain. The number of electronic transportation resources accessible on the Internet and through fee-based vendors grows daily. Clearly, we are information rich, but we are also often knowledge poor.

Information is data; knowledge is data we have processed to arrive at understanding. We are knowledge poor because we do not have time to read, much less absorb, all that is published in our transportation fields. To become knowledge rich, we will increasingly depend on specialized libraries and on librarians to guide us through the confusing maze of print and electronic resources.

State departments of transportation are increasingly relying on their own libraries to provide the most current and reliable resources. Economic necessity may be driving this trend: it is nearly 2.5 times less expensive to furnish information from specialized libraries than from other sources (1). Although state DOT libraries provide services to all department staff and often to county engineers, university students and faculty, and the general public as well, traditionally they are allocated a small percentage of operating funds. How are these libraries meeting the growing demand for ever greater support with comparatively small budgets? A 1996 survey of the DOT libraries of seven states—Connecticut, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Washington, and Wisconsin—provides two answers: increased reliance on electronic information storage and retrieval systems and provision of computer-based services.

USERS AND FUNDERS

The seven libraries surveyed are located within different divisions of their respective state DOTs. The Connecticut and Minnesota libraries are part of offices of communications within executive offices; the New York library is part of research divisions. Michigan's Information Services is in the Office of Information Management; Ohio's library is in the Office of Human Resources; and Wisconsin's library is in the Planning Division. Washington's library is a branch of the state library.

The libraries serve a variety of groups outside their departments and other state agencies. Connecticut's library serves patrons of a technology transfer center, students, local engineers, and the general public. Michigan's Information Services is available to road commission members and contract consultants; a small branch library serves research laboratories. Minnesota's Transportation Libraries serve university students and the general public.

All of the libraries are supported by state research funds; some also receive federal research dollars. The Washington Department of Transportation's library is funded through a contract with the Washington State Library. Minnesota Transportation Libraries is jointly funded by its members: MnDOT and the Center for Transportation Studies (University of Minnesota and the Technology Transfer Center); a small amount of support is also provided by the Local Road Research Board. The Wisconsin library has received a federal grant. The grant from National Highway Traffic Safety Administration was for a project called Planning Literature Acquisition on Impaired Drivers, for which WisDOT received an award

from the National Commission Against Drunk Driving.

ELECTRONIC RESOURCES AND SERVICES

The seven libraries use a variety of electronic resources to gain access to information. Most have access to Knight Ridder's Dialog Information Service so that patrons can search the Transportation Research Board's Transportation Research Information Services (TRIS) data base and 400 other subject data bases. Many of the libraries also have access to the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC), through which material held by libraries around the world can be located and electronically borrowed. Many regularly use the Value-Added Network (VAN) Bulletin Board service of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials.

The Internet has become an increasingly valuable tool. Many of the libraries surveyed not only provide access to Internet services but also offer training to department staff in effectively exploiting the resources available on the World Wide Web. The libraries also provide access to a variety of CD-ROM products, including TRANSPORT, which includes TRIS and two European databases. Some libraries are now networking this CD-ROM to provide direct access to its information at multiple workstations. Most of the libraries make their catalogs available on line.

Connecticut's library catalog is on the statewide database reQuest. The librarian handles the department's multimedia interactive-training programs, introducing department staff to personal computers, DOS, and software (WordPerfect and Lotus).

Michigan's on-line library catalog is networked to all the district offices. All department staff have access to the catalog at their desks. In addition to library materials, the computerized library system includes a records management system and a correspondence tracking system. These systems are designed and maintained by the library staff. Desktop access to CD-ROMs became available in April.

The Minnesota Transportation Libraries catalog, which is on-line with the University of Minnesota library catalog, includes entries for holdings of

state agency libraries, the Minnesota University System libraries, and community and technical college libraries. In the future, the MnDOT library plans to provide desktop access to the catalog and CD-ROMs. The library also expects to put an MnDOT gopher server on the Internet.

Since 1988, New York's library has moved from a totally paper-based to an electronic operation. The library now provides information from electronic resources such as Dialog, OCLC, and CD-ROMs.

Ohio's library possesses a unique resource called OHIOLINK, an on-line service providing access to 35 state university catalogs, various research databases, and the state library. Interlibrary loan service and delivery with a 48-hour turnaround are available through OHIOLINK. In the future, the library plans to network its catalog.

Washington's library maintains a home page on the Internet, where a list of its new materials appears monthly. The library established a program to gather historical materials on the state's transportation system to put them on-line. Guides to the collection have been published for department staff.

Wisconsin's library is featured on WisDOT's Web page on the Internet. Visitors to the site can access information about the library's array of products and services. The library offers Internet and personal computer training.

LINKING LIBRARIES

The seven libraries surveyed are ready to embrace the recommendations of the International Information Exchange Workshop held in Washington, D.C., in 1995. The primary recommendation emerging from the workshop was that linking the libraries of state DOTs to a national library system is essential. But participants agreed that no matter how well organized or developed such a system might become, it would be useless if the agencies acting as primary end users lacked access to its information and materials.

REFERENCE

1. Keyes, Alison M. "The Value of the Special Library: Review and Analysis." *Special Libraries*, June 22, 1995, p. 172.