

A Candid Look Back at the 59th Annual Meeting and a Look Ahead to the 60th Annual Meeting

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As I am sure you would expect, the TRB staff conducts a substantial debriefing after each Annual Meeting: What went wrong, what went well, and what can we improve? We also take seriously the letters and calls from committee members, presiding officers, speakers, and other participants that we receive each year—some complimentary and some critical.

After 59 such meetings, it is not surprising that most suggestions for improvement from staff and other TRB family members have been considered in prior years and rejected for one reason or another. Some recurring ones are

1. Move to another city. This has been rejected thus far because a major reason for the success of the meetings is heavy participation by TRB staff. It would cost TRB roughly \$50 000 to move participating staff to a meeting in the Midwest. Also, important interaction with transportation specialists in federal agencies would be greatly reduced; 900 were registered at the 59th Annual Meeting, and most were from the Washington area. In addition, there are very few hotel complexes that can provide enough function rooms to accommodate our 45 simultaneous sessions and committee meetings.

2. Split the meeting into sessions one week and committee meetings another. This has been rejected because sponsors will not permit employees to be away for two weeks and because the interactions between people attending committee meetings and sessions are considered very important.

3. Pay travel expenses for all sponsor-employed participants and increase sponsor's "dues" to cover the cost. This was rejected by the Executive Committee several times; the cost would be some \$450 000/year.

However, with the new decade and with the experience of a first meeting in the new Sheraton Washington

behind us, it is appropriate to reconsider many things. This we are doing. Some changes are planned, some suggestions have been rejected, and some changes are still under study. These are discussed informally below.

The Hotels

Parts of the Sheraton Washington were still under construction, and this caused some difficulties and confusion; however, the management did what it could to make things work. We expect that construction will be completed next year. Although there will be fewer small meeting rooms than in previous years, we will work with the hotel's management to make the best use of the available space. It should be noted that next year the Sheraton will have six operating restaurants.

We experienced some difficulties and received some complaints this year concerning the Shoreham. The Shoreham, it should be remembered, is operating under new management, and we shall endeavor to work with the management to resolve any difficulties that we encountered this year.

Hotel room rates in Washington are high, but not necessarily any higher than those in other major metropolitan centers. Our expectation, of course, is that room rates generally will be higher in the future.

The Program

The quality of the 59th Annual Meeting program was reported to be very high. Of course, among more than 800 presentations, some few will be poor and some repetitious, but no change in the paper review process is contemplated. Despite a tripling of the number of sessions in recent years, a systematic staff process of session and committee meeting scheduling effectively minimizes most direct conflicts, although some will always be present.

While most registrants may make reasonably easy judgments as to where they want to be at a given time, agencies are encouraged to send sufficient staff to ensure adequate coverage of their major interests.

Hotel Registration

TRB can do little to expedite hotel registration or to prevent the dishonoring of confirmed reservations. This year, at the Sheraton, there were 20 percent no-shows for our meeting—folks with reservations who did not appear or cancel. One cannot fault the hotel for overbooking under such circumstances.

TRB Meeting Registration

On Monday and Tuesday morning there were long lines and delays—not longer than in earlier years, but too long. We can do something about this. Next year we will process, in a separate line, the 1500 or so employees of sponsor organizations that support TRB through their yearly contracts and, therefore, are not required to pay an additional fee for registration.

In addition, two lines will be provided for those registrants who do pay fees. If anyone wonders why it is necessary for TRB to charge registration fees, this year these fees brought in funds that covered about two-thirds of the out-of-pocket cost of the meeting.

Visual Aids

For the 59th Annual Meeting, TRB professional and support staff

- Received, counted, and logged in some 10 000 slides from more than 500 authors;
- Loaded them carefully into trays for projection under carefully controlled conditions;
- Looked at each image and, where necessary, measured the size of copy or made judgments of acceptability according to published rules;
- Wrote letters to authors conveying approval, rejection, or some combination of the two;
- During the annual meeting, received and checked 109 sets of replacement slides brought in by those whose slides had been rejected earlier; and
- Returned without checking 9 sets of slides to authors whose slides were received after the deadline date.

It is disappointing that so many slides still must be rejected as unreadable (182 partial or complete sets for the 59th Annual Meeting). It is encouraging that so many meet the submission deadline, which a few consider to be arbitrary and unreasonable. Those few who complain about our process for quality assurance do so with great vigor. Those who remember the old days, however, are equally vigorous in support of the program—and its results.

TRB is well aware of the contribution individual authors make to the annual meeting program. In fairness to those who come to hear, see, and learn, however, TRB is

committed to continue the enforcement of its reasonable standards of quality for visual aids.

The 60th Annual Meeting is scheduled for January 12-16, 1981. Because it is so early, the date for slide submission has been set for December 1, 1980. TRB staff will be augmented as required to get the slides reviewed and authors notified as quickly as possible. Staff will again issue early alert letters to authors to give as much notice of acceptance of their papers as possible. Our fondest wish is for a time when every slide passes—not because of our checking, but because all authors agree that the aims of the program are worth the attention and care it takes to make good slides.

This entire effort is devoted to ensuring that visual messages can be read and comprehended in the brief time they are on the screen. However, quality also depends on the projection equipment and the operators, and TRB is painfully aware of many shortcomings in the performance of its visual aids contractor this year. Every effort will be made to ensure that the 60th Annual Meeting contractor provides performance to complement the quality of the visual aids approved for use.

The cooperation of all participants is earnestly solicited.

Preprints

One of the most appreciated features of the TRB annual meeting has been the preprint room, where registrants can select “free” copies of up to four papers and can purchase additional copies until the supply is exhausted. This program permits the user of research to take home the very latest information for immediate application without waiting for the material to be edited, printed, and mailed at a later date.

The preprint service is popular; this year, the supply of about 100 of the papers was exhausted by week’s end. Preprints are available only during the meeting.

The program is made possible through the cooperation of those authors who comply with TRB’s requirement that 200 preprint copies of their papers be provided. Of these 200 copies, about 65 are withheld by TRB for early distribution to selected research users immediately after the annual meeting. These users include the state highway and transportation departments and the U.S. Department of Transportation; most of these copies are very quickly put into the hands of those most likely to make use of them.

TRB is well aware of the cost to authors and their organizations in supplying 200 copies of their papers. It is also aware and concerned about the small but growing trend among authors to send no preprints or send fewer than 200 copies. TRB is considering a different process; if its advantages appear to outweigh the disadvantages, it will be implemented well in advance of the next meeting. Unless you hear to the contrary, however, in fairness to all authors, and to those who depend on preprints for the early acquisition of new knowledge for implementation, please plan to make the full 200 copies available for each of your papers accepted for future annual meetings.