Cooperative Automated Transportation Systems - Observations and Trends

Article #2: Partnerships

When it comes to transportation and technology, we talk about partnerships in many different contexts. For example, an infrastructure owner/operator (IOO) might enter a partnership because:

* splitting the contributions can make it more reachable for agencies of all sizes
* sharing risk and increasing the shared gain will benefit public taxpayers
* bringing different expertise and abilities will usually lead to a more successful outcome

Through a series of in-person and virtual scan tours over the past 18 months, several State and Local DOT leaders have gained valuable insight into the many different facets of partnerships. The meetings were organized through the National Cooperative Highway Research Program (NCHRP) project 20-24(128), State of the Art Review of Cooperative Automated Transportation Systems. And nearly every conversation has reinforced the importance that partnerships will play.

While it was no surprise that many companies and organizations our panel heard from repeated the theme that you can go farther by partnering, it wasn’t always universal; some companies are still very selective in just how much they’ll lift the hood for others to peek at the engine.

What was a surprise, however, was hearing from many that “cooperation is the new competitive advantage,” and how many were actively seeking to collaborate with public, academic, and other private companies.

Could this newfound interest in partnering reflect the sensitivities that automated transportation present? A CEO of one start-up company felt so, and made it clear that “we need everyone to succeed…one failure sets everyone back.”

An open mind toward collaboration will continue to be important as we embrace cooperative automated transportation concepts - and in parallel begin to engage in other innovations such as shared mobility, vehicle electrification, and new data-driven applications. The panel heard from many organizations that supported the notion of IOOs expanding their approaches toward partnerships of many different sizes and varieties:

* partnerships between state & local DOTs
* partnerships between IOOs and academia
* partnerships between IOOs, private industry, and public safety

At the end of the day, cooperation rather than competition in key areas is recognized as preferred, or simply more rational. "It's not healthy to compete on safety."

*This article is part of a series covering high level observations and trends that have emerged as part of NCHRP 20-24(128). Future articles will cover topics such as Organizational Readiness for CAT, Data, Technology & Planning, People, and more. The opinions and conclusions expressed or implied are those of the panel members or research agency that performed the research and are not necessarily those of the Transportation Research Board or its sponsoring agencies.*