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TRANSPORTATION RESEARCH BOARD

**Executive Committee Meeting Minutes**

January 26-28, 2021

Online, Zoom

**January 26, 2021, Tuesday**

11:30 a.m.

Introductions and Announcements (Braceras) Information

- a. Policy Statement on Preventing Discrimination, Harassment, and Bullying was noted.
- b. Bias/Conflict of Interest Discussion – There were no conflicts of interest reported.

12:05 p.m.

Approval of August 17-19, 2020 Minutes (Braceras) Action

- The minutes were approved.

12:07 p.m.

Approval of Consent Agenda (Braceras) Action

12:09 p.m.

Executive Director's Report (Pedersen) Information

- Very proud of the TRB staff for everything it has done to convert everything into virtual work and a virtual Annual Meeting.
- We have really ramped up our Communications activities.
- We had brainstorming sessions on COVID-19 and Equity in Transportation, which are resulting in Critical Issues addendums.
- Technical Activities highlights include the two top-performing webinars we've ever had; they were both on COVID-19 issues.
- SHRP 2 Safety Database has been transferred to FHWA.
- Consensus Studies and Marine Board highlights also briefly mentioned, as were Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Strategic Plan; new National Research Council Strategic Plan, TRB Centennial; and TRB finances, which have been impacted by the TRB Annual Meeting revenue shortfall.

12:16 p.m.

TRB Division Committee Report (Hendrickson) Information

- a. Conference approvals were made.
- b. Monitoring diversity. We are seeing more and more diversity participating in TRB activities. Even a 1 percent increase in African-Americans involved with TRB is an increase of more than 100 people.

12:26 p.m.

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#### Technical Activities Update (Park and Brach) Presentation

- A major focus this past year on responding to major issues: COVID-19 and Equity.
- Committee restructuring enhanced relevance of many committees.
- COVID-19 impact on specialty conferences means these will continue to be virtual at least through the first half of 2021.
- There is a new Blue Ribbon Award diversity category.
- The next Spotlight theme, for TRBAM 20222, will be “Innovating a more just, resilient, and safe transportation system.”
- For this year, we developed a month-long agenda to accommodate attendees.
- We have a new record of nearly 20,000 attendees this year (versus 14,000 late year), including more than double the attendance for Sponsor attendees. The feedback has generally been positive and people are happy that we have decided to hold the meeting. Some people really like the spread-out sessions and more people can attend the keynote sessions.
- Other early results of what attendees are saying in having a virtual event rather than an in-person one. Also, what might a “hybrid” event look like and whether we need to consider for next year.
- Discussion ensued on the virtual format, with a lot of positivity about turnout and how we can continue down this good path.

12:55 p.m.

Break

1:10 p.m.

#### Marine Board Update (Grabowski) Presentation

- The Board has been asked by the U.S. Coast Guard to have a meeting in May to discuss issues to address, and other upcoming developments were detailed.

1:20 p.m.

#### Emerging Trends in Goods Movement (Grabowski, Evans, Kruger, and Gray) Presentations and Discussion

- There have been huge bottlenecks and impacts from COVID-19 for maritime freight. There is an ongoing shift to contactless operations. There are enormous needs for storage of bottlenecked containers. There are also enormous quantities of returns happening in the industry to deal with. There are lots of studies being done but we will discuss ways to aggregate the studies at our June TRB meeting. Another emerging issue is the mental health of the workforce.
- Severe reductions in passenger markets has disrupted air cargo, but air cargo growth continues to grow and is expected to keep growing over the projected next 20 years. Disruptions in air cargo affects roadways. There are major changes in cargo facilities.
- The UPS COVID-19 vaccination distributions efforts were detailed.

2:20 p.m.

#### Policy Priorities of the Biden Administration and Congress (Jeff Davis, Jim Tymon, Paul Skoutelas) Discussion

- There will be more focus on climate change and race and equity goals from this administration than from the last administration, and you can see that by the appointees that have already been named. There does not appear to be risks of getting COVID-19 because of taking public transportation.

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3 p.m.  
Adjournment (Braceras)

### **January 27, 2021, Wednesday**

11:30 a.m.  
Chair's Plenary Session

- Keynote Speaker, Dr. Marcia McNutt, President, National Academy of Sciences

1 p.m.  
Break

1:30 p.m.  
Policy Session on COVID-19 Impacts on Mobility and Equity (Braceras) Presentations and Discussion

- Shaheen presentation: She detailed the makeup of a study she led to examine possible scenarios up to 6 years out post-COVID. She discussed next steps to take for addressing equitable mobility.
- Turnbull presentation: She presented changes in travel behavior during COVID, including a major drop in VMT in Texas but a return of VMT recently. She said there have been significant increases in bicycling in Texas. There is an uptick in slower, healthy street programs. The overnight change in an increase in telework has been a success, although some are going back to an office or more hybrid setting. E-commerce and curbside pickup have increased in the area of goods movement. Travel spending and hotel occupancy were down, festivals and events were cancelled, and rural and smaller communities have been hit hard economically; however, RV sales, tent camping, and national park visitation areas are up.
- Wilson and Ford offered reactions.
- Discussion points included:
  - Electric bikes is an under-explored topic. There has been an increased interest in recreational transportation. As a result, e-bikes are currently difficult to purchase.
  - More broadband should be one focus as we see the upturn trend of telework.
  - The drop in airport use is significant and some of it could be permanent.
  - Bike lanes and the Slow Streets Movement are major areas of interest. Seattle is leading the charge.
  - Demand for regional rail could increase while demand for commuter rail could decrease. There are mixed opinions among the Executive Committee on this.
  - The nation needs transportation research. Not TRB's places but organizations represented on the Committee should advocate for that.
- Ford presentation: He presented ways for public transportation to work with health officials and to be a key part of vaccination distribution. Diversity and inclusion programs need to be implemented across the board, including vendors and partnerships.
- Wilson presentation: He presented about urban and non-urban challenges, specifically for African-Americans. Rural economic growth in the service sector lags behind urban economic growth across the U.S. Access to jobs, public transportation, and others is much lower in rural areas.

5:30 p.m.

## Executive Director's Reception

**January 28, 2021, Thursday**

11:30 a.m.

## Discussion of Implications of COVID-19 for TRB (Braceras) Discussion

- What policy or research issues should TRB be addressing? What should the new normal be?  
How should TRB change?
  - TRB has to continue to do well what it already does.
  - Look at ways to diversify since TRBAM is losing so much money this year, such as perhaps moving to more virtual meetings somehow.
  - Focus more on development of “content as a product” to package and professional development opportunities. Providing and charging for that content is how we grow.
  - The conference has more attendees than ever and the content is good, but there might be funding opportunities that could be further explored.
  - We should continue to have an in-person TRBAM, but let's figure out how to work some virtual into the meeting, such as perhaps some virtual meetings beforehand, for example.
  - Think about which activities could really thrive in a virtual world versus what would work better in-person.
  - January 2022 will still be difficult and people will still be fearful of travel, so having short-term and longer-term plans is important. Hopefully over a 2-3 year period we will be able to go back to the full in-person conference.
  - More customer segmentation and tiered pricing are things to examine.
  - The conversation veering toward a recommendation of a “hybrid” conference.
  - There are two different audiences: the kind that is used to flying and going to conferences and the more technical people who are used to sitting at their computer and getting things down.
  - We have heard from TRB staff that a “hybrid” approach is very difficult. Maybe we could combine with another meeting, such as an AASHTO meeting, so people can more easily attend, and have different opportunities throughout the year for the technical experts.
  - TRB has a contract for the next 12 years with the Washington Convention Center (and the contracts with the 12 hotels is also relevant).

12 p.m.

## Future Policy Sessions (Houston) Discussion

- There was a discussion of the topics that could be included in the upcoming Social and Racial Equity Critical issues Addendum, including environmental justice, structural racism, affordable housing and development, and Native American equity issues. A self-funded special report related to equity is also potentially being planned. This might also be the topic for the next SPPR meeting.
- Feedback included:
  - Under the concept of environmental justice, it would be good to include the concept of climate justice.
  - Structural racism could include more on zoning issues, redlining, and systemic racism.

12:20 p.m.