

Future of International Activities

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Transportation worldwide shares many common concerns in the planning, design, construction, operation, financing, regulation, and maintenance of transportation services. Many nations also support programs of research, development, training, and professional learning. The potential for collaboration and information sharing is great, and the need to share diverse experiences has never been greater.

CURRENT STATE OF PRACTICE

There are 400 members from outside the United States participating in 190 Transportation Research Board (TRB) committees and task forces, representing 46 countries. About 130 of the committees and task forces have international participation and 63 have three or more international participants. In addition, more than 500 international professionals were identified as participants in 484 sessions at TRB's 1999 Annual Meeting.

The purpose of the Committee on International Activities is to strengthen international participation in TRB activities; improve TRB interaction with other multinational research organizations; advocate international perspectives and establish a liaison between them and other TRB activities; and encourage other national, state, and local participation in international activities.

Recent actions have included half-day international roundtable presentations and discussions at the TRB Annual Meetings on such topics as

- Aggressive international highway safety programs,
- Transportation response to global climate change,
- Multinational transport research organizations,
- Transport privatization, and
- International "scanning" tour benefits.

Special sessions also have been sponsored:

- International Changes in Management and Delivery of Transportation Services,
- European Union Transport Research Results and Future Program,
- Great Belt Project, and
- Transportation Security.

Most important, time has been dedicated to listening to and learning from each other.

National Cooperative Highway Research Program and Transit Cooperative Research Program projects are active to guide and subsidize costs of participation in select research and learning activities. The American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials has recently established a special task force to guide and coordinate international activities. The Federal Highway Administration has sponsored and organized an international technology scanning program. Since 1990, more than 25 topics have been explored by professionals touring foreign countries to learn about and extract best practices. A few of the notable tours have been the European Asphalt Study Tour, 1990; Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety, 1993; Winter Road Maintenance Practices, 1994; Speed Management and Enforcement Technology, 1995; Transportation Agency Organization and Management, 1997; and Bridge Structures: Asia, 1997.

Familiarity with other multinational transport research organizations is improving:

- The International Road Federation is a nonprofit service organization that encourages better road and transportation services worldwide.
- The World Road Association (PIARC), founded in 1909 to exchange knowledge and techniques on roads and transportation, boasts 93 member governments and other members in 129 countries.
- The Institute of Transportation Engineers is an international, individual-member educational and scientific association with 15,000 members in some 80 countries.
- The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development provides governments a setting in which to discuss, develop, and perfect economic and social policy for 29 member countries. A Road and Road Transport Research Program performs research and policy assessments together with technology transfer and information exchange.
- The Nordic Road Association promotes research and best practices among regional governments and the road transport community.
- The World Interchange Network, initiated by PIARC, is a network to put road professionals with problems in touch with those with solutions at national, regional, and global levels.
- The Transport Directorate of the 15-country European Union is actively involved in transportation research.
- The Road Engineering Association of Asia and Australasia advances the science and practice of road engineering and related programs.
- The Union Internationale des Transports Publics (UITP) is a worldwide association of urban and regional passenger transport operators, authorities, and suppliers. UITP was founded in 1885 and now has more than 1,700 members from 80 countries.
- The World Bank grants loans, advice, and an array of customized resources to more than 100 developing countries in transition.
- Cooperation for the Continuing Development of Urban and Suburban Transportation is another organization.
- The Pan American Institute of Highways promotes technology transfer.
- The United Nations has specialized and affiliated entities: United Nations University, United Nations Development Program, International Civil Aviation Organization, and International Maritime Organization.

The personal interaction among international professionals is as important as formal organizational cooperation.

LOOK TO THE FUTURE

One of TRB's strategic goals is the dissemination of foreign research results in the United States and the dissemination of U.S. research findings both here and abroad. A strength of TRB is its volunteer network of more than 4,000 transportation experts serving on 190 committees and task forces. There is relatively weak representation of international members. These few, but increasing, international contacts are an opportunity for TRB to increase outreach for technical advice and information. TRB could increase programs and services likely to be of greatest interest to foreign and international transportation organizations and professionals. Targeted services to this constituency should be explored. International organizations could be encouraged to hold their meetings concurrent with or adjacent to the TRB Annual Meeting. Foreign organizations should be encouraged to become TRB affiliates. Members of the international community should be encouraged to increase their participation in TRB committees and task forces.

As worldwide communication, travel, and business grow, the need to cooperate on transport research will continue. Likely future challenges include the following:

- Operating transport services and facilities will evolve. The type, extent, and quality of service to users will be under continuous evaluation. The interoperability of transport services will be an issue.
- Transport organizations will continue a strong trend toward more competition in the delivery of transport services and facilities.
- Financing and subsidies will always be discussed in the transport sector. Electronic innovations will permit more possibilities for efficient user fees, and democratic governments will ensure some perception of equity.
- Environmental effects of transportation will increase in importance as long-term issues of air quality, water quality, noise, land use, and hazardous waste become priorities for quality of life and sustainability.
- Safety and security of passengers and freight will continue to be emphasized as the public moves toward a zero tolerance of accidents and damage.
- Government regulations, now moving toward economic self-regulation, may change from time to time to balance efficiency with equity and fairness.
- Transportation organizations will have to be more prepared to respond to the threat of climatic change, including effects of emergencies such as hurricanes, floods, and earthquakes.
- There is a threat of urban congestion and suburban sprawl for sustainable transport.

Worldwide coordination and cooperation among transport officials and professionals in research and development will continue to increase in the 21st century.