



APPENDIX A:
PANEL CALL SUMMARIES

Benefits of Transportation Support Services

Oversight Panel Call

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November 17, 2014

Call participants

- Shannon Eggleston, AASHTO
- Joyce Brenner, AASHTO
- Jenny O'Connell, AASHTO
- Lloyd Brown, AASHTO
- Mary Jo Oie, Nebraska Department of Roads
- Tara Grell, Nebraska Department of Roads
- Kristen Schuster, Michigan Department of Transportation
- Tim Tait, Arizona Department of Transportation
- Erik Filkorn, Vermont Department of Transportation
- Julie Lorenz, Burns & McDonnell
- Danny Rotert, Burns & McDonnell

Introductory Comments – Joyce Brenner

- This project, the Benefits of Transportation Support Services, is being administered through the Center of Environmental Excellence which AASHTO coordinates and is funded through the Federal Highway Administration.
- The purpose is to research which messages are being communicated about the benefits of transportation with an emphasis on environmental benefits. Furthermore, the research is to examine who is receiving those and via what mechanisms.
- It's important to recognize that AASHTO has other communication activities and research underway and this research effort will be coordinated with those other efforts which primarily focus on the economic benefits of transportation. The goal is to build upon previous efforts, conduct this work within the context of other ongoing efforts, and not duplicate any other research efforts.
- Burns & McDonnell is the selected contractor for this work. They offered a unique approach and proposal and they will conduct the research. The oversight group is made up of communication and environmental professionals from state departments of transportation and AASHTO. They have been gathered to provide other perspectives from a variety of disciplines and geographies.
- This should be a very interesting project and the Center is excited to get the project off the ground!

Project Approach - Danny Rotert

The approach focuses on examining what people are talking about and how effectively the messages are being shared. This approach utilizes both high touch and high tech. The goal is to get a picture or a “good snapshot” in time of the conversations that are taking place and what works best. The team is working from a three-prong approach including:

1. A view from the Hill – The team will meet with Congressional staffers on both the House and Senate side who work on transportation and environmental issues in early December. The discussions will focus on what messaging resonates with their constituencies across the country.
2. Conversations with DOTs and others who communicate transportation and environmental issues across the country – A webinar with the oversight panel and invited others will be conducted during the second or third week of December to discuss what’s working and what’s not at the state level.
3. Social media crawl – This effort is underway to track conversations and glean information from the social media landscape using Twitter. It’s one of the easier modes of social media to track for a snapshot. Because conversations are categorized using hashtags, it’s easier to track conversations. Algorithms will be used to generally assess positive, neutral and negative conversational tones. The team certainly recognizes the limits of Twitter and the fact that it's not an all-inclusive view, but this examination will give us a picture of what conversations look like right now. This approach fits within the budget and, when paired with other social media research and messaging research AASHTO has underway, a fuller picture emerges.

Scope and Schedule – Julie Lorenz

- The scope is focused in two arenas. First, the research will be conducted as described above. Second, the deliverables include a White Paper that presents the findings of the research and the Roadmap that places this research in the larger context of current messaging research efforts.
- The schedule calls for discussions with the congressional staffers to occur in early December with the next webinar for panel members and invited others to occur in the second or third week of December. The draft White Paper and Roadmap will be submitted to AASHTO and the CEE at the end of 2014/beginning of 2015 with a panel call to discuss the drafts in mid- to late January.

Role of the Oversight Panel – Joyce Brenner

- The panel will discuss products and results. Panel members shouldn’t worry about conducting lots of written reviews; rather they will provide greatest value through their participation in calls and offering broader perspectives.
- More notice will be provided for future webinar calls.

Panel Discussion

- Information specific to this project will not be presented at the upcoming AASHTO annual meeting. Rather, Carlos Braceros will provide an update on the Center for Environmental Excellence to the Standing Committee on Highways and this project will be mentioned as a task of the Center.
- This project is different from other communication research efforts in that it is primarily focused on environmental messages while the other work is more focused on fiscal/investment/funding messages.
- When environmental and transportation advocacy messages are combined your reach becomes much larger than a singularly focused message. This research will help the industry understand that expanded reach and which topics help move us forward. We're also likely to reach a younger and slightly more progressive audience.
- Media will also be examined. It's possible the industry develops great messages but they aren't widely distributed, with the unintended effect of "preaching to the choir."
- It was explained that the consultant team will look beyond AASHTO and examine all 50 Twitter handles from the states and hashtags that concentrate on overlapping conversations, in other words, focus on conversations that carry both an environmental and transportation topic (e.g., sustainability and carbon or VMT). The panel was asked to send specific hashtags for initiatives that they would like to have included as part of this study.
- A panel member offered to include his state's environmental agency in future discussions if that's helpful.