

# **Managing Change in State Departments of Transportation**

## **Scan 4 of 8: Innovations in DOT Communications, Image, and Positioning**

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## FOREWORD

### Change Management in State DOTs

State departments of transportation are operating in an environment of unprecedented change. Evolving demands for transportation services, new technologies, workforce composition, stakeholders' concerns, and a constantly changing political environment create continuing demands for institutional change. To address these challenges, many state DOTs are undertaking a range of initiatives such as strategic planning, organizational restructuring, performance measurement, process engineering, and outsourcing.

Both anecdote and survey suggest that change management is now the major preoccupation of senior management. However, the rate of change is very uneven and not well-understood. Indeed, there appears to be more *innovation* than *imitation* -- since the creative approaches being introduced are not documented or widely discussed. Little "literature" on state DOT change management has been developed -- either case studies or "how to" material.

### AASHTO's Strategic Interest

A 1998 AASHTO report on "The Changing State DOT" identified drivers of change and approaches being taken by state DOTs in change management. AASHTO's Year 2000 Strategic Plan activities then introduced an element concerned with facilitating institutional change. Meanwhile, a newly reorganized TRB Committee on Strategic Management, through calls for papers and annual meeting sessions, focused on studying the range of changes occurring in transportation organizations. This led to the formation of a committee to plan a special workshop on strategic management under the joint sponsorship of the Transportation Research Board Committee on Strategic Management, AASHTO Standing Committee on Quality, and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA).

### The Strategic Management Workshop

The two-day workshop (June 25-27, 2000) in Minneapolis was organized to facilitate peer-to-peer discussions among the CEOs and senior staff of the state DOTs about their experiences in managing internal and external change. This workshop focused on sharing recent experiences with managing internal and external change and lessons learned. Twenty state DOT CEOs participated in the workshop, and 35 state DOTs were represented by CEOs or senior staff. Conference dialogue dealt with three principal management challenges:

1. Strategic planning-related initiatives
2. Workforce and reorganization-related initiatives
3. Process and program delivery-related initiatives

The discussions identified a wide range of specific issues within each area that attendees felt deserve organized review via case studies, assessment of the state of the practice, and identification of promising concepts, approaches, and tools. Workshop participants used the results of these discussions to identify research that would help state DOTs lead and manage their changing organizations. Twenty-two research problem statements were crafted around the three subject areas.

TRB, at the urging of AASHTO and participating CEOs, immediately set up an NCHRP panel, chaired by Mary Peters of Arizona DOT, to develop a multiyear NCHRP research program under the 20-24 program established for special AASHTO research related to DOT administration. The panel combined and prioritized problem statements into eight strategic management issues for priority research. In view

of the lack of written material on these subjects, the panel decided to start with broad "scans" of the state of the practice in each area to provide guidance for a substantive multiyear research program. Each scan would summarize the challenges, document examples of current innovations, and recommend the appropriate initial components of a research program. The eight-month scan program -- including presentations at AASHTO Board meeting roundtables -- represented a highly unusual rapid-response approach to the priority placed on these issues by AASHTO and TRB.

### **Cross-Cutting Findings from the Initial Eight Scans**

The eight scans produced considerable evidence of the number and breadth of change management initiatives within state DOTs. In general, these initiatives are concerned with the agencies as institutions, their mission and leadership, organization and workforce, process, and resources. The principal, common forces of change include:

1. Deliberate reorientation of strategic objectives in response to program limitations (Scan 3, operations), new technology (Scan 6, information technology), or funding (Scan 8, innovative finance)
2. Evolution of new forms of cooperation for improved service delivery with other public agencies (Scan 7, partnerships) and the private sector (Scan 2, outsourcing)
3. Workforce strategies (Scan 5) in response to downsizing, retirements, competition, and the need for new capabilities
4. The need to institutionalize and measure change management (Scan 1, strategic leadership) and improve agency image in the overall constituent context (Scan 4, positioning)

Overall, state DOTs today appear to be evolving away from single-purpose entities with standard approaches to producing a limited number of well-understood products and services. Instead, they are moving toward more flexible organizations designed to respond to constantly changing missions with ever-increasing efficiency through a shifting coalition of partners and stakeholders. Managers of these changes can clearly benefit from access to collective experience, including a better sense of the state of the practice and specific resources based on the more promising approaches. The scans identify some of the most valuable experience and provide important pointers to key issues for further dialogue and research.

### **Individual Scan Highlights**

Scan 1 -- Innovations in Strategic Leadership and Measurement for State DOTs: Strategic planning itself is increasingly widespread in state DOTs. However, many CEOs find that the process often breaks down in the implementation stage -- creating buy-in and "institutionalization" of key change vectors. Yet some promising solutions are being found, including widespread participation of a variety of stakeholders in the process, a customer focus in terms of strategy and priorities, top management commitment to implementing the strategic agenda, ongoing communication to promote it, and "omni-directional alignment" among goals, performance measures, and budgets. Further research in each of these areas is needed to strengthen and integrate strategic management practices. *(Scan by T.H. Poister and D.M. Van Slyke of Georgia State University)*

Scan 2 -- Innovations in Private Involvement in Project Delivery: Outsourcing -- commonly employed for construction and design services to cope with lumpy demands or staff downsizing -- is spreading to other functions within the project and service delivery functions. It is increasingly important to understand the relative costs and quality of work conducted in-house versus by external private firms. Current evidence is not conclusive, as cost comparisons may not have been systematic. More research and more collaborative efforts are required by transportation organizations to identify best practices and possible standard procedures. *(Scan by Dr. D. Hancher, P.E. and R. Werkmeister, P.E., University of Kentucky)*

Scan 3 -- Innovations in Institutionalization of Operations: Systems operations and management is already considered a mission priority by many state DOTs. However, the several types of operations-related activities -- ranging from ITS to maintenance of traffic -- are stovepiped and decentralized in most state DOTs. In most cases, there appears to be no common department-wide policy framework around which to organize for efficient integration of services and sustainable funding. Some member departments are establishing performance measures by conducting customer surveys, but implementation for program management is still in the very early stages. Further case study research into promising approaches is needed to connect customer interests and performance measures to integrated operations activities. *(Scan by Philip J. Tarnoff)*

Scan 4 -- Innovations in DOT Communications, Image, and Positioning: The scan focused on states known to be addressing issues of communications, image, and positioning. Those that were most advanced focused on improving both internal communications with staff and external communications with the public, elected officials, and the media. Some innovative states are assessing their image and identifying ways in which to clarify and improve it with the public, recognizing that image enhancement and improved constituent communications may lead to an improved position for the agency, to new resources, and to a more supportive audience for the agency's work. Increasingly, states report that proactive efforts to better communicate and to position the agency positively with decision makers have led to increased public support and legislative funding for the DOTs. Additional research in communications, positioning, and marketing to various constituencies was felt to be needed. *(Scan by K. Stein and R. Sloane of Howard/Stein-Hudson Associates)* **This scan is the topic of this file.**

Scan 5 -- Innovations in Work Force Strategies: State departments of transportation face severe challenges in recruiting and maintaining their workforces. Innovative approaches are being taken to recruitment of core competencies such as IT and senior civil engineering. Retention and succession approaches were also investigated, including mentoring and reverse mentoring. However, more case study and research are needed in defining, recruiting, and retaining the necessary workforce. *(Scan by C. Gilliland of the Texas Transportation Institute)*

Scan 6 -- Innovations in Organization Development as a Result of Information Technology: The rapidly changing environment of IT is challenging DOTs to deal with emerging opportunities and problems. This scan identified the range and types of new opportunities related to IT itself as well as related organizational development implications. Key issues include organization of the IT function, the cost-effective degree of outsourcing, and a range of management issues such as handling information overload, funding, procurement, and training. These areas suggest future research directions. *(Scan by C. Cluett and K. Baker of Battelle Seattle Research Center)*

Scan 7 -- Innovations in Public-Public Partnering and Relationship Building in State DOTs: A wide variety of partnerships among state DOTs; other state, local, and federal agencies; and public stakeholders are improving project and program delivery and increasing efficiency across agency or jurisdictional lines. Promising areas for partnering include achieving environmental streamlining, rationalizing state-local maintenance responsibilities, and joint community problem solving. Examination of successful partnerships and relationships identifies common elements of success and provides a starting point for the development of new partnering tools more applicable to longer-term, peer-to-peer relationships among DOTs; other state, local, and federal agencies; and non-governmental stakeholders. *(Scan by Mark Ford of HDR-Portland)*

Scan 8 -- Innovations in Project Financing: There is now a very rich menu of innovative revenue sources and finance techniques. New revenues are available from toll facilities, HOT lanes, value or congestion pricing, special assessments and fees, shared resource projects, and/or joint development. These revenues can be combined to leverage scarce federal aid through both debt and equity approaches, capitalizing on the new flexibility within the federal aid and some state programs. Such new approaches to project financing can also benefit from innovative project development approaches. Research is needed on promising approaches to mainstream these approaches within transportation agencies. *(Scan by A. Reno and L. Hussey of Cambridge Systematics, Inc.)*

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## **ABSTRACT**

A transportation agency's image is conveyed through actions by the agency and reactions from the general public, the legislature, the media, and even the agency's employees. Methods for projecting an agency's image are based on communications strategies that are both internal and external. Internal strategies focus on employees' communication with each other and with external entities. External strategies focus on improvement of the agency's image through appeals to specific constituent groups.

Image enhancement may lead to an improved position for the agency and more supportive audiences for the agency's work, which can result in new resources. Agencies report that new funding can derive from integrated initiatives for improved customer service and communications with customers, the media, and the legislature and from statewide communications and listening strategies to promote the need for new resources.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This scan of innovative practices in Departments of Transportation (DOT) communications, image, and positioning was undertaken in November 2000. Information was obtained from several DOTs, a statewide highway department, and a statewide transit agency. Questions were devised to elicit comments about the following issues in each agency:

Communications = agency internal and external exchanges  
Image = what people both inside and outside the agency think of the agency  
Positioning<sup>1</sup> = the ways agencies choose to gain support and funding for programs and projects, either from consumers or from political actors. In this report, we have focused on the political aspects of positioning.

Respondents to our inquiries agreed that image affects an agency's position directly with the agency's personnel, the media, the general public, and the legislature, and that accurate internal and external communications were essential.

An agency's image is conveyed in many ways. DOT employees often occupy unique roles where they become aware of the image that the DOT conveys to the public, especially if they work directly with the public. Employees who are a good source of information about public image can also be a source of ideas for improving the image if it is tarnished or blurred.

All forms of media—newspapers, radio, television, and the Internet—are important to DOT image. Media monitoring can result in determining the level of positive media coverage of DOTs.

Direct contact with the public may be the most efficient means of determining an agency's image. Through sample surveys, DOTs around the country seek opinions on levels of satisfaction or perceptions of agency performance during the year. The results of the opinion surveys become a surrogate for determination of public image.

Internal and external communications are important to both an agency's image and its ability to find improved financial and other resources. For improved internal communications, many DOTs unify communications policies and strategies through internal reorganization, coordination, or management of communications within the agency. A "Speaking With One Voice" campaign focuses on accurate and aggressive communications while promoting consistent core messages. Training programs for supervisors and managers and follow-up interviews of individuals reinforce a central message.

Motivation of a public agency's staff can be a challenging issue. Recognizing a need for motivational improvement, public agencies frequently turn to private-sector examples to motivate staff. DOTs report that agency culture is frequently the principal issue in creating or changing an agency's image. Agencies stress the need to build credibility with all audiences through "ambassadorial" work in the community and by teaching the basic skills all staff should have.

Externally directed image-building strategies can focus on brand identity—establishing a unique, self-defined image used in communications, taglines, or slogans. Over time, this image can become ingrained in customers' minds, whether through distinctively designed Web sites, direct communications techniques and advertising, or emphasis on high performance.

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<sup>1</sup> Positioning has two major definitions relevant to this topic: agency positioning as cited by the reviewer (i.e., in a market sense), and an agency's position with political and funding decision makers (i.e., a political sense).

Challenges to a DOT may come from a variety of external sources, including the media, and must be tackled head-on to avoid permanent damage to the agency's image. The response to a crisis can re-establish public faith in the agency's brand, but failure to accept responsibility can destroy future trust in an agency's credibility. Even bad weather is a challenge that must be handled quickly and efficiently: a weather crisis is an opportunity for a DOT to get its marked trucks out on the streets fast and create a good impression.

A focus on delivering high quality services to customers can lead to a positive external image: "Good service translates into political capital," stressed one respondent. Strategies to build a positive reputation can include the ability to track what customers want and think about the agency, respond in a timely way to queries, and look for and train employees to tell the agency's story well. In addition to Web sites and fast-response e-mail, one DOT reports its expenditures through "stockholder reports" to show what has been done with its funds. Another develops strategies to capitalize on the widespread customer approval and recognition of its snow plowing services as a basis to establish an identity for other services.

External communications strategies can be targeted toward local partners—customers with special linkages to the agency, including local governments. These customers can be identified according to their special needs or specific customer segments (customer groups with distinct needs) of the market the agency serves.

To translate to an improved bottom line, effective communications with the state legislature are essential to tell a DOT's story. DOTs need to take a different approach to positioning themselves with the legislatures than with the general public: legislators need to be convinced to spend money. The task for the DOT is to gain credibility and tell legislators, in great detail, what is planned for their individual districts—and then to get it done in a timely way, which usually means before that legislator stands again for election. An agency's good performance can be communicated to support the agency's position with the public, through customer surveys that report on the legislative constituency's transportation needs and reactions to individual programs.

In dealing with the media, DOTs stress the need to be open and honest in dealings with the media to avoid subsequent issues or problems. Improvements in media relationships can come from employees who have special skills or training in dealing with media representatives. A program presenting agency accomplishments can lead to a media image of agency responsiveness to requests.

The results of image enhancement may be an improved position with both citizens and public officials that leads to new resources and more support for the agency's work. Agencies report that new funding can derive from integrated initiatives for customer service and communications with customers, the media, and the legislature, and from statewide communications and listening strategies to promote the need for new resources.

A research program in this broad subject area has been identified. It includes the following six topics, listed in order of priority:

- |   |           |
|---|-----------|
| ▪ Methods of Conducting Market Research on Image-building and Positioning         | \$100,000 |
| ▪ Methods of Positioning Agencies for Public and Legislative Support              | \$200,000 |
| ▪ Methods of Keeping in Constant Contact with the Community and Others            | \$100,000 |
| ▪ Methods of Improving and Maintaining Internal Communications                    | \$150,000 |
| ▪ Methods of Comparing Internal Changes to External Impacts on Public Perceptions | \$150,000 |
| ▪ Methods of Spreading Information about Best Practices among the States          | \$50,000  |

## CHAPTER 1: Introduction

This scan of best practices and innovations in Departments of Transportation (DOT) communications, image, and positioning was undertaken in November 2000. Staff from Howard/Stein-Hudson Associates made calls and talked with participants in the scan. Participants were chosen from a variety of DOTs around the country and, for additional breadth of inquiry, from one state-wide highway and state-wide transit agency. Individuals who responded included secretaries of DOTs, heads of departments, and line staff. A list of the contacts made at each agency is included in **Appendix A**.

The questions asked of participants are included in **Appendix B**. The questions were devised to elicit comments on current and best practices and major issues and innovations related to communications, image, and positioning in each agency.

Prior to conversations with each contact in the agencies, a list of definitions was prepared, to give respondents a relatively simple view of the topic and to assure all understood the questions. These definitions are:

|                            |  |
|----------------------------|--|
| Communications =           | DOT internal and external exchanges  |
| Image =                    | what people both inside and outside the DOT think of the agency  |
| Positioning <sup>2</sup> = | the ways DOTs choose to gain support and funding for programs and projects, either from consumers or from political actors. In this report, we have focused on the political aspects of positioning. |

In presenting this information at the CEO Roundtable at AASHTO's annual meeting in Indianapolis in December 2000, a diagram was added to demonstrate the ways communications and image are interrelated and to demonstrate that both can be used by agencies to establish a position that can gain advantages in obtaining both financial and political support (see the "How the pieces fit together" slide in **Appendix C**).

At the Roundtable discussion, 14 CEOs of transportation agencies and other senior staff shared views on the topic. Many agreed that image affects an agency's market and political positions directly with the legislature, the general public, the media, and even the agency's personnel. According to the CEO of Pennsylvania DOT (PennDOT), creating an image with the general public is fraught with irony: "If you're doing a good job, they forget about you. If you're not doing a good job, they get mad at you." The task is to put good work in plain view of the public.

## CHAPTER 2: Findings

### Where Does a DOT's Image Come From?

#### *DOT employees*

Awareness of the public image of a state DOT comes from several sources, including employees who take professional pride in both their staff positions and the work they perform for the organization. DOT employees are often in unique roles where they can be aware of the image that the DOT projects to the public, especially if they work directly with the public.

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<sup>2</sup> Positioning has two major definitions relevant to this topic: agency positioning as cited by the reviewer (i.e., in a market sense), and an agency's position with political and funding decision makers (i.e., a political sense).

Everyday contacts with neighbors can enhance employees' awareness of reactions to DOT services and market position. Employees who are a good source of information about public image can also be a source of ideas for improving the image if it is tarnished or blurred.

In California, a survey of the "employee climate" found that Caltrans employees, while generally happy with their work, were concerned that the agency maintained a bad image with the public. Although 72 percent of the employees expressed positive job satisfaction, 54 percent said that Caltrans had a negative public image. In addition, a significant proportion of employees felt that top management was not conveying a clear vision for the agency. These two issues—the agency's public image and communication of the agency's vision—topped a list of only 14 major issues cited by employees as problems to be addressed. Based on these findings, Caltrans management held focus groups with employees, who developed an image improvement plan, currently (December 2000) being implemented.

In an internal survey conducted by Minnesota DOT, employees reported a perception that the DOT image was not necessarily negative with the public, but that it was fuzzy and unclear.

### *The media*

All forms of media—newspapers, radio, television, and the Internet—are important to DOT image. Nearly every DOT tracks news clips and broadcast media reports to get some notion of how the agency is being presented, frequently on a daily basis. As a result of close monitoring, several DOTs are able to report high levels of positive media coverage of DOTs.

New Mexico DOT (NMDOT) aggressively seeks out media contacts in an open, proactive way, resulting in positive feedback. In tracking media coverage regularly, NMDOT reports its rate of positive stories is around 80 percent.

Management concerns about negative media coverage led the internal staff in the Caltrans district around Los Angeles to analyze several thousand clips from a single year to assess the positive and negative media coverage of the agency. The staff analyzed newspaper coverage, along with tapes of radio and television reportage, in terms of negative/positive/neutral stances taken, and then measured each in terms of column inches and minutes of radio or TV coverage. Contrary to expectations, the finding was that media coverage was overwhelmingly positive, by a 15 to 1 proportion of positive to negative coverage. Furthermore, these positive media accounts would have cost Caltrans over \$1.5 million if the agency had purchased such coverage at moderate-sized newspaper or broadcast prices. (This staff calculation did not reflect higher-priced regional newspapers and broadcast stations.)

### *The public*

Direct contact with the public may be the most efficient means of determining an agency's public image. Capitalizing on the benefits of sample surveys, DOTs around the country seek opinions on levels of satisfaction or perceptions of agency performance during the year. The results of the opinion surveys are then analyzed, calibrated, and used effectively as a surrogate for determining public image.

Kentucky's Transportation Cabinet undertakes annual customer satisfaction surveys to find customer needs and wants. The Cabinet uses the results to fashion its requests for program approvals and funding from the legislature.

Florida DOT's (FDOT's) survey of residential travelers (one of its distinct customer groups) shows that 68 percent of those surveyed are satisfied or very satisfied with the overall transportation system provided by FDOT.

New Mexico performance measures include three distinct questions to determine public perceptions of the DOT performance during the year. NMDOT also measures responses from customers by encouraging all who come into the central or district offices to fill out service cards with their reactions to the services provided to them. Data and opinions from the cards are carefully collected and used in further communications.

Minnesota DOT surveys customers to determine confidence in its abilities to serve the public. High levels of customer confidence were found in snowplowing, where the DOT logo and name is prominently mounted on the snowplows. However, the DOT found little customer recognition of the many other services that it offers.

New Jersey Transit tracks service reactions through rider-based surveys to get satisfaction levels, including ratings. Ratings include personal reactions to employee services provided by the agency.

Wisconsin DOT has a customer service index in one of its divisions. Everyone who comes into the office or talks with DOT staff is asked to fill out a standard form that permits a rating of the services provided.

## **Internally Directed Strategies**

### ***A unified communications policy and approach***

A major goal for many DOTs is unification of communications policy and strategy. Implementation policies are based on internal reorganization, coordination, or management of communications within the agency.

Kentucky's Secretary of Transportation holds an annual retreat for top management. Seeking a unified "voice" for the DOT, the Secretary stresses the need for internal cooperation, credibility, and communications.

Minnesota DOT (Mn/DOT) launched its "Speaking With One Voice" campaign at a communications forum with employees and continued its message through quarterly meetings with all managers. As a result, all employees know about the campaign. Mn/DOT uses props such as ballpoint pens with "One" embossed on them. The messages were clear: no willy-nilly actions in communicating; all staff should think about possible effects of what they say and plan ahead accordingly. However, Mn/DOT also takes care that employees do not perceive this as a "gag order," and that the training is to improve employee awareness and care in making media contacts, along with "core messages" to prevent inaccurate or inconsistent messages.

Wisconsin DOT sponsors an annual training program for supervisors and managers, and follows up the training with 400 interviews of individuals by two top-level managers. Questions asked include: What does it mean to be a manager in DOT? What skills do you need to improve or acquire? What expectations do you have for yourself or your subordinates?

PennDOT, with a quality initiative in place for nearly twenty years, coordinates agency units to work toward unified communications. PennDOT coordinates communications across agency units to spread the word about agency activities and avoid redundancies. The quality program in place in Pennsylvania has achieved continuity across three state elections with new governors and state executive administrations.

### *Staff motivation*

Motivation of a public agency's staff can be a difficult issue. Some detractors hold that there is little motivation for public employees to improve the quality of services they offer, in part because levels of job security for public-sector employees result in few rewards or penalties for performance. Public agencies are seldom held up as examples of organizations that aggressively seek out customer needs or satisfy what customers want. Recognizing a need for motivational improvement, public agencies frequently turn to private-sector examples to motivate staff.

PennDOT recognizes that employees are its most important resource through "internal customer service" and tries to motivate them by providing better management-employee relations through attentiveness to employee needs and wants.

Oregon DOT cites the example of high levels of employee services at Schwab's, a retail store specializing in tires and automotive parts, where the purchase of a tire brings flat tire repairs any time, anywhere, for free. Schwab's employees are widely known for friendly service and an eagerness to serve.

In its internal employee motivation efforts, Minnesota DOT uses techniques borrowed from the private sector. To boost morale, Mn/DOT launched its 2001 transportation conference with an employee pride video; took employees on a summer tour with the Commissioner to the districts and offices in the agency; and promoted the "Speaking With One Voice"/"Moving Mn/DOT" (internal) message and the "Moving Minnesota" (external) slogan at every possible opportunity.

### *Transforming agency culture*

DOTs report that agency culture is frequently the principal issue in creating or changing the image of an agency. Engineering employees are infrequently trained in communications skills and may not understand or appreciate the need for changes that enable the agency to improve its standing with the public or with the legislature.

The Kentucky Transportation Cabinet staff, with guidance from the division office of FHWA, traveled to branch offices to discuss making the agency more environmentally conscious and to build credibility for environmental leadership.

Working on improved communications throughout its organization, Mn/DOT assigned public relations specialists (called "account executives" in the language of public relations) to its individual units; for example, the bridge, structural, or environmental departments. The communications staff in each unit is assigned to represent the sub-units and their work to the public, as well as tasks related to bringing unit needs to management's attention.

DOT employees need to be aware of their value in acting as "ambassadors" to all with whom they come in contact. Management may be able to encourage "ambassadorial" work through surveying employees for questions about mission or agency direction. Answers can be provided in many ways: Georgia DOT gives employees quick answers to frequently asked questions on sheets inserted into paycheck envelopes.

PennDOT urges its employees to become active in community groups or activities such as the Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, or a volunteer fire department.

Wisconsin DOT is developing a corporate university to teach the basic skills all staff should have: core skills, such as the budget process or how to talk to legislators or the media. The agency also teaches and upgrades skills needed in day-to-day encounters with customers and with people in political roles.

Success in meeting DOT outreach may need to be monitored. Maryland's customer service council, comprising top management in the state highway agency, tracks departmental success in implementing the overall business plan.

PennDOT contends the job of creating a positive image for all its audiences is a 24/7 proposition—so important that it affects all significant DOT relationships.

## **Externally Directed Strategies**

### ***Create “brand identity”***

External strategies can focus on brand identity, which means establishment of a unique, self-defined image used in external and internal communications. When used over time, this image can become ingrained in customers' minds. The concept has already been placed into use by some transportation agencies.

New Mexico DOT has created an identity through its distinctively designed Web site. NMDOT requires its contractors to set up individual logos and Web sites for each project showing facts about the project, its goals, what it's intended to do, and the progress of the work. The individual sites are then linked to the NMDOT site.

New Jersey Transit worked 10 years to establish its name and its reputation for service, using direct communications techniques and advertising. NJT is convinced that its reputation is now based on delivering quality services. Arizona DOT developed a 5-year program of building free-ways on time and on budget, resulting in an image of high performance.

A more modest, short-term strategy might be the taglines or slogans adopted in several state DOTs. Mn/DOT uses its “Moving Minnesota” slogan to imply economic vitality and progress that arises from the smooth movement of people and goods. Oregon wants to show its customers that the agency's work is efficient, cost-effective, and a good investment. It is evolving from a “highway” brand to a “service” brand. Its overall goal statement is “Think ODOT, Think Customer Service.”

### ***Target strategies to local partners***

Local partners are DOTs' customers who have special linkages with the agency. These customers can be identified according to their special needs to provide a basis for specific programs intended to meet those needs. New Mexico DOT uses a variety of techniques to reach out to customer groups. In one successful method, NMDOT schedules breakfasts with civic leaders and business people around the state.

Minnesota DOT has identified the specific customer segments (customer groups with distinct needs) of the market that it serves. These groups include emergency vehicle operators, farmers, intermodal shippers, commuters, personal users, local communities, and neighbors. Mn/DOT is developing policies and strategies around these customer groups.

Florida DOT has identified the customer groups it serves: residential travelers; commercial users; elected/government officials; visitors; special need residents; and property owners. FDOT is developing surveys for each of these external groups and has completed the survey of its residential travelers.

Local governments can be partners with DOTs. In such a partnership arrangement, it is essential to understand the attitudes and needs of the local partners. Washington State DOT surveys administrative staff of the local governmental agencies it serves to determine levels of satis-



faction and specific suggestions for improvement. This survey is intended to operate online, thus becoming entirely paper-free.

Pennsylvania DOT's "agility" program provides services to local governments and frequently trades services between government levels. Its goal is to make every local government an ally of DOT.

### ***Meet challenges head-on***

Challenges to a DOT may come from a variety of sources and must be tackled head-on to avoid permanent damage to the agency's image. A well-known example is the handling of the Tylenol controversy in the early 1980s, when the makers of Tylenol had to respond to a scare alleging that the product was contaminated with poison by malicious parties. The response to the crisis re-established public faith in the brand, but failure to accept responsibility for bad news can destroy future trust in an agency's credibility, the same way it can for a corporation.

Media agents can present a DOT with a crisis. Wisconsin preserved its image from a local "shock jock" who belittled DOT preparation for a major interstate repaving project. Preparing increased bus service on parallel streets and remote parking lots helped meet the goal of reducing traffic during repaving of the westbound lanes. As a result of meeting its goals of both communicating to customers and avoiding confusion or congestion on the westbound paving project, the DOT was able to repave the eastbound lanes without comment from this critic.

Legislative actions can bring challenges for a DOT. Minnesota's legislature handed Mn/DOT the task of removing freeway ramp meters and studying the results. Knowing that, despite proven benefits, the meters were viewed negatively by the public, Mn/DOT assigned one person as sole contact with the media and individuals, then shared available information about the meters and their removal via its Web site with feedback forms for public comment and criticism. All responses were recorded, tracked, and studied to determine public perceptions over time. The coordinated effort produced a new DOT role as a non-biased participant and also improved internal management during a time of high volumes of public interest and response. For its internal customers, the project demonstrated that, with appropriate reactions, the DOT could stay ahead of the story and, in effect, control its progress.

Even bad weather is a challenge that must be handled quickly and efficiently. What appears to be a weather disaster to citizens is an opportunity for the DOT to get its marked trucks out on the streets fast and create a good impression.

### ***Focus on delivering services to customers***

Providing quality service can lead to a positive external image. Strategies to improve an agency's image can be based on delivering good service and by building a positive reputation that the agency can deliver its programs and projects. Essential to the delivery of good services is the ability to track what customers want and think about the agency, to respond in a timely way to queries, and to look for and train employees to tell the agency's story well. Many DOTs focus communications with the public on Web sites or on fast-response e-mail.

Arizona DOT maintains that a DOT should be consistent in its approach to communications in delivering requested services: the process should begin by telling customers what they're going to get, what they are getting while construction is underway, and what they got once the project is finished. It focuses attention on a finished project with public "parties" for the opening of, say, a new freeway segment. Citizens are invited to picnic, rollerblade, or join a 5K run on

the segment the day before it is opened to traffic. Free media follows the invitation, the celebration, and the people (up to 5,000 people have attended DOT's "parties.")

Reactions from the public need to be tracked. New Jersey Transit maintains a "Customer Input Tracking System," which its staff developed internally, to respond to customers' questions through on-line coordination between departments. The new system replaces what was a paper process with internal agreements that can be translated into a response that is transmitted quickly to the inquiring person.

Like a private business, Oregon DOT treats its customers as its owners. ODOT reports its expenditures through "stockholder reports" to outline what has been done with its funds. The report lists miles of lanes striped, miles of guardrail installed, money spent on emergency maintenance and snowplowing, tons of sand use, tons of asphalt laid, money spent on road de-icer, etc.

Another method of treating customers as owners is to ask for specific preferences. In one example, a survey of preferences was taken of residents served by a specific highway. The question posed to the residents was whether their highway should be closed a few hours a day for a long period while work was done on their highway, or closed entirely for a briefer period. The opinion of the majority of the residents was then respected in the construction work.

Pennsylvania DOT used its success in upgrading Division of Motor Vehicles (DMV) services under its management to establish a positive reputation that pulls up other departmental reputations with it. The DMV offered a specific place to "showcase the ability of the DOT to perform." PennDOT refers to close attention to individual needs as "L.L. Bean-type service," and believes that good service translates into political capital.

Minnesota develops strategies to benchmark off the widespread customer approval and recognition of its snow plowing services as a basis to establish an identity for other services. DOT snow plowing is used as an example of a high level of return on investment, where customers know what they are getting for money spent by the agency.

### ***Focus on legislative contacts***

To translate to an improved bottom line, effective communications with the state legislature are essential to establish a stance from which to tell the DOT's story. DOTs need to take a different approach to positioning themselves with the legislatures than with the general public. Legislators need to be convinced to spend money. The task for the DOT is to gain credibility and to tell legislators, in great detail, what is planned for their individual districts—and then to get it done in a timely way, which usually means before that legislator stands again for election.

An agency's good performance is an element that should be communicated and utilized to support the agency's position with political leaders. Aggressive outreach to the state legislature is essential for DOTs, either directly or through sister state agencies, and through customer comments or ratings as shown by surveys.

Oregon DOT cites its customer survey data to demonstrate its positive public when it conveys reports of high customer satisfaction levels to the legislature. Customer surveys are also used to report on transportation needs and reactions to individual programs.

Wisconsin DOT maintains an aggressive outreach to both legislative members and sister agencies. A legislative outreach program, in place over the last four or five years, provides information to legislators so that they will be informed about issues before a constituent brings up a question. WDOT schedules meetings between legislators and knowledgeable field people on an annual or sometimes semi-annual basis. This allows the legislator to give adequate respon-

ses accurately and readily. One result is that legislators feel free to call the DOT before responding to individuals or going to the media.

New Jersey Transit thoroughly examines weak spots in its position before legislative votes are taken on the transportation trust fund. NJT has a senior executive dealing principally with external business and legislative interests and an internal director dealing with operations.

### ***Focus on contacts with the media***

DOTs have many options in dealing with the media. DOTs reporting successful media relationships stress the need to be open and honest in dealings with the media to avoid subsequent issues or problems. Most improvements in media relationships come from internal employees who have special skills or training in dealing with media representatives.

New Mexico DOT has a target of developing internal managerial skills based on finding employees capable of dealing with the media and placing them in managerial slots. Five years after instituting the program, called the Trailblazers' Group, NMDOT has 64 out of 70 managers chosen through this process. NMDOT feels that its program of follow-through has led to a media image of agency responsiveness to citizen requests.

Arizona DOT assigns community relations staff members to cover live radio talk shows where staff deals with customer call-in questions. Staff is able to convey DOT accomplishments and the details of why specific facilities are under construction or congested, as well as the agency's hopes and plans for the future.

As part of its 1998 funding drive, and in keeping with its "Speaking With One Voice" campaign, Minnesota DOT provided its district offices with a scripted PowerPoint presentation, "The ABCs of Transportation," to use in meetings with local people and the media. Over a two-month period, the programs were presented on request, and district offices were encouraged to seek out new contacts with the media and the public. The terms defined in "ABCs of Transportation" have gained significant recognition throughout the state.

Special programs can be designed to encourage media coverage. Human interest campaigns can be created in-house, as in, for example, a guided trip for two to a construction site for an up-close look, promoted by ads on local radio stations. Safety helmets can be provided to indigent families whose kids will be receiving scooters—the current craze—as Christmas gifts.

### **Results of Image Enhancement: New Positions, New Resources**

DOTs may well ask, "What is the need for all this?" The answer is frequently an improvement to the bottom line of the agency—more resources and a more supportive audience for the agency's work. The following are examples of DOTs that cited image-building and position-enhancing exercises as a basis for increased funding from their legislatures.

Pennsylvania DOT has garnered new funding—approximately \$550 million—through implementation of its integrated quality initiatives for customer service and communications with customers, the media, and the legislature.

Minnesota DOT developed a state-wide communications strategy to promote the need for new funding and received \$400 million in new funding, the first such increase in 17 years. The state-wide communications effort was actively supported by the Governor, who based his approach on DOT's communications strategy to obtain the funding.

New Mexico DOT “brought the state together” to get \$1.2 billion in funding. A 13-member panel traveled around the state, listening to ideas and concerns from local people, getting business group support, producing projects for entire corridors, and engendering demand for even more services.

### **CHAPTER 3. Interpretations and Conclusions**

Working on the image of the DOT and strengthening its status with the public involves effort that is not wasted. PennDOT characterizes the process as “shameless self-promotion,” with the final admonition: “Continuously, aggressively marketing yourself in a systematic fashion—if you do all that you might get lucky, and have an improved status with the public. If you don’t do it you *will* get unlucky.”

Departments of Transportation throughout the country are thinking about improving their image with the media and the public. In particular, chief executives have become well aware of the benefits of such programs. The contacts in this scan suggest that image-building and positioning may become part of the basic responsibilities of a transportation agency, and that DOTs can make these programs part of their core strategic initiatives. Such programs provide for an improved match between internal and external communications, as well as part of an agency’s strategic plan.

Among DOTs with programs already implemented, major successes are reported, along with a variety of ways that improved positioning can be accomplished, and the means used to integrate the improvements into day-to-day operations. Interviews with DOT staff members engaged in these practices suggest that both image-building and positioning programs are being embraced in a range of methods from recruitment of leaders of internal units to working on core agency programs and specific projects. Several DOTs also noted the benefits of adapting the market research tools and techniques from the private sector.

### **CHAPTER 4. Suggested Research**

The following are research topics that grew out of contacts with individual staff members of DOTs, who suggested needed and useful topics where practice-based research would help their agencies. These are listed in rough order of priority from Research Topic 1 through 6. Suggested levels of funding are approximations, based on perceptions of the potential effort required.

The six research topics represent a comprehensive research program, with priorities based both on significance to improving practices and on a natural progression in which the different topics should be researched to support one another. Even though there are distinct topics within this program, each of which will produce useful results, they are closely linked with one another. Reflecting the findings of this scan, the research program includes the three major topics examined in this scan: communication, image, and positioning. The suggested program divides naturally into internal and external components: Topics 3 and 4 deal specifically with external and internal communications, whereas Topic 5 looks at the relationships between internal and

external impacts. Many topics will probably require some special expertise in areas not typically part of transportation research, even practice-based, applied research: market research, political science, human behavior, communications, psychology, organizational behavior, etc.

**Research Topic 1:  
Methods of Conducting Market Research on Image-building and Positioning with Consumers**

DOTs may need to conduct market research for use in terms of agency accountability and performance. Finding out the associations people have with a transportation agency is a basic form of market research. Publicly-expressed associations of a public agency—its reputation—may vary from a very positive response to snow plowing to a negative reaction to staff phone responses. DOTs may need to get away from expecting logic and reasoning in attitude development. Perhaps people use a gut instinct in reacting to agency actions. Questions may include: What factors are used to evaluate performance? What are the relationships between the subjective impressions an agency gives, on one hand, and its demonstrated performance, on the other, in terms of creating its image and position with the public? How important are direct project expenditures? To what extent is an agency known for its positive aspects (what one respondent called its “likeability”)? How much of this is personalized in the CEO or other staff members? How might an agency influence or change these perceptions?

A second part of the issue focuses on employees’ responses to customers. People suggest that being ignored is the single biggest problem people face in confronting a large organization. Market research can delineate the extent of such problems and point toward establishing guidelines for staff responses to customer queries. Market responses by staff may also point toward an internal organization that can responsibly and quickly answer inquiries. A centralized method may be essential to track responses to queries from customers, beginning with customers’ phone calls for basic information. For quick response, agencies may want to establish a method to locate important staff contacts, along with times when they will be available. There may even be simple methods, such as updating voice mail every morning, that can help staff find people and answers to questions more efficiently.

*Suggested funding level: \$100,000*

**Research Topic 2:  
Methods of Positioning Agencies for Public and Legislative Support**

Positioning requires development of a strategy to gain political support, and the nature of that strategy varies by circumstance and geography. At a basic level, DOTs need to achieve a level of public understanding to ensure public support for the agency’s mission and to obtain responses that the mission has been carried out successfully over time. Spending money on a campaign to garner support for funding requests will probably not be successful without that initial level of public support. What benefits derive, for example, when the agency actively asserts it is spending money wisely and is working to anticipate future needs and address ongoing concerns? What levels of public support form the basis for development of a strategy? How can an agency respond with openness and maintain transparency in the face of real problems and criticism?

Agencies use two main types of approaches to enhance their position and garner support from the public and decision-makers. One approach is informal networking to contact, persuade,

and share information (closely related to lobbying) with both public-sector decision-makers and influential community decision-makers. Because of their nature, it will be a challenge to research these informal, multi-faceted interactions and assess direct relationships between the effort and the results achieved. This will call for care and creativity in the research approach and may require expertise in areas like political science. Research should lead to identifying external and internal communications strategies (Topics 3 and 4) that work directly in support of favorable agency positioning.

The second method is more organized, more pre-planned, overt positioning strategies: advertising campaigns, one-message efforts to convey the results of agency investments, publicizing major results of surveys, assessments by opinion leaders, and so forth. Even though these efforts are visible, usually widespread, and fairly easy to document, it is still challenging to demonstrate the relationship between the campaign and the results that are achieved vis-à-vis the position of an agency.

*Suggested funding level: \$200,000*

### **Research Topic 3: Methods of Keeping in Constant Contact with the Community and Others**

Consistent, repeated, and informative communications are a basic ongoing function of transportation agencies, and each agency needs to be aware of the responses their initiatives engender. Agencies often disseminate a regular stream of information to a wide audience, but frequently do not provide regular monitoring of the impact and effectiveness of these communication efforts. Communications efforts include not only written communications, releases to the electronic and print media, and, increasingly, use of the Internet and other electronic media to reach the public at large. Such communications always include day-to-day oral communication, usually informal, on the phone, in meetings, and in interactions at all levels of staff.

The purpose of this research project is to identify the range of agency practices in planning, implementing, monitoring, and assessing the effectiveness of externally-directed communications. The focus is on the organizational and programmatic levels of communications versus project-level public information/public involvement programs. It includes both organized and structured efforts, as well as the casual and informal communications that make up most of what the agency says to the world and what it hears back. The researchers will assess the ways in which one-way and two-way communications programs mesh with and support strategic and/or business plans. Based on this review of current practices, the researchers will identify best practices, including case studies reflecting implementation in a variety of circumstances.

*Suggested funding level: \$100,000*

### **Research Topic 4: Methods of Improving and Maintaining Internal Communications**

This topic focuses on internal-to-internal communications within transportation agencies and how such communications enhance staff and organizational capacity. The ultimate goal is to improve the ways in which agency leaders and staff communicate key messages, but the emphasis here is on what it takes to create that capacity internally. Virtually all agencies have instituted internal programs and informal activities to improve communications, yet it is unclear

whether communications are effective in improving the exchange of information and increasing the understanding of key goals and messages. In the context of organizational culture, informal and formal communications efforts can reduce the extent of conflict and confusion, build a sense of purposefulness and shared agenda, and create an improved organizational climate. Methods of determining obstacles to internal communication should be identified. The research should also identify the types and levels of employees who should be involved in improving internal communications, along with the training required to achieve this.

Communications issues are frequently viewed as intractable or pervasive, but they may lend themselves to research through case studies, including how specific agencies have broken away from these organizational constraints. The impact of monetary and other resources, training, and expert assistance in improving internal communications will be identified as part of these cases. The potential and advantages of media training throughout the agency's managerial and key staff should also be explored. The research should identify best practices to both develop and sustain improvements over time so they become institutionalized and part of the organizational culture.

*Suggested funding level: \$150,000*

**Research Topic 5:  
Methods of Comparing Internal Changes to External Impacts on Public Perceptions**

Is it possible for a DOT to measure accomplishments in improving agency image? Both Caltrans and Minnesota DOT are actively engaged in internal restructuring to improve their agencies' image and position. Internal feedback was solicited, was viewed as helpful, and has given impetus and direction to changes directed by management. Yet both agencies are concerned about methods of discerning whether these changes will be noticed by the public. To find answers to this question, both Caltrans and Mn/DOT propose tests of external impacts through surveys of consumer groups. California is particularly interested in whether customers will reflect concerns expressed by agency employees. Minnesota is curious as to whether messages from the agency are getting out to the public, and whether the responses will reflect the agency's ability to hear what its customers are saying. In terms of the broad focus of this overall research program, this topic includes the impact of improved public perceptions on the positioning of the agency—its demonstrated ability to garner additional legislative support and necessary resources to support agency programs and services.

This research project will look systematically at the relationship between internal changes and the impacts they produce externally in terms of public perceptions and consequent agency positioning. It may require a longitudinal approach, where the impacts of specific internal actions are tracked and assessed over time, with customers, market segments, and key elected officials, and in terms of changes in agency positioning.

*Suggested funding level: \$150,000*

**Research Topic 6:  
Methods of Spreading Information about Best Practices among the States**

Respondents suggest that information about best practices in other states would be helpful. A method for sharing these practices might be developed through conferences, a Web site, a newsletter, etc. Pros and cons of sharing information should be investigated, including which

information might be made available to public or community relations personnel, to managerial personnel, and perhaps to rank-and-file personnel, as well. Research is needed on the state of the art of communications everywhere, and how to find the best practices of communication. As it is now, communications managers and designers will talk among themselves, but information is not widely distributed. The information should be spread cross-functionally and across state lines. Trend analysis—regional trends, perhaps—might be useful to exchange ideas about approaches and to announce what’s happening, with what responses. Information does not spread easily, and individual DOTs have less access than they want and need *vis a vis* what others are doing. Finding out what others do shouldn’t have to be based on personal relationships that are built slowly over time but could be greatly facilitated and speeded up by more systematic structures and processes for disseminating information on best practices, especially with a “how to” emphasis.

*Suggested funding level: \$50,000*



**APPENDIX A:  
Sample Practices, Contacts, and Written Materials from This Scan****Sample Practices**

|     |  |
|-----|--|
| AZ  | Nurturing of image through performance in construction; consistent communication of services |
| CA  | Analysis of media coverage; survey of employee “climate”                                     |
| FL  | Survey of residential travelers, other external groups                                       |
| KY  | Annual customer satisfaction surveys; branch office visits for policy coordination           |
| MD  | Customer service council tracks department implementation successes                          |
| MN  | “Speaking With One Voice” program; “account executive” for each internal unit                |
| NJT | Service reaction tracking; customer input tracking system                                    |
| NM  | Creation of “brand identity”; performance measures of public perceptions                     |
| OR  | “Stockholder reports” for customers; customer levels of satisfaction used with legislature   |
| PA  | “Internal customer service”; coordination for unified communications                         |
| WA  | Surveys of levels of satisfaction achieved with local governments                            |
| WI  | Internal interviews of staff; “corporate university” for staff training                      |

**Contacts Made from This Scan**

|     |  |                      |  |              |
|-----|--|----------------------|--|--------------|
| AZ  | AZDOT                                  | Doug Nintzel         | Community Relations                          | 602-712-7399 |
| CA  | Caltrans                               | Russell Snyder       | Quality Control                              | 916-654-3453 |
| FL  | FLDOT                                  | Tom Barry            | Secretary of Transportation                  | 850-414-5205 |
| KY  | KY Transportation Cabinet              | John Carr            | Deputy State Highway Engineer                | 502-564-3730 |
| MD  | MD State Highway Admin. UMN Center for | Suzanne Bond         | Deputy Communications Director               | 410-545-0302 |
| MN  | Transportation Studies                 | Robert Johns         | Director                                     | 612-625-9376 |
| MN  | Mn/DOT                                 | Megan Lewis          | Director, Creative and Strategic Development | 651-297-8352 |
| NJT | New Jersey Transit                     | Jim Redeker          | Assistant Executive Director, Planning       | 973-491-7000 |
| NM  | NMDOT                                  | Kathy Leyendecker    | Director of Community Relations              | 505-827-5134 |
| NM  | NMDOT                                  | Pete Rahn            | Secretary of Transportation                  | 505-827-5109 |
| OR  | ODOT                                   | Patrick Cooney       | Deputy Director of Communications            | 503-986-0411 |
| PA  | PennDOT                                | Brad Mallory         | Secretary of Transportation                  | 717-787-5574 |
| WA  | WSDOT                                  | Sid Morrison         | Secretary of Transportation                  | 360-705-7012 |
| WA  | WSDOT                                  | Patty Miller-Crowley |  | 360-705-7879 |
| WA  | WSDOT                                  | Gretchen White       | Deputy Secretary for Policy                  | 360-705-7012 |
| WI  | WIDOT                                  | Dan Pritchard        | Administrator, Division of Districts         | 608-266-2392 |

**Written Materials That Supplement Personal Interviews**

|     |   |
|-----|---|
| AZ  |   |
| CA  | <i>Assessing the Impact and Cost-effectiveness of Public Relations at Caltrans District 7</i> |
| FL  |   |
| KY  |   |
| MD  |   |
| MN  | “Speaking With One Voice” pen (photocopy); employee survey results                            |
| NJT |   |
| NM  | <i>New Mexico Compass</i> , Third Quarter 2000; <i>Que Pasa Newsletter</i>                    |
| OR  | Quick Response Program  |
| PA  |   |
| WA  |   |
| WI  |   |

**APPENDIX B:  
ORAL INTERVIEW GUIDE**

The following is a guide to oral interviews with representatives of the state DOTs and state-wide transportation organizations that were contacted for this scan. The material was noted and incorporated into the PowerPoint presentation and into this final report.

**Questions for NCHRP Scan***Innovations in DOT Communications, Image, and Positioning*

For presentation at AASHTO Annual Meeting, December 10, 2000

- One major concern that emerged at the June workshop for DOT chief executives (AASHTO and TRB) is that DOTs are not doing as much as they could to convey a positive image to the public and to position the agency favorably with media, legislators, and other key stakeholders. By image, we mean what others think of you. By positioning, we mean how a DOT gains support and funding. (We will not quote you directly in your answers to these questions; we are simply doing a scan of current practices.)
- Do you regard DOT image or positioning as a significant problem or issue?
- What do you do to understand your image as others perceive you and to learn what your stakeholders and customers expect from you?
- Is addressing this issue one or part of your major strategies? If so, where is the responsibility?
- What initiatives do you have underway externally (legislature, media, users, general public, etc.)? How do you use them? Any results yet?
- What initiatives do you have underway internally (key messages, team building, building buy-in, adding skills, etc.)?
- What kinds of assistance or research could be done to help move this forward?

**APPENDIX C:**  
**Overheads from Conference Presentation**

# Innovations in Communications, Image, and Positioning

Howard/Stein-Hudson

# Definitions

- Image = what people think of your DOT
- Positioning = how DOTs gain support and funding
- Communications = DOT internal and external exchanges

# How the Pieces Fit Together

- diagram

# Where Does DOT's image come from?

- Employees
  - CA “Employee Climate Survey”
    - Identified negative agency image
    - Employee focus groups
    - Employee-generated improvement plan
  - MN Employee Survey
    - Lack of clear DOT image and identity



# Where Does DOT's Image Come From?

- Media
  - NM tracks media coverage
    - 80% approval
  - CA Dist. 7 longitudinal survey of coverage
    - Track column inches and minutes of coverage
    - Assess negative vs. neutral or positive
    - 15 to 1 positive
    - Over \$1.5 million free, good media coverage/year

# Where Does DOT's Image Come From?

- The Public
  - KY annual customer satisfaction surveys
  - NM performance measures include public perceptions
  - WA surveys local agencies on satisfaction
  - MN surveys customer confidence & recognition of DOT services

# Results of Improved Image & Position

- OR - a service focus transforms image
- NM - seen as responsive due to follow-through emphasis
- New resources secured through positioning
  - PA - \$550 million
  - MN - \$400 million
  - NM - \$1.2 billion

# Internally-Directed Strategies

- Unified communications policy & strategy
  - PA Coordination across agency units
  - PA Continuity across administrations
- Internal agreement and support
  - KY Annual retreat: cooperation, credibility & communication
- “Speak with one voice”
  - MN campaign with core messages and props
  - WA tracks employees’ ability to speak for DOT

# Staff Motivation & Agency Culture

- Use private sector examples to motivate
  - OR Schwab Tire's levels of customer service
  - MN International Harvester's employee pride
- Transform organizational culture
  - MN communications “account executives” to serve internal clients
  - WI in-house “Corporate University”
  - KY road show to staff to change agency focus
  - PA emphasis on internal customer service

# Externally-Directed Strategies

- Create “brand identity”
  - NJ transit identity based on communications, advertising & delivery
- Develop & deploy taglines
  - “Moving Minnesota,” “Think ODOT, Think Customer Service”
  - NM distinctive website & logo for each project

# More External Strategies

- Target strategies around market segments
  - MN - segment analysis: farmers, etc.
- Work with local partners
  - PA “agility” program trades services with local government
  - NM civic leader breakfasts
  - WA ask locals how we’re doing
- Organize contacts & feedback
  - MN districts’ outreach with kit of tools
  - NM measure feedback via response cards

# Focus - The Bottom Line

- Communicate good performance
  - OR high customer satisfaction levels communicated to legislature
  - WI aggressive legislative & agency outreach
- Treat customers as owners
  - OR Stockholders' quarterly reports on accomplishments
  - PA “L.L.Bean-type” service = political capital
- Find out what they want & think
  - NJT find weak spots before votes on funding



# Focus on Quality Service

- Find out what they want & think
  - WI customer service index
  - NJ track customers' reactions including employee service
- Give good service & build reputation for it
  - MN Benchmark off services customers love
  - NJT ensure unified response to every query
- Train people to tell your story well
  - NM Trailblazers' Group media-trained

# Meeting Challenges Head-On

- Dealing with “shock journalism”
  - WI Interstate paving project
    - Proactive response through performance
    - Prove dire predictions wrong
- Dealing with “unexpected pleasures”
  - MN ramp metering study for legislature
    - One point of contact
    - Open in sharing information
    - Stay ahead of game, control story

# Questions for Discussion

- What are the most cost-effective strategies for polishing images?
- What other experiences agencies have had in positioning?
- Etc. depending on input from round table moderator and others