

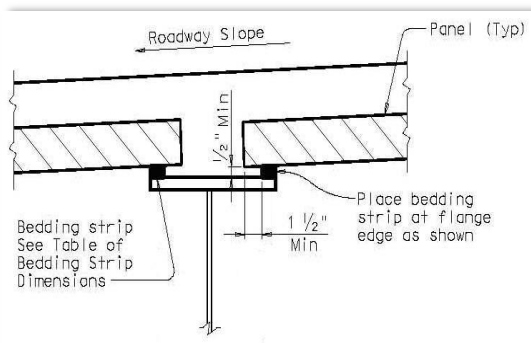
WASHTO-X Program

Videoconferencing Information Exchange

This report details the extension of the original two-year pooled fund research program on videoconferencing for western State DOTs. The success reported in 2004 for the initial phase continued through June 2008. We continued to provide a medium where expert presenters could disseminate information between the several organizations involved in the program. We learned that videoconferencing is a lower cost alternative to traditional conference travel and provides expanded networks for transportation staff.

Why we Chose Videoconferencing Exchange

This research began as a way to increase information exchange between different State DOTs and expand networking between experts in different states. Videoconferencing lowers the cost of this higher level of interaction relative to the traditional conference. Typically, only higher-level managers would travel to a conference location because of the expense. This old format places a limit on the amount of information shared between administrators in the different states. While there is an increasing amount of information available among specialists, there is a decreasing amount of resources at the state level to pay for conference travel. The WASHTO-X project sought to prove that videoconferencing technology could effectively replace this level of information exchange. The success of phase one (2002 to 2004) led to an extension of the project through June 2008. The project is evaluated on its ability to expand the number of people involved in exchange of information and the cost of delivering this higher level of service.



The WASHTO-X Program

The videoconferencing project relied on Tel-8 Transportation Communication Network. We created the physical and administrative structure to facilitate State DOT and FHWA information exchange. Over provided five and a half years, the program participants rated the WASHTO-X program with a consistently high approval ratings as indicated on follow-up surveys of the sessions. Maintaining this high level of success as measured by the participant's engagement shows that the

videoconferencing technology is now an established part of the toolkit of the State transportation departments.

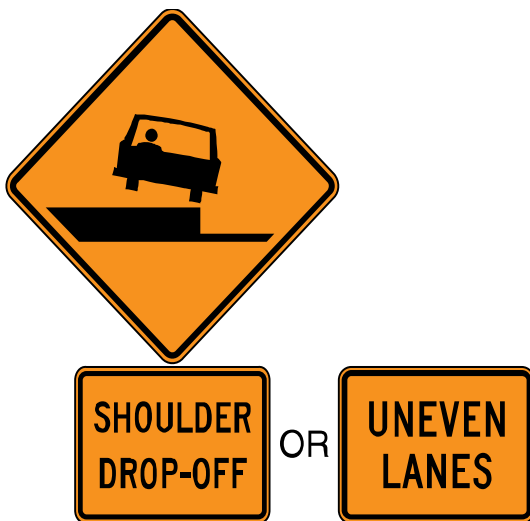


Successes and Failures

The program succeeded at expanding the networking and information exchange for both high and mid-level State DOT participants. The mid-level executives, who would not normally travel to conferences, were able to establish relationships with experts in other areas. The biggest obstacle that the project faced was to get the right participants and the right presenters at each conference. Improvement in this area continued over time as users became more familiar with the format. The costs savings of this increased connectivity suggest continued use of the videoconferencing format.

Recommendations

The WASHTO-X project showed that videoconferencing has much potential for State DOTs in developing information exchange among experts in specific areas. Future videoconferencing networks should build on the successes of this project and focus on establishing regular sharing between State DOTs as a way of increasing service to the public at a lower cost. This technology is particularly useful if it connects middle and lower level technical experts between departments in different states or areas of the same state. For these technicians travel is not as likely but information sharing is of greater importance.



Implementation

A major concern in the beginning of the project was the physical difficulties of connecting to the feed. Connecting a large group of people to an unfamiliar technology takes patience and deliberate effort. Over time, the staff became familiar with the new technology. One thing that was important for success is the use of proper planning to make sure that all attendees know in advance what sessions are best to attend. Once potential participants know what to expect the program is more likely to be adopted by a broader group of people. Early success is important to gaining wider support. Our results show that positive support for the project continued for the life of the project.

Contact:

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