STATE OF THE PRACTICE FOR TRAVELER INFORMATION DURING NONRECURRING EVENTS

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This fact sheet is a summary of the Federal Highway Administration report *State of the Practice for Traveler Information for Nonrecurring Events* (FHWA-HRT-17-014).

INTRODUCTION

The Federal Highway Administration recognized the need to take a comprehensive look at the information requirements and decisionmaking processes of travelers across a range of nonrecurring events. These events included traffic incidents, severe weather, work zones, and emergencies, among other events. Devices and media used to communicate information included smartphone applications, dynamic message signs, telephony, websites, radio, and in-vehicle devices that may become part of the connected vehicle ecosystem. As part of the comprehensive analysis, it was important to review traveler information from the perspective of a traveler regarding access to, perception of, and need for information about nonrecurring events. Information on nonrecurring events could be optimally presented by matching user needs with respect to content and media. Examination of the expanding role of the private sector in existing and emerging real-time advanced traveler information systems was also important. The ultimate goal was to determine what information and dissemination methods about nonrecurring events would help the traveling public make the most effective and safest travel decisions.

PURPOSE AND APPROACH OF THE STUDY

The goal of this study was to review and synthesize data about travelers' information needs and current practices for information dissemination related to nonrecurring events. To achieve this goal, researchers identified, reviewed, and synthesized academic literature, practitioner reports, and best practices for information provision related to nonrecurring events.

For more information on this research, see the final report, *State of the Practice for Traveler Information for Nonrecurring Events.*[1] While the emphasis of this study was on information that can be provided by traffic managers, it also considered the increasing role of private companies in traffic data collection and dissemination.

PROJECT FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Traveler information for nonrecurring events has evolved significantly in recent years. While transportation departments continue to use traditional methods such as dynamic message signs (DMSs), highway advisory radio, and 511 websites, the set of available tools has expanded to include mobile applications (apps), social media platforms, and text/email alerts. In the near future, connected-vehicle technology will provide personalized, real-time traveler information directly to travelers in their vehicles. At the same time, private-sector websites and apps such as Google® Maps™ and Waze™ provide users with valuable real-time routing, congestion, and event information. The availability of new traveler-information media drastically expands the toolbox from which traffic managers can draw, but it is important to implement information approaches in ways that meet the needs and desires of travelers as well as the needs and limitations of the transportation department. Key findings and recommendations from this study are as follows:

- **Acknowledge that planned and unplanned events necessitate different information strategies:** Information about events planned in advance can be disseminated early to alert the public. Press releases, news coverage, paid media, DMS messages (including portable DMSs placed at relevant locations), emails, and other media can be used. Information about unplanned events should emphasize dissemination methods that can reach travelers as quickly as possible.

- **Provide concrete information about nonrecurring events:** Travelers want to know the nature of the event, the delay or disruption it will cause, and availability and time savings of alternate routes. The affected locations should be described as specifically as possible. Travelers also want to

know that the information they receive is accurate and current.

- **Consider the audience:** Local travelers and commuters are likely to be familiar with the area's roads and options to seek information about traffic and events. Nonlocal travelers (e.g., tourists and long-distance travelers) may not be familiar with area roads and options for traveler information. Commercial vehicle drivers often acquire relevant information from other commercial vehicle drivers via citizens band radio.

- **Consider non-transportation department traveler information context:** Radio, television, apps, and websites (e.g., Google® Maps™) are widely available and popular with travelers. Developing a traveler-information strategy that considers and complements the various resources available to travelers is valuable.

- **Allow users to personalize where applicable:** Travelers want information that is relevant to their trips as irrelevant information is likely to be a nuisance and may reduce usage. Where possible, users should be allowed to choose to receive information that is customized to their location, route, or general areas of interest. This is particularly important for "push" notifications such as text messages.

- **Publicize resources available to the public:** The general public is often unaware of the traveler-information resources available to them. Informing the public of available options and potential benefits may increase usage.

- **Present event information on multiple platforms:** Any given traveler may have different preferences for how they like to receive information, so provide information on various platforms (e.g., both Facebook™ and Twitter™).

- **Consider traveler information partnerships:** Partnerships with public or private sector organizations can lead to improvements in traveler-information data collection and dissemination, improve consistency of information, and expand geographical coverage and audience.

- **Keep abreast of new trends and technologies:** The availability and popularity of technologies and information platforms can change quickly. It is important to keep pace with the public's changing preferences.

REFERENCES

1. Robinson, E. et al. (In press). *State of the Practice for Traveler Information for Nonrecurring Events*, Report No. FHWA-HRT-17-014, Federal Highway Administration, Washington, DC.