

Transportation Asset Management Expert Task Group

Article 1

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In a time of change, an expert panel is providing a forum to identify strategies for advancing the practice of transportation asset management in transportation agencies.

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Office of Asset Management formed the Transportation Asset Management Expert Task Group (TAM ETG) as a forum to discuss changes in the way highway agencies are managing assets. Among the issues facing the asset management community are:

- There is increased demand on transportation agencies to make performance-based management decisions that consider risk and long-term financial consequences;
- Agencies are adopting the new *Asset Management Guide: A Focus on Implementation*, which is published by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) and promotes the use of Transportation Asset Management Plans (TAMPs);
- The inclusion of "risk" creates a new focus area for asset management practitioners;
- The transportation asset management plans will be developed in an era of increasing emphasis on performance management;
- States display varying levels of TAM maturity with some at advanced stages and others in preliminary ones.

"Agencies see the value of gathering input from a variety of stakeholders regarding how we can support the state DOTs and local agencies in this new era of asset management," said Mr. Butch Wlaschin of the FHWA Office of Asset Management. "An ETG allows us to gain a great deal of input from a cross-section of interests."

Mr. Wlaschin added that asset management is more important than ever. State and local agencies are under severe financial pressures and lack the budgets needed to sustain their assets to optimum levels. He said asset management is the best long-term means to demonstrate accountability and to preserve assets.

"The states are facing severe financial pressures that emphasize the need for developing risk-based asset management plans and financial plans. It is a good time to be discussing these issues," he said.

The first meeting of the TAM ETG was held in early March at the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) in Albany. The group initially consisted of:

- Neil Pedersen, recently retired as Administrator of the Maryland State Highway Administration and formerly Vice Chair of the AASHTO Subcommittee on Asset Management;
- Tim Henkel, Division Director, Modal Planning and Program Management, Minnesota Department of Transportation, and current Vice Chair of the AASHTO Subcommittee on Asset Management;

- Carlos Braceras, Deputy Director of the Utah DOT and Chair of the AASHTO Subcommittee on Maintenance;
- Michael Bridges, Undersecretary for the Office of Management and Finance for the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development and Chair of the Technical Panel that developed the new *Asset Management Guide: A Focus on Implementation*;
- Chris Champion, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Institute of Public Works Engineering Australia;
- Moh Lali, Executive Director of the Alberta Ministry of Transportation;
- Brad Allen of the Maintenance Program Planning Division of (NYSDOT);
- Hyun-A Park, President of Spy Pond Partners, a consulting firm that helped write the new *Asset Management Guide: A Focus on Implementation*;
- Gordon Proctor, a consultant and former Director of the Ohio Department of Transportation, (ODOT).

Contributing to the ETG on behalf of FHWA also are Butch Wlaschin, Stephen Gaj, Nastaran, Saadatmand, Francine Shaw-Whitson, and Egan Smith. Tom Palmerlee of the Transportation Research Board and Matthew Hardy, of AASHTO are also contributing to the ETG.

The structure and membership of the TAM ETG were intentionally designed to ensure interaction with key AASHTO and Transportation Research Board committees. Katie Zimmerman, President of Applied Pavement Technology, who also is Chair of TRB's Transportation Asset Management Committee leads the ETG discussions and facilitates their activities. She is assisted by Dr. Omar Smadi of Iowa State University, an active asset management researcher.

"The state transportation agencies will be facing many new asset management issues in the years ahead," said Mr. Henkel. "The TAM ETG provides another opportunity for us to identify ways we all can address these challenges."

The members adopted the following as the group's charter:

The Transportation Asset Management ETG will:

- Outline a framework for financially sustainable infrastructure and service delivery that clarifies connections between asset management, stewardship, risk management, performance management, and long-term financial planning;
- Identify strategies for advancing asset management practice and influencing change within state DOTs and partnering with transportation agencies by addressing gaps in the framework, roles and responsibilities, drivers, tools, and/or workforce skills;
- Provide input to FHWA, AASHTO, and TRB regarding direction, definitions, processes, tools, and templates associated with implementation of state and local transportation asset management plans;
- Develop and implement a plan for communicating the work of the TAM ETG to the transportation community;
- Find a forum for the long-term sustainability of the work of this group.

FHWA has relied on ETGs before to serve as forums to discuss other issues that relate to asset management such as bridge preservation and pavement preservation. ETGs do not provide advice and have no rule-making ability. Instead, they serve as forums for discussion in which emerging issues can be identified. One of the products will be a plan to outline the activities that will help advance the use of asset management in state highway agencies. The strategic plan will help to coordinate the activities of the TAM ETG with the activities of FHWA, AASHTO, TRB and other parties who promote asset management.

Among the issues that ETG members identified are a need to:

- Develop guidance for agencies in the form of case studies, and communities of practice, and so on;
- Establish definitions and relationships between asset management plans, performance management, and risk-based asset management;
- Discuss practice and process changes to allow asset management to be used effectively;
- Explore national asset management performance metrics and data issues;
- Foster the development of tools and templates in support of asset management;
- Define ways to measure system performance improvement;
- Demonstrate success stories and share best practices;
- Provide communication tools for executives and the public to promote asset management;
- Establish descriptions for successful programs;
- Develop methods for making asset management sustainable within transportation agencies.

As a non-advisory body, the TAM ETG will serve as a hub of information exchange bringing in ideas from AASHTO, state DOTs, the international asset management community, and the private sector.

"The next few years will be very dynamic," said Mr. Wlaschin. "The TAM ETG will be a great forum for us to consider all viewpoints as we expand the concepts, principals, and fundamentals of asset management."