

Virginia's Dashboard: Driving VDOT Success

At one time, in order to find the status of a project at the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT), one had to track down varying reports from multiple people in different departments across the agency.

Now, it no longer takes a “room full of people” to get up to speed—It simply takes a dashboard.

In order to sustain their success, VDOT knew they needed to build the public's trust in them by communicating more effectively externally and internally. They needed to be more transparent—operate in the open and update their stakeholders on their progress, successes, and challenges. In essence, they needed to report out on VDOT's performance. But how?

The Dashboard

Many States utilize dashboards as a quick way to check the speed of their performance. Therefore, 10 years ago VDOT created their first dashboard. The dashboard increases public awareness of their performance and, through that, increases VDOT's accountability to their stakeholders. The dashboard also provides a platform to measure, monitor, evaluate, and report performance to assist in establishing clear business rules and improve internal communication. Previously VDOT would have had to round up several departments for a meeting to get the same information that is summarized in the dashboard.

The dashboard concept is based on the ability to drill down to multiple levels of data to gain more detail, so the user can get the level of detail with which he or she feels comfortable. The main dashboard level gives a general feel of the status of projects by showing traditional gauges with green, yellow and red status indicators. Then it gets interesting as

KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- **Established clear business rules.**
- **Increased accountability and performance.**
- **Provided a platform to measure, monitor, evaluate, and report performance.**
- **Increased public transparency.**
- **Recognized that external or internal distractions affect performance.**
- **Recovered from a lapse of progress utilizing the dashboard.**

the next level, **Level 1**, allows the viewer to find information on on-time and on-budget performance by fiscal year, district, and funding source. Drilling further down to **Level 2** allows the viewer to see and search contract-level performance and information. **Level 3** then shows the fine details about each project under construction or design. Since its inception 10 years ago, VDOT has expanded this concept where possible to other areas of the business, not just project delivery. As with the dashboard, project delivery has become more efficient and effective. When VDOT first started their dashboard, performance on delivery was well below established goals.

Choose Measures that Matter

A major part of a successful dashboard is having clearly defined measures and targets to track. These measures help manage expectations and show what achievements the agency is working toward. Rather than



establishing easy to reach measures, VDOT chose measures that were meaningful—outcome oriented—measures that support key decision-making.

VDOT also needed to ensure their measures addressed their seven main reporting areas, which are: performance, safety, condition, projects, citizen surveys, finances, and management. In addition, they found it important to have measures that promoted openness, honesty, and transparency. They wanted to demonstrate that they are good stewards of the public's funds.

It was also important to have leading indicators—in addition to the outcome measures—that would be predictors of performance. This would allow them to check the health of a measure before the year's end. Interim checks on the measures help them take minor corrective action along the way before it becomes a missed target.

Keep Your Eye on the Ball

Throughout this process VDOT recognized the importance of staying focused and keeping their eye on the ball. They realized that external and internal distractions affect performance. For example, during 2009 and 2010, VDOT experienced a series of layoffs that not only distracted employees but pulled limited resources away from project delivery and monitoring. As a result, many projects slated for delivery that year were delayed. Through tracking via the dashboard and other tools, VDOT's leadership team recognized the need to focus and prioritize projects. VDOT was able to bring their measures back up to their target.

Results

Rather than relying on a room full of people to determine the status of a project, the VDOT dashboard now makes reporting on performance clear and concise. With the dashboard, project delivery is more efficient and effective. When they first started their dashboard 10 years ago, VDOT's performance on delivery was well below their goals. Within a couple years of monitoring, project deliveries were on track and consistently higher than anticipated. In addition, VDOT is always looking to improve their dashboard so it best meets the needs of the users.

VDOT's dashboard has become so successful that the Commonwealth of Virginia is also looking to expand to areas outside the highway transportation arena.

View VDOT's dashboard at:
<http://dashboard.virginiadot.org/>



Figure 1. VDOT'S DASHBOARD

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