

Successes **in** Stewardship

<http://www.environment.fhwa.dot.gov/strmlng/es4newsltrs.asp>

October 2009

Double Issue!

Nebraska Environmental Streamlining Workshops

and

ICOET 2009

Streamlining Workshops

Since the enactment of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) in February 2009, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) has been assisting State Departments of Transportation (DOTs) and Local Planning Agencies (LPAs) in getting many transportation projects quickly approved, funded, and implemented to meet ARRA funding requirements. An example of the use of innovative techniques and out-of-the box thinking was demonstrated in Nebraska, where the FHWA Nebraska Division Office (FHWA-NE) and the Nebraska Department of Roads (NDOR) convened a series of meetings and workshops aimed at streamlining the environmental review process and enhancing collaboration among local, State, and Federal agencies.

In June 2009, FHWA-NE determined that Nebraska's LPAs had over 80 potential ARRA projects but only a few of these projects had approved environmental documents. As a first step in expediting the traditional project-delivery process, FHWA-NE and NDOR initiated emergency procurement procedures, hiring experienced environmental consultants to provide assistance to LPAs. Once the consultants were selected, FHWA-NE and NDOR met with them to explain expectations and assign LPA projects. Within a week, FHWA-NE and NDOR had joined forces with the FHWA Resource Center's Environmental Technical Team and the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) to host the first of two environmental LPA workshops, on July 15–16 at the NDOR offices in Lincoln. LPA representatives were paired with representatives from transportation and resource agencies who could provide project-specific technical assistance to streamline the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) environmental review process. The second workshop was hosted on August 3–5.



Workshop participants review environmental documentation with FHWA and NDOR staff. (Photo courtesy of NDOR)

Streamlined Project Approvals

FHWA staff recognized that most ARRA-candidate projects could be processed as categorical exclusions (CEs). With this in mind, the workshops were designed to provide individualized project-review guidance to LPAs with regard to a new Programmatic Agreement for CEs between NDOR and FHWA. The types of projects reviewed during the workshops included resurfacing, minor widening, bridge replacement, signalization, and safety improvement.

The workshops were structured around three NEPA workstations, each staffed with representatives from FHWA and NDOR. Local government officials and environmental consultants representing LPAs brought actual project materials to the workstations. FHWA and NDOR staff reviewed the materials and assisted LPAs with completion of the required

environmental documentation. Laptop computers and printers were available, allowing LPA representatives to revise and resubmit materials on site.

Technical experts were also on hand. Three specialty stations, where NDOR resource and wildlife specialists fielded questions on threatened and endangered species, wetlands, and historic preservation, were established. Agency staff was available via phone and e-mail for expedient reviews and clearances. For example, the NDOR-funded transportation liaison for the Nebraska SHPO conducted a preliminary review of impacts to historic properties and, upon a finding of no impact, e-mailed relevant documentation to the Nebraska SHPO, which sent back a concurrence within a few hours.

NDOR and FHWA staff was able to give their undivided attention to project reviews during the workshops. The on-site availability of technical experts and agency representatives eliminated lag time between various agency reviews in the NEPA process. The workshops allowed Nebraska transportation staff to approve a large volume of projects within a short timeframe.

Lessons and Outcomes

The workshops provided an opportunity to improve relationships among local, State, and Federal transportation and resource agencies. Through individualized working sessions on specific projects, FHWA and NDOR staff was able to educate LPAs about the environmental review process, identify areas for future training, and gain a better understanding of additional support needs. They also were able to clarify and expedite the steps necessary for environmental clearance. Many LPA representatives requested that similar workshops be held on a more regular basis to create partnerships in the planning stages of projects. FHWA and NDOR staff found the workshops to be positive experiences and stated their intention to hold such workshops for non-ARRA local projects to reach out to LPAs across the State.

A total of 79 projects were reviewed at the two workshops. After the first workshop, eight projects were approved and another 25 required only minor revisions. The second workshop yielded 44 project approvals, in part because many LPAs returned with more complete documentation. As of late September, a total of 77 projects had received environmental approval. For the few projects that were not approved, LPAs and their environmental consultants had a clear understanding of what remained to be done to secure such approval.

The workshops were especially relevant in Nebraska: LPAs had had some prior training, but the workshops offered more concrete applications. The Nebraska FHWA Division Office and NDOR have already committed to providing future workshops for non-ARRA projects, using the same format, with the goal of assisting LPAs with timely completion of environmental documentation while providing an educational forum. FHWA staff involved in the workshops believes that the model will be useful in other States that have new procedures or for educational outreach. As a collaborative effort among State and Federal agencies, the workshops offered an opportunity for enhanced relationships among multiple levels of governance.

FHWA Contact Information

David Grachen

Environmental Program
Specialist
FHWA Resource Center
61 Forsyth Street, 17T26
Atlanta, GA 30303
(410) 562-3668
david.grachen@dot.gov

Joseph Werning

Division Administrator
FHWA Nebraska Division Office
100 Centennial Mall North
Room 220
Lincoln, NE 68518
(402) 437-5961
joseph.werning@dot.gov

Melissa Maiefski

Lead Environmental Specialist
FHWA Nebraska Division Office
100 Centennial Mall North
Room 220
Lincoln, NE 68518
(402) 437-5973
melissa.maiefski@dot.gov

Cindy Veys

Environmental Section Manager
Nebraska Department of Roads
1500 Highway 2
Lincoln, NE 68509-4759
(402) 479-4410
cindy.veys@nebraska.gov

2009 International Conference on Ecology and Transportation (ICOET)

From September 13 to 17, 2009, approximately 400 experts in ecology and transportation, representing more than 16 countries, came together in Duluth, Minnesota, for the 2009 International Conference on Ecology and Transportation (ICOET), hosted by the Minnesota Department of Transportation. ICOET is held every two years. Its mission is to address a broad range of ecological issues that relate directly to surface transportation through presentations and poster exhibits that feature the most current research and best practices in these areas.

Conference History

The first ICOET was held in 1996 by a group of dedicated ecologists in the transportation industry. The conference was conceived by State DOTs and FHWA as an effort to avoid and reduce the adverse impacts of transportation on wildlife and ecosystems. Shortly after its creation, ICOET merged with the Connections: Transportation, Wetlands, and the

Natural Environment Conference. Since that time, ICOET's emphasis has been on bringing together professionals from a variety of disciplines, including ecology, planning, resource management, and engineering.

2009 Conference

Known for its presentations of cutting-edge research from around the world, ICOET is essential to both transportation and environmental professionals, as it provides a rare opportunity for the exchange of information and ideas between the disciplines.

About 220 research abstracts from over 20 countries were submitted. The technical program featured more than 120 research-paper and poster presentations and included the first tribal presentation, by Minnesota's Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa. Countries that were represented included the United States, Australia, Brazil, Canada, France, India, Ireland, Israel, Mexico, the Netherlands, Portugal, China, Sweden, Switzerland, and Wales.

The conference theme, "Adapting to Change," incorporated transportation systems and ecosystems in the context of global climate change, highlighting shifts in funding and new priorities. Evolving environmental and transportation policies were also explored, in presentations by keynote speakers including Rick Ridgeway, Vice President of Environmental Initiatives at Patagonia, Inc.

The next ICOET will be held in September 2011.

Celebrating the 8th Biennial FHWA Environmental Excellence Awards at ICOET

Since 1995, the FHWA Environmental Excellence Awards have recognized people, programs, and processes that have used Federal funding to promote environmental sensitivity and sustainability without sacrificing mobility. Award winners have made an outstanding contribution to the transportation community while demonstrating environmental stewardship.

FHWA was proud to honor the winners of the 2009 awards as exemplars of environmental practices in transportation at an ICOET luncheon. The ceremony was presided over by Greg Nadeau, FHWA Deputy Administrator; Derrell Turner, Minnesota FHWA Division Administrator; Carol Adkins, Acting Director of FHWA's Office of Project Development and Environmental Review; and Patricia Cazenias of FHWA's Office of Project Development and Environmental Review.

A panel of three independent judges reviewed 98 applications from 28 states, ultimately selecting 13 awardees and two honorable-mention recipients. The diverse group that was honored, from California, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Minnesota, Nebraska, Oregon, Virginia, and Washington, had partnered with community organizations and the private sector to perform research on highway noise, restoration of historical structures, and preservation of ecosystems and wildlife. A recording of the awards ceremony is available at:

<http://online.ncsu.edu/Mediasite/Viewer/?peid=b06b4fcf64c848cea915eb9c0d69730c>.

ICOET Sponsors

- Federal Highway Administration
- USDA Forest Service
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- Center for Transportation and the Environment at North Carolina State University
- Defenders of Wildlife
- Caltrans (California DOT)
- Washington State DOT
- Transportation Research Board ADC30 Committee on Ecology and Transportation
- Sustainable Transportation Center and Road Ecology Center, University of California, Davis

2009 Conference Co-Sponsors

- HDR Engineering
- ARCADIS-US
- Connectivity for Wildlife, LLC
- ElectroBraid Fence
- Great Lakes Maritime Research Institute

2009 Environmental Excellence Awards

- Excellence in Ecosystems, Habitat, and Wildlife: Innovative Topdown Construction Used on the Washington Bypass Project
- Excellence in Wetlands, Watersheds, and Water Quality: Caltrans Statewide Stormwater Management Program
- Excellence in Environmental Streamlining: 11th Street Bridges Environmental Impact Statement
- Excellence in Ecosystems, Habitat, and Wildlife: Oregon Department of Transportation Vernal Pool Mitigation and Conservation Bank
- Excellence in Nonmotorized Transportation: Midtown Greenway and Bridge
- Excellence in Context Sensitive Solutions: Glenville Wetland Mitigation Bank/Fox Point State Park
- Excellence in Cultural and Historical Resources: Minnesota Historic Bridge Management Program of the Minnesota Department of Transportation
- Excellence in Environmental Research: Quieter Pavement Research Development of Technology for Measurement of Tire/Pavement Noise Using the On-Board Sound Intensity
- Excellence in Roadside Resource Management and Maintenance: Nebraska Department of Roads – Plan for the Roadside Environment
- Excellence in Air Quality Improvement and Global Climate Change: California Regional Blueprint Program
- Excellence in America's Byways: Minnesota's North Shore Scenic Byway
- Excellence in Environmental Leadership: Gary Ruggione
- Judges' Award for Special Recognition: The Oregon Solar Highway

FHWA Contact Information

Mary Gray
Environmental Protection Specialist
FHWA Office of Project Development
and Environmental Review
711 South Capitol Way, Suite 501
Olympia, WA 98501
(360) 753-9487
mary.gray@dot.gov

Look What's New!

- The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) is hosting a webinar on **Wednesday, October 7, 2009**, from **2 to 3:30 p.m. EDT**, to demonstrate and share information about the [Environmental Competency Building \(ECB\) Navigator](#), an online resource and tool to assist individuals in different disciplines in determining the degree of proficiency needed across multiple environmental competencies. The target audience for the webinar is transportation and environmental practitioners and training and resource providers.

To register online, please visit

https://www.nhi.fhwa.dot.gov/resources/webconference/web_conf_learner_reg.aspx?webConfID=17729.

- The first Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) National Dialog Workshop will be held on **Tuesday, October 20, 2009**, in Austin, Texas. The workshop will provide participants with an opportunity to learn more about CSS and how it can improve transportation processes and outcomes. To learn more, visit <http://www.contextsensitivesolutions.org>.

Successes in Stewardship is a Federal Highway Administration newsletter highlighting current environmental streamlining and stewardship practices from around the country. To subscribe, visit http://environment.fhwa.dot.gov/sis_registration/Register.aspx or call 617-494-3137.