

0-6892: Integration of Right of Way Project Schedules for Decision-Making Purposes

Background

Inefficiencies in the process to acquire and manage real property have a significant impact on the ability of transportation agencies to develop and deliver transportation projects effectively. Acquisition of real property is frequently on the critical path of transportation projects.

The purpose of recently completed National Cooperative Highway Research Program (NCHRP) 20-84 was to develop improved, integrated real property procedures and business practices during project delivery. One of the NCHRP 20-84 products was a prototype real property acquisition and relocation assistance schedule template for use in alternative analyses and decision making. The purpose of Research Project 0-6892 was to compare the project performance tools developed in NCHRP 20-84 against processes and schedules at the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT), expand the national research by including a risk-based approach for conducting what-if scenarios and sensitivity analyses, and adapt relevant strategies developed in NCHRP 20-84 to TxDOT business processes and practices.

What the Researchers Did

Six months into the research, TxDOT officials informed the researchers of a separate initiative at TxDOT to implement an enterprise-level system to manage construction projects more effectively. This capability will involve tracking a large number of date stamps, including critical

date stamps related to the acquisition and delivery of real property interests. Because of the perception of potential overlap between Research Project 0-6892 and the new initiative, TxDOT decided to terminate Research Project 0-6892. Activities that were completed while the research project was active included the following:

- Review of current policy, manuals, and procedures; and identification of similarities and differences between the NCHRP 20-84 process and the process for acquisition of real property at TxDOT.
- Interviews with TxDOT officials to gather information about current real property acquisition and relocation assistance practices.
- Exploratory analysis of ROWIS data, with a focus on trends, frequency, and manner of use of date stamp data, as well as activity durations.

Research Performed by:

Texas A&M Transportation Institute

Research Supervisor:

Cesar Quiroga, TTI

Researchers:

Ioannis Tsapakis, TTI

Edgar Kraus, TTI

William Holik, TTI

John Overman, TTI

Don Kang, TTI

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What They Found

The review of current policy, manuals, and procedures, as well as the identification of similarities and differences between the reference NCHRP 20-84 process and the process for acquisition of real property at TxDOT, provided a framework for the analysis of current practices for the acquisition of real property interests, including modernization initiatives at TxDOT.

The review of documentation included an analysis of project schedule templates, including templates to manage the acquisition of real property interests, which were developed during the initial phases of the P6 implementation at TxDOT. To assist in this process, the researchers conducted meetings with TxDOT officials to gather information about real property acquisition and relocation assistance practices. The focus of the interviews was to identify:

- The reasons that districts only use P6 at a high level of activity aggregation.
- Tools and protocols that districts use to manage the acquisition of real property interests.

The discussion focused on templates in Microsoft® Excel® format that districts have developed to assist in the management of the real property acquisition process. The spreadsheets contain a large number of fields that broaden the collection of relevant date information compared to what is currently possible with ROWIS.

The evaluation of ROWIS data provided a foundation for the determination of typical durations in the acquisition of real property interests and relocation assistance. The Project, Parcel, and Payments tables within ROWIS contain several date milestone fields. The researchers evaluated these date fields to determine the number of records with valid dates and the sequence of milestone events.

What This Means

Districts use Excel templates to track activities related to the acquisition of real property interests and relocation assistance. These templates have gone through a couple of iterations, relying primarily on the experience and expertise of end users. The Excel template approach is low-tech but highly effective. There is every reason to believe that districts will continue to use this approach to manage the acquisition of real property interests in the near future.

A comparison between the date fields in ROWIS and those in the Excel templates reveals that districts use the Excel templates to track a significant number of date stamps that ROWIS currently does not handle. In addition to date fields to track the acquisition of property interests, the Excel templates include date stamps to track appraisals and relocation assistance activities. This makes the Excel templates particularly versatile and flexible.

For More Information

Project Manager:

Sonya Badgley, TxDOT, (512) 416-4657

Research Supervisor:

Cesar Quiroga, TTI, (210) 321-1229

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Research and Technology Implementation Office
Texas Department of Transportation
125 E. 11th Street
Austin, TX 78701-2483
www.txdot.gov
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