

# **Interagency Assignment Summary Report**

## **Leni Oman**

**Summary of assignment:** On assignment to Federal Highway Administrations Turner Fairbank Highway Research Center from April 1, 2006 to May 31, 2006. The primary purpose was to assist in the development of an implementation strategy for the Advanced Research Program. Participation in other activities were also encouraged.

### **Advanced Research Program**

Products: Prepared briefing papers for the FHWA Research and Technology Leadership Team including:

- An advanced research program framework (typical steps in a research program and options for addressing them)
- Chronology of the FHWA Advanced Research Program
- Focus areas source material
- Three year calendar for the Advanced Research Program
- Proposal for management of the program

Assisted in the development of an implementation strategy and next steps for the new Advanced Research Program.

### **Surface Transportation Environmental and Planning Cooperative Research Program**

Products: Drafted papers on:

- A proposed framework for program management
- Suggested STEP Program Elements
- A summary of transportation research programs that fund environmental and planning research
- A calendar of existing transportation research programs
- Options for Peer Review

Provided documents summarizing options for program development, peer review, and timing other research programs for HEP Managers.

### **University Transportation Centers**

Products:

- FHWA R&T Contacts Handout
- UTC Matching Opportunities with FHWA and state DOTs.

Attended the Plenary Meeting for the University Transportation Centers on April 11-12. This session included an overview of research activities and needs for each of the USDOT Administrations. I helped prepare the PowerPoint presentation for FHWA's

overview and developed a handout of FHWA Contacts for research and technology by topic area.

Because of the number of new universities, the increased need for match by many of these universities, and the changes to funding sources established in SAFETEA-LU, I developed a document that summarizes match opportunities from FHWA and state DOTs. The paper is considered a working document and will be posted on the RITA website, distributed to CUTC members, and used as the basis for discussions at the upcoming CUTC meeting.

### **International Scanning Program**

Product: Draft paper on ways to improve outreach on the International Scanning program with a particular emphasis on leveraging resources to continue the program at the current level or expand it.

The FHWA funding contribution to the International Scanning Program will be reduced in 2007 due to the budget impacts of SAFETEA-LU. In order to deliver the program of scanning tours currently planned for 2007, the program will need to either use a greater share of NCHRP funding or find additional sources to contribute to the program.

NCHRP is a program funded by voluntary contributions from each state at a rate of 5.5% of the SPR budget. Because the SPR budget is an allowable match for University Transportation Centers, it is possible by working with them, to both meet a portion of their matching need while addressing topical interests of both the universities, FHWA, and the state DOTs. However, the International Program, while broadly supported, is not widely understood. This paper proposes ways in which universities, FHWA, and the NCHRP Panel can work together on how universities contribute ideas, what the decision process and time frames are and ways in which they might participate.

### **Environmental and Planning Research**

Product: A graphic of transportation research programs that can fund environmental and planning research and a document further describing the programs.

Several transportation and environmental forums have expressed interest in improving their understanding and use of research opportunities in the last year including:

- AASHTO's Standing Committee on the Environment
- AASHTO's Center for Environmental Excellence
- TRB's Environmental Analysis in Transportation Committee (ADC10)
- TRB's Conduct of Research Committee (as part of a broader discussion of research collaboration tools needed)
- FHWA's STEP Program Managers

The Center for Environmental Excellence has recently contracted the development of an Environmental Research Needs database. As a corollary to this database, I prepared the summary of research projects available *within* the transportation community that could be used to fund environmental and planning research. Still needed: information on research resources outside of the transportation community.

Materials will be used in a session on research at the Standing Committee on Environment meeting and the TRB Environmental Analysis in Transportation Committee summer meeting hosted by WSDOT in Seattle this July.

### **Transportation Libraries**

Product: Comparison of agency Library budgets and resources.

The Turner Fairbank Highway Research Center has maintained a library for a number of years. However, the information has not been systematically cataloged and is difficult to find. Of the estimated 50,000 items in the collection, only about 5000 are currently cataloged. Following a presentation on WSDOT's Office of Research and Library Services, I was asked to provide more information on the WSDOT Library Budget and resources. While the agency budgets are very similar, the fact that FHWA must contract for services means that salary and overhead consume their budget while WSDOT is able to provide online subscriptions, access to bibliographic databases, proactive information services (such as news alerts) and develop collections on a limited basis. This is very unfortunate and prevents the FHWA Library from providing much needed information resources services to the agency.

### **Transportation Pooled Fund Program**

Product: Draft of new fiscal procedures for the Transportation Pooled Fund Program (TPF).

Current fiscal management processes for the TPF are manual. Each time a lead entity for a project seeks reimbursement from FHWA, the Office of Budget and Finance needs to draw down funds from each of the contributing states and non-federal fund sources. A project may have from two over 50 organizations contributing so this is time intensive and has been somewhat inconsistently applied in the past. In addition, non-federal funds are kept in what is called the 'lockbox' (the official name seems to be the Multiuse Account). These funds are not currently visible in the Fiscal Management Information System that states can access. So a lead state can't easily see what funds are available to them at a given time.

The new procedure looks at fiscal management through six scenarios – all based around the lead organization (state or FHWA) and whether or not non-federal funding is contributed to the project. It proposes to pooled funds into no more than two buckets of funding – one for federal sources, the other for non-federal. If funds are available at the end of the project, they will be disbursed based on the pro rata obligation. In addition, it is proposed that FHWA payments be processed through the RASPS system. This shifts the process to not only an electronic system but to a Division-based task. It will be similar to how Federal Aid projects are billed.

I also participated in the interviews for the position that facilitates the TPF at FHWA.

### **State Planning and Research under SAFETEA-LU**

Product: Pending information from FHWA, I will prepare a summary document of how SPR increases are calculated and the increase under SAFETEA-LU once information from FHWA is provide.

The FHWA presents the percent increase in the State Planning and Research Program as a 20 to nearly 25% increases over TEA-21 by FHWA (HEP and TFHRC). The increase at WSDOT is only 9.5% (excluding FY 2004 and including RABA and rescissions). Because this will be an important fact to consider in reauthorization, a request was made to understand the data and assumptions used to calculate SPR funding under SAFETEA-LU.

WSDOT recognizes that the percentage change quoted by FHWA represents a national average and that WSDOT's funding increase may be less than the national average. However, a limited survey indicates some states have a higher percentage but no states currently exceed 18%. We believe that the differences are due to whether or not RABA and rescissions are included. Also, FHWA numbers may also be based on funding anticipated under SAFETEA-LU rather than actual funding levels.

This issue has not been fully resolved.

### **Environmental Geospatial Information for Transportation**

Product: A workshop on collaboration for environmental geospatial information for transportation in the Mid-Atlantic Region.

This workshop was sponsored by FHWA and hosted by the Transportation Research Board (TRB) and was in development before my assignment to DC. I served as the Chair for the workshop planning committee and facilitator of the workshop. There were 84 attendees at the workshop representing the nine Mid-Atlantic Region states (33 attendees) but also participants from other areas such as Texas and Colorado. Speakers included Marty Spitzer, Professional Staff Member, U.S. House Science Committee and Mark Sudol, Chief, Regulatory Branch, U.S Army Corps of Engineers as well as technical specialists in geographic information systems, natural resources, and transportation management. Elizabeth Lanzer presented an update on collaborative GIS applications that were the focus of a peer exchange conducted in 2003. Evaluations received from the conference were very positive and will, hopefully, lead to more collaboration in the Mid-Atlantic Region as well as throughout the transportation sector.

### **Interagency Personnel Agreement Process**

Product: Summary of process to establish an IPA for a state employee to work at FHWA.

The FHWA has a guidance document for IPAs within federal employment. Much of the process is the same but there are some modifications. Information for this assignment of a state employee was not all in one place. This document attempts to describe the steps and sequencing of those steps that need to occur to make future IPAs easier to develop.

### **Other**

- Participated in the Safety Operations and Infrastructure Workshop sponsored by the TRB Committee on Research Priorities and Coordination in Highway Infrastructure and Operations Safety. The workshop focused on need for and possible approaches to developing a national safety research agenda.

- Gave a presentation to the TFHRC Research, Development and Technology Leadership Team (26 managers responsible for various research programs) on the WSDOT Office of Research and Library Services. The presentation was well received and several attendees appreciated information to improve their understanding of what a state research director does and the types of services the WSDOT Library provides (lots of interest in the daily and custom news alerts). The presentation ended with requests for specific types of information from FHWA on their research programs and a request for questions or comments regarding WSDOT research or of state DOT research directors in general.
- Met with Transportation Research Board staff to discuss potential cost saving strategies in their Core Services. Because FHWA funding for TRB Core Services has been significantly reduced following passage of SAFETEA-LU, TRB is evaluating cost savings and revenue sources. It is their intent to continue to serve state DOT needs because we are, collectively, the largest contributor. I made suggestions to reduce the frequency of the state TRB visits, subscription management options, and meeting planning considerations. We also reviewed other strategies under consideration.

### **Was it worth it?**

Absolutely. I learned a lot about the challenges our federal research partners encounter and this will be useful in our continued efforts to collaborate. I made some new contacts and was able to spend some quality time with others I new already. I learned about programs I hadn't previously been able to spend much time on. I had some time to develop documents that will be helpful to WSDOT and FHWA as well as other departments of transportation and universities. I think I helped provide some insight into a state DOT research program for the federal staff I worked with.

It's nice to be home. Doug Brodin and the other staff in the Office of Research and Library Services did a tremendous job while I was gone and I deeply and sincerely appreciate their support in this effort.

I would encourage others to take advantage if offered the opportunity to do this with an organization. It was a sabbatical that provided a new perspective that will infuse my work and help me be a more knowledgeable partner.

I am grateful to the Federal Highway Administration and Debra Elston for extending this offer and funding my two month stay despite the current fiscal constraints in FHWA research. I also appreciate the many FHWA employees who opened their doors, explained their programs, answered my questions, and asked how they could better reach out to the states. Employees at the USDOT Research and Innovative Technology Administration provided the same courtesy and excellent insight.

And my husband kept the home front in good shape without the whisper of a complaint. What a guy.

### **Personal Enrichment**

It would have been a shame to be in DC and not take advantage of the wonderful museums, monuments, and other cultural opportunities. I used at least one day a weekend to get out and see something new. Thomas Jefferson made a concerted

effort to include personal enrichment in his life. The following is my program of personal enrichment.

- U.S. Botanical Gardens
- Renwick Gallery
- National Gallery of Art
- Hirshorn Gallery
- Museum of African Art
- National Women in the Arts
- Spy Museum
- Maria Koshland Science Museum
- National Building Museum
- The Phillips Gallery
- Monticello
- Ashlawn-Highland
- The National Zoo
- Prince William Forest Park
- Leesylvania State Park
- Julie J. Mertz Wetland Bank
- Tidal Basin and memorials, the display of shoes for the soldiers and civilians killed in Iraq, Embassy Row...