

ARTBA and **Transportation Operations**



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Overview

For several years ARTBA has been engaged with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and several other key transportation groups in a dialogue regarding methods to improve operations of America's roadway network. FHWA's Operations Core Business Unit, headed by Dr. Christine Johnson, coordinates the dialogue. FHWA has contracted with the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) to organize meetings, papers and forums wherein organizations can participate and express their views.

The dialogue reached a pinnacle October 16 – 18, 2001, at an "invitation-only" summit held in Columbia, Maryland. In preparation for the summit, 12 national organizations were contracted to develop "white papers" explaining their views on improving transportation operations. ARTBA was one of the 12 organizations that presented a paper.

A member-task force developed ARTBA's white paper, with representatives from six divisions consisting of the Contractors, Traffic Safety Industry, Transportation Officials, Public/Private Ventures, Education & Research, and Planning & Design.

This document summarizes ARTBA's position and the outcomes and concerns resulting from this ongoing dialogue.

What does *transportation operations* mean?

As evidenced by the views of those participating in this national dialogue, the definition of "transportation operations" is far from clear—and is heavily influenced by the particular interests of each participating organization. Generically, the term deals with

managing the flow of people and freight across the various modes of transportation, including roadways, waterways, transit, rail, and air. Because of the breadth and complexity of the issues, ARTBA chose to limit its comments primarily to roadway transportation operations.

With a focus on roadways, ARTBA refined its dialogue to discuss operations in three broad categories: 1) operational improvements to the infrastructure, 2) more efficient traffic management, and 3) improved traffic management in temporary traffic control situations (e.g. work zones, special events and emergency incident management)

Why is ARTBA concerned about operations?

Many organizations involved in this dialogue express viewpoints that conflict with ARTBA's mission and position. These views include, "Now that the interstate system is complete, we need to change from a 'construction' mindset to an 'operations' mind set;" and, "We need to change Title 23 of the U.S. Code to allow more local flexibility to move money from construction programs to operational programs."

While such expressions are a cause for concern, many other participants readily recognize that construction and maintenance programs must move forward in tandem with improved operations. In reality, a state or municipality is unlikely to divert significant sums of transportation funds to new operations technologies when the roadways are filled with potholes and/or the bridges are poorly aligned and crumbling.

ARTBA is supportive of increased emphasis on this real operations need, but new funding sources must be developed to meet those needs (apart from construction and maintenance programs). ARTBA firmly believes that it is wrong to divert money from capital improvements when so many unmet needs remain. Alternatively, ARTBA believes

that local jurisdictions need to find new ways to raise funds for operational needs, as originally envisioned by the federal-aid highway program. ARTBA is supportive of providing federal funds to meet some operational needs, provided that Congress develops additional sources for the funds.

Why a national dialogue?

FHWA's Operations Core Business Unit has been charged with developing solutions to transportation problems in the United States, such as:

- Relieving congestion in metropolitan—and even some rural—jurisdictions
- Improving traffic flows around emergency incidents, such as automobile crashes
- Improving safety and mobility around roadway construction work zones
- Maintaining mobility and redundancy in America's transportation network in the new environment of terrorism and homeland security concerns
- Better managing competing demands for surface transportation resources among motorists, pedestrians, bicyclists, public transit users, etc.

. . .and many more issues.

FHWA is looking to improved transportation operations as a more *immediate* fix to many “under-capacity” issues, especially since capital improvements are more expensive and often take many more years to completely implement.

Attendees to the October Summit put forward a number of recommendations for improving operations, including:

- Educating and developing local and national leaders to champion the cause
- Developing national, regional and local performance measures
- Holding a summit on incident management
- Involving more partners in the dialogue, especially public safety officials; and

- Improving traveler information through better outreach to local media and electronic postings

FHWA hopes to build a consensus around a few, key issues—and a vocal, organized community to push for more resources devoted to operations during the next surface transportation authorization legislation, planned for the year 2003. Some of the key reauthorization issues suggested at the summit are:

- Rewriting the U.S. code on transportation funding (Title 23) to make operations funding more flexible and obtainable
- Creating a new funding program for homeland security
- Creating incentives or special funding for data collection and implementation of performance measures
- Creating mandates or incentives for creation of local and regional operations plans; and
- Creating a new formula program system management infrastructure

Should ARTBA members get involved?

Efficient operation of the transportation network, at all levels, is a growing concern for government leaders and infrastructure owners. ARTBA members should have a clear understanding of the operational challenges their officials face, and be supportive of those concerns. ARTBA recommends that its members participate in the operations dialogue to share expertise and views related to smooth system operations.

ARTBA strongly believes that the need to address transportation operations should not be construed as “shift” from construction and maintenance programs. New construction and maintenance are critical components to keeping pace with a growing and efficiency-demanding population. Rather, the critique and

added emphasis on operations reflect the natural progress of understanding and need as our transportation infrastructure matures, and some badly congested areas do not have the funds or available space to continuously expand.

Arguably the greatest operational aspect of our road network is maintaining the roadway surface in good condition, including clear pavement markings and signage. According to data from the Federal Highway Administration, federal investment in roadway infrastructure maintenance has been inadequate to simply maintain the roads in good condition, let alone improve them.

ARTBA is supportive of seeking additional federal funding to assist states and local governments meet their increasing operational needs. ARTBA wishes to make clear, however, that such funds must come by increasing the amount of federal funds dedicated to transportation projects, and not diverting funds from programs that still have pressing, unmet needs. To state the matter plainly, ARTBA would not support creating new categories of operational funding from monies set aside in the Highway Trust Fund, unless the fund revenue is increased with new or additional monies specifically for that purpose.



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