

# **KDOT Partnership Project Internal Stakeholder Interviews**

**Summary**

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Conducted for

**The Kansas Department of  
Transportation**



by

**ETC Institute**  
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HNTB

July 14, 2003

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## **Overview of the Partnership Project**

The Partnership Project is a top to bottom review of KDOT that was initiated by the Secretary of Transportation as part of the Governor's BEST Process to evaluate how Kansas government functions. The Partnership Project will be used to identify ways that KDOT can continually improve the way it serves Kansas.

The Partnership Project is being led by an Internal and External Advisory Group, which is composed of KDOT employees and community leaders from across the State of Kansas. The Internal and External Advisory Group will provide the Secretary of Transportation with its findings and recommendations by the end of the year. These findings will be based on the following data collection activities:

- one-on-one interviews with senior KDOT managers.
- one-on-one interviews with persons outside KDOT who influence transportation decisions in the State of Kansas.
- focus groups with KDOT employees.
- focus groups with transportation stakeholders in each of KDOT's six districts.
- statistically valid surveys of Kansas residents.
- survey of KDOT's external partnership groups including contractors, consultants, city/county officials, state legislators, other state agencies, and other organizations with whom KDOT works.

## **Contents of This Report**

This report contains an executive summary of the one-on-one interviews with senior KDOT managers that were conducted during June 2003. The purpose of the internal interviews was to assess the perceptions that senior KDOT managers have about a wide range of issues including:

- How well KDOT works with organizations outside the Agency.
- How well KDOT partners internally.
- Which work units do managers think are the best internal and external partners.
- Which work units do managers think are the worst internal and external partners.
- Suggestions for using KDOT's resources more effectively.
- Expectations that KDOT managers have for the Partnership Project.

The information from the internal interviews will be used to develop questions for the focus groups and surveys that will be administered in July and August 2003.

This summary was prepared to provide a synopsis of the findings. No conclusions or recommendations will be made on the results of the internal interviews alone, and a more detailed list of comments is available to provide information about the types of information that have been collected. Anyone who reads this report is encouraged to comment or expand on the ideas that have been presented. Comments can be made on-line at the Partnership Project's website.

### **Persons Participating in the Internal Interviews**

A total of 40 interviews were conducted between June 11 and June 20, 2003. Persons selected to participate in the interviews included members of the Executive Staff, Bureau and Office Chiefs, and District Engineers. Face-to-face interviews were conducted by Chris Tatham (ETC Institute), Ron Vine (ETC Institute), Karen Falk (ETC Institute), and John Cameron (TransTech Management). A complete list of the persons interviewed is provided below:

- Roger Alexander, District 4 Engineer
- Mike Armour, Director, Division of Aviation
- Harold Benoit, Chief, Bureau of Engineering Support
- David Comstock, Director, Division of Engineering & Design
- Bob Cook, District 5 Engineer
- Mike Crow, Chief, Bureau of Traffic Engineering
- Nancy Daniels, Acting Chief, Bureau of Personnel Services
- Don Drickey, District 2 Engineer
- Larry Emig, Chief, Bureau of Local Projects
- Ra?l Guevara, Chief, Bureau of Support Services
- Bob Haley, Director, Division of Administration
- Terry Heidner, Director, Division of Planning & Development
- Sally Howard, Chief Counsel
- Ken Hurst, Bureau of Design
- Lon Ingram, Chief, Bureau of Materials & Research
- Rosie Ingram, Chief, Bureau of Program Management
- Dale Jost, Chief, Bureau of Fiscal Services
- Ron Kaufman, Chief, Bureau of Public Involvement
- Jim Kowach, Chief, Bureau of Design
- Rod Lacy, Bureau of Design
- Chriss McDiffett, District 3 Engineer
- Jim McLean, Director, Division of Public Affairs
- Deb Miller, Secretary
- Rick Miller, Bureau of Materials & Research
- Ben Nelson, Chief, Bureau of Computer Services

- Roy Rissky, District Engineer, District One
- John Rosacker, Bureau of Transportation Planning
- Gene Robben, Chief, Office of Inspector General
- John Saiki, Bureau of Construction & Maintenance
- Warren Sick, Assistant Secretary
- Dean Testa, Chief, Bureau of Construction & Maintenance
- Larry Thompson, District 6 Engineer
- Rosalie Thornburgh, Chief, Bureau of Traffic Safety
- Jim Tobaben, Chief, Bureau of Transportation Planning
- Bill Vicory, Chief, Bureau of Right of Way
- Jaci Vogel, Bureau of Construction & Maintenance
- Linda Voss, Bureau of Traffic Engineering
- Cindy Wade, Bureau of Computer Services
- Bill Watts, Chief, Office of Management & Budget
- Steve Woolington, Director, Division of Operations

A total of 26 different topics were discussed during the interviews; some of the major findings are summarized below. A complete list of the topics and comments is available separate from this summary.

### **Perceptions of EXTERNAL “Partnering”**

Although most KDOT managers generally understood the concept, there were mixed feelings about how well KDOT was partnering with external organizations. Several managers who thought the Agency was doing a good job mentioned KDOT’s partnering efforts with contractors and consultants as examples. Those who did not think KDOT was doing a good job felt that the Agency was often too rigid with its policies and that KDOT had not tried hard enough to create new partnerships in recent years, particularly with local governments and the State Legislature.

When asked to identify which KDOT work units do the best job of partnering with external organizations, 23 different KDOT work units were mentioned. When asked to identify which KDOT work unit works worst with external partners, 11 different KDOT work units were mentioned. The majority of the negative comments were directed at Design and the Bureau of Local Projects.

Several managers thought KDOT should be more flexible in the interpretation of policies. Others thought KDOT should be more willing to share information with external organizations and be more willing to provide detailed explanations regarding the reason decisions are made.

Some of the reasons that senior managers thought KDOT was not more responsive to external partners included: (1) a perception that the current work load is too heavy, (2) high turnover in the organization, (3) a perception that KDOT's culture instills an attitude among employees that KDOT knows what's best, and (4) the perception that KDOT is generally unwilling to give serious consideration to exceptions regarding policy.

Although senior managers thought KDOT should strive to improve its working relationship with many different organizations, most managers thought KDOT should focus its efforts on improving relationships with one of three groups: local units of government, the State Legislature, and contractors.

### **Perceptions of INTERNAL "Partnering"**

When asked to rate how well they thought KDOT partners with other organizations inside KDOT on a scale of 1-10 (10 being best), 25 of the KDOT managers interviewed gave KDOT a rating of "7" or higher. Only two managers gave KDOT a rating of "5" or below. Almost all of the managers who were interviewed thought internal partnering at KDOT had improved in recent years.

The perceptions that senior managers had about the quality of internal partnering at KDOT was usually a function of a manager's personal experience and relationship with employees in other work units. Specific examples regarding the efforts and attitudes of individual employees were usually cited as the reason a senior manager had a positive or negative impression of another work unit. Eighteen different work units were cited as "best" internal partner at KDOT. A significant portion of the negative comments were directed at the Bureaus of Computer Services, Fiscal Services, Personnel, and Local Projects.

### **How Managers Thought KDOT Could Use Its Resources More Effectively**

Senior managers at KDOT suggested dozens of ways that they thought the Agency could reduce costs or be more efficient with the resources it currently has. Some of the suggestions included the following:

- Doing more work in-house so that KDOT does not spend as much on consultants and contractors.
- Requiring construction/design consultants to bid on projects.
- Putting more experienced inspectors in the field with the authority to impose penalties on contractors who fail to provide quality work.
- Outsourcing some of KDOT's legal services.

- Rewarding work units that do not spend their entire budget to change the “use it or lose it” mentality in the organization.
- Sharing resources and equipment with other state agencies.
- Soliciting input from employees about the quality of products that are purchased by KDOT and eliminating vendors who consistently provide poor quality products from the agency’s vendor list.
- Implementing a corridor management plan so that land is purchased before development occurs.
- Turning “stub” routes over to local governments and paying cities and counties to take the routes over. Some of these routes are only one-tenth or one-fourth of a mile long. This would help KDOT clean up the system and would give cities and counties a new source of revenue.
- Allowing other state agencies to attend KDOT sponsored training when KDOT employees don’t fill all the slots.
- Streamlining the 883-project authorization process. Making employees feel that there is a sense of urgency for projects so that projects do not drag out for years.
- Working more with cities and counties to eliminate utility problems, which often causes significant delays.
- Having the Secretary hold regular meetings with Bureau Chiefs (at least once a quarter) to be sure that the Bureau Chiefs can see the “big picture.”
- Reducing the time it takes to hire new employees.

### **Perceptions of the Partnership Project**

At the beginning of the interview, several managers were clearly concerned about the Partnership Project when they arrived. Many thought the primary purpose of the process was to identify budget cuts for the organization. At least ten of the persons who were interviewed came prepared to justify their work unit’s performance and staffing needs.

By the end of the interview, however, after the purpose of the Partnership Project had been explained, most managers thought the Partnership Project was generally a good or an okay idea. Only one person thought it was a bad idea. Although several managers thought it was a good concept, only a few said they really expect to see significant changes in the way that KDOT conducts business as a result of the process.

Almost all of the managers said they hoped the Partnership Project would be used to refine the Agency rather than recreate it. Most thought the overall quality of the state’s transportation system was relatively good and that the Partnership Project should be used to make a good system better.