

# Partnership Project Consensus Week Phase 2 Activity Summary

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Conducted for

**The Kansas Department of Transportation**



by

**ETC Institute**

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HNTB

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## 1. 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/External Advisory Group, which is composed of KDOT employees and community leaders from across the State of Kansas. The Internal/External Advisory Group will provide the Secretary of Transportation with its findings and recommendations by the end of the year.

The Partnership Project process involves three phases:

- ***Phase One: Development of the Evaluation Criteria.*** This phase was conducted during June and July 2003. It involved the completion of 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, nine focus groups with KDOT employees, and focus groups with transportation stakeholders in each of KDOT's six districts. This phase was used to identify more than 150 issues and concerns that internal and external partners thought the Agency should address during this project. Consensus building sessions were conducted with senior KDOT managers and members of the Internal/External Advisory Group in July 2003 to finalize the process for evaluating the priority that should be placed on issues that were identified during this phase of the project.
- ***Phase Two: Data Collection and Analysis.*** This phase was conducted during August and September 2003. It involved the administration of two surveys. One survey was administered to a random sample of Kansas residents. The other was administered to transportation stakeholders across the State. The surveys were designed to help KDOT objectively assess the relative importance of the issues that were identified in Phase One. The primary objective of this phase was to narrow the list of issues that were identified during Phase One to a maximum of ten Priority Issues. Consensus building sessions were conducted with senior KDOT managers and members of the Internal/External Advisory Group during late September 2003 to finalize the Priority Issues. A list of the Priority Issues that were accepted by the Internal/External Advisory Group is provided on page 5 of this report.
- ***Phase Three: Recommendations for Action.*** This phase will be completed by the end of the year. It will involve the development of action strategies for KDOT to address the Priority Issues that were identified during Phase Two. The final report for the project will be completed in early December 2003.

## **2. Overview of Consensus Week Activities**

The ETC Institute team facilitated Consensus Building Sessions with three key groups during the week of September 19-23, 2003. The three groups included:

- KDOT Executive Staff and District Engineers on September 19, 2003 in Topeka, Kansas.
- KDOT Bureau Chiefs on September 22, 2003 in Topeka, Kansas.
- KDOT Partnership Project Internal/External Advisory Group on September 23, 2003 in Manhattan, Kansas.

The Consensus Building Sessions were designed to achieve two objectives:

- The first objective was to provide senior KDOT managers and members of the Internal/External Advisory Group with the findings from Phase Two of the Partnership Project. This involved a presentation of the results of the resident and stakeholder surveys and the analysis that was used to identify a preliminary set of Priority Issues for the Agency to consider.
- The second objective was to get senior KDOT managers and members of the Internal/External Advisory Group to reach consensus on a maximum of 10 Priority Issues of the agency to address.

The desired outcomes for each meeting were: (1) to ensure that all attendees were generally comfortable with the process the Partnership Project was using to identify Agency priorities and (2) to give those attending an opportunity to identify issues and/or concerns that could prevent KDOT from acting on the findings.

## **3. Executive Staff and District Engineers Consensus Building Session**

The KDOT Partnership Project workgroup met with the Executive Staff and District Engineers on September 19, 2003.

Secretary Miller opened the meeting by giving a brief overview of the activities accomplished to date. She emphasized the importance of the Partnership Project and the reasons that KDOT leaders need to actively participate in the process. Chris Tatham, ETC Institute, then presented the results of the resident and stakeholder surveys. He was followed by Tom Warne, former President of AASHTO and former chief executive of the Utah Department of Transportation, who discussed the strategic value of the Partnership Project to the Agency's long-term success.

After a short break, those attending were asked to identify what they thought the Priority Issues for KDOT should be based on the results of the surveys and other information that had been presented. Once a preliminary list of Priority Issues was developed, Chris Tatham presented an analysis of the survey data that had been conducted by the consulting team to prioritize the issues that had been identified during Phase One of the project. After the statistical analysis was presented, those attending were asked to make modifications to the initial list of Priority Issues. The list was revised until everyone in attendance agreed that the following items should be the Priority Issues for the Agency:

#### **Priority Issues for Executive Staff/District Engineers**

- involve local governments in the decision-making process
- communicate better with cities, counties and state legislators
- use targeted communication
- promote on-going communication with communities, particularly between phases of a project to keep things in front of property owners and locals
- effectively educate people about what KDOT is doing, letting people know what we are doing, who to call
- empower employees to make decisions by involving the field in major decision-making activities at KDOT and making decisions at the lowest possible level
- have effective internal communication
- have better coordination with cities about local projects to minimize confusion about responsibilities
- be more flexible to local requests; KDOT may be fair and consistent, but it is not responsive
- provide reasons why KDOT makes certain decisions
- educate Legislators about why KDOT does things

The Executive Staff and District Engineers were told that the list of Priority Issues for the Agency would be revised based on input from Bureau Chiefs on September 22, 2003 and that the list would be finalized at the Internal/External Advisory Group meeting on September 23, 2003.

#### **4. Bureau Chiefs Consensus Building Session**

The KDOT Partnership Project workgroup met with Bureau Chiefs on September 22, 2003.

Secretary Miller opened the meeting by giving a brief overview of the activities accomplished to date. She emphasized the importance of the Partnership Project and the reasons that KDOT leaders need to actively participate in the process. Chris Tatham, ETC Institute, then presented the results of the resident and stakeholder surveys.

After a short break, those attending were asked to identify what they thought the Priority Issues for KDOT should be based on the results of the surveys and other information that had been collected during the project. Once a preliminary list of issues was developed, Chris Tatham presented an analysis of the survey data that had been conducted by the consulting team to prioritize the issues that had been identified during Phase One of the project. He also showed the list of Priority Issues that was developed by Executive Staff and District Engineers. Based on the information presented, those attending were asked to make modifications to their initial list of Priority Issues. The list was revised until everyone in attendance agreed that the following items should be the Priority Issues for the Agency:

### **Priority Issues for Bureau Chiefs**

- better communication with KDOT partners
- build continued support for future transportation programs
- improve relationships with city/counties
- do a better job explaining reasons KDOT makes decisions
- have a more holistic approach with cities/counties
- make it easier for public to get to the right people at KDOT
- re-examine how KDOT measures success - from safety/mobility to economic development and other issues (context sensitive design)
- provide a single point of KDOT, simplify process for contacting KDOT
- improve KDOT communication internally/externally
- KDOT needs a consistent message; KDOT needs to be consistent with policies (informal policies should match formal policies)
- enhance employee morale

Bureau Chiefs were told that the list of Priority Issues for the Agency would be finalized at the Internal/External Advisory Group meeting on September 23, 2003.

## **5. Advisory Group Consensus Building Session**

The KDOT Partnership Project workgroup met with the Internal/External Advisory Group on September 23, 2003.

Secretary Miller opened the meeting and emphasized the importance of the Partnership Project. Mike Lackey, Chair of the Internal/External Advisory Group, then gave a summary of activities accomplished to date. Chris Tatham, ETC Institute, then presented the results of the resident and stakeholder surveys.

After lunch, those attending were asked to identify what they thought the Priority Issues for KDOT should be based on the results of the surveys and other information that had been collected during the project. Once a preliminary list of issues was developed, Chris Tatham presented an analysis of the survey data that had been conducted by the consulting team to prioritize the issues that had been identified during Phase One of the project. He also showed the group the list of Priority Issues that were developed by the

Executive Staff/District Engineers and the Bureau Chiefs. After the information was presented, those attending were asked to make modifications to the initial list of Priority Issues. The list was revised until everyone in attendance agreed that the following items should be the Priority Issues for the Agency:

**Priority Issues Accepted by the Internal/External Advisory Group**

- Establish real, active partnerships/relationships with Local Governments that genuinely involve cities/counties in KDOT's decision-making process
- Empower KDOT Employees to Make Decisions at the Appropriate levels
- Enhance Employee Morale (compensation/training)
- KDOT should provide reasons for its decisions
- Educate the public/stakeholder groups about KDOT and the services it provides
- Foster more open/active dialogue between KDOT and the State Legislature
- Ensure that safety on non-KDOT roads is treated as a priority when planning improvements to the State Highway system
- Continue to enhance relationships with all stakeholder groups

This list of Priority Issues that was accepted by the Internal/External Advisory Groups will be the list that is used to guide the final recommendations for the project.

**Identification of Potential Action Strategies.** Since Phase Three of the project will involve the identification of action strategies, members of the Internal/External Advisory Group spent the last two hours of the meeting participating in breakout groups to begin the process of identifying possible courses of action for KDOT to pursue. Some of the action strategies that were suggested by members of the Internal/External Advisory Group are listed below:

- Increase contacts with local governments by making it a priority outcome at the District and Area level;
- Be more flexible with cities about control of highways within city limits (let cities trade funding for more local control; decrease funding as local control increases);
- Meet with local governments at least every other year to discuss issues and projects;
- Do a better job of keeping first line supervisors at KDOT informed;
- Increase compensation for KDOT employees;
- Provide more training and professional development opportunities for KDOT employees;
- Educate the State Legislature about KDOT's compensation issues and the challenges for attracting and retaining quality employees;
- Increase State contributions to health care benefits;
- Reclassify some positions that currently require the person to be an engineer;
- Use stakeholders to lobby state legislators for better employee compensation;
- Hold employees accountable for poor work performance;
- Give employees praise for meaningful accomplishments;
- Require maintenance supervisor and superintendent to participate in field checks;

- Promote positives about KDOT;
- Publish and encourage people to use KDOT's toll-free number;
- Develop a decision-making action plan to explain the reason decisions are made, especially for controversial decisions;
- Have better contact information cards;
- The priority formula should allow more local input;
- KDOT should have periodic meetings with local transportation leaders;
- Have a KDOT representative attend annual meetings of the Kansas League of Municipalities and county association meetings;
- Remove the cap on the salaries for engineers;
- Be sure that decisions are made at the appropriate levels;
- Provide more training to area engineers so they are better equipped to talk with locals;
- Provide better explanation about the authority of different KDOT positions;
- Provide good explanations for the reasons decisions are made – don't just blame AASHTO;
- Review the need for an engineer in many KDOT positions;
- Give good employees time for technical and professional training;
- Increase awards and recognition for employees;
- KDOT road plans should incorporate local comprehensive plans;
- Review the need to outsource projects to consultants;
- Be more open and flexible;
- Have continuous communication with local communities;
- Meet with APWA more often;
- District and Area Engineers need to meet with city and county staff and elected officials more often;
- Have a single point of contact a KDOT; and
- Close out projects faster.