

Partnership Project Consensus Week

Activity Summary

Conducted for

The Kansas Department of Transportation



by

ETC Institute

TransTech Management

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 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 (*the status of the activity at the time this summary was published is noted in parenthesis*):

- ! one-on-one interviews with senior KDOT managers (*completed*)
- ! one-on-one interviews with persons outside KDOT who influence transportation decisions in the State of Kansas (*completed*)
- ! focus groups with KDOT employees (*completed*)
- ! focus groups with transportation stakeholders in each of KDOT's six districts (*completed*)
- ! statistically valid surveys of Kansas residents (*underway*)
- ! 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 (*underway*)

2. Overview of Consensus Week Activities

At the completion of the one-on-one interviews and focus groups with internal and external audiences, the ETC Institute team facilitated Consensus Building Sessions with three key groups during the week of July 21-25, 2003. The three groups included:

- ! KDOT Executive Staff and District Engineers on July 21, 2003 in Topeka, Kansas.
- ! KDOT Bureau Chiefs on July 23, 2003 in Topeka, Kansas.
- ! KDOT Partnership Project Internal and External Advisory Group on July 25, 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 I of the

Partnership Project. Phase I involved the completion of one-on-one interviews and focus groups with internal and external audiences.

- ! The second objective was to solicit feedback from senior KDOT managers and members of the Internal/External Advisory Group about the evaluation criteria and survey instruments that KDOT will use to help set Agency priorities based on the results of Partnership Project data collection activities.

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.

In addition to the Consensus Building Sessions, members of the Partnership Project Workgroup met with representatives of the Kansas Consulting Engineers and the American Public Works Association – Kansas Chapter on July 23, 2003 in Emporia. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss the Partnership Project with officials outside KDOT. Although this meeting was not a Consensus Building Session, a summary of the meeting has been included at the end of this document since the meeting was conducted during the same week.

3. Process for Developing the Partnership Project Assessment Criteria

In order to determine which areas should receive priority from KDOT, the Internal and External Advisory Group worked with the ETC Institute Team to develop an Assessment Criteria for evaluating the relative importance of issues that were raised during the first two months of Partnership Project. The five-step method for developing the assessment criteria included:

1. Beginning with a blank slate – no issues were outside the scope of the Partnership Project at the beginning of the process.
2. Developing a list of potential topics to be evaluated by soliciting input from stakeholders and members of the Internal/External Advisory Group. More than 200 topics were originally suggested as priorities of KDOT to pursue.
3. Having focus group participants rate the importance of topics that were suggested. Items with a mean importance rating of 3.3 on a 5-point scale, where “5” was most important, were selected for further consideration.
4. Identifying links between the issues mentioned by focus group participants and other KDOT initiatives such as the Strategic Management Plan and the Internal Survey.

5. Developing an organizational framework for evaluating the issues that were most frequently mentioned. The framework that was developed contained eight assessment categories. The eight categories were:
 - Mission Accomplishment
 - Employee Morale
 - Resource Efficiency
 - Communication
 - Responsiveness
 - Safety
 - Key Partner Group Concerns (including Local Governments/MPOs, State Legislators, Contractors, Consultants, Other State Agencies)
 - Organizational Structure

Within each of these categories, several subtopics were developed. A complete list of the assessment categories and the subtopics is provided in a separate document.

Once the assessment categories were completed, questions for the resident and stakeholder surveys were developed to help KDOT evaluate the relative importance of most of the topics included in the assessment criteria. The results of the resident and stakeholder surveys will be used to statistically quantify the number of external partners (residents, state legislators, city officials, county officials, other state agencies, contractors, consultants, vendors, metropolitan planning organizations, and others,) who think KDOT should take various actions that have been suggested during the Partnership Project. Since KDOT does not have the resources to respond immediately to all suggestions that have been presented during the process, the results of the resident and stakeholder surveys will be used to help KDOT objectively determine which suggestions should receive the highest priority from the Agency. KDOT's 2002 Internal Survey along with data from the internal focus groups and stakeholder interviews will be used to evaluate some internal topics for which questions on the resident and stakeholder surveys were not developed.

4. Executive Staff and District Engineers Consensus Building Session

The KDOT Partnership Project workgroup met with the Executive Staff and District Engineers on July 21, 2003.

Secretary Miller opened the meeting by emphasizing the importance of the KDOT Partnership Project and the importance of KDOT leadership involvement in the project. Chris Tatham, ETC Institute, presented an overview of tasks completed to date. Julie Lorenz, HNTB, then asked each participant to identify the two most important issues they thought should be addressed by the Partnership Project. After the responses were recorded, those attending were shown the top 75 external suggestions for improvement and the top 100 internal suggestions for improvement from the focus groups. Chris

Tatham explained how the input from the focus groups and one-on-one interviews was used to develop the eight assessment areas and asked those attending the meeting to comment about each area.

The suggestions from by members of Executive Staff and District Engineers were incorporated into a revised version of the Assessment Criteria that was shared with KDOT Bureau Chiefs two days later. Members of the Executive Staff and District Engineers were also given copies of the draft resident and stakeholder surveys. Although time did not allow a detailed discussion of the surveys, those attending were asked to review the documents and provide comments by the end of the week. All of the comments received were incorporated into the final version of the surveys.

5. Bureau Chiefs Consensus Building Session

The KDOT Partnership Project workgroup members met with KDOT Bureau Chiefs on July 23, 2003. Secretary Miller opened the meeting by emphasizing the importance of the KDOT Partnership Project and the importance of KDOT leadership involvement in the project. The consultant team then reviewed progress to date of the Partnership Project, the top 75 external suggestions for improvement and the top 100 internal suggestions for improvement from the focus groups, and the five-step methodology for developing the Assessment Criteria. Each of the eight Assessment Areas was then briefly reviewed, and participants were asked what issue he/she thought is most important to be addressed by the Partnership Project. It should be noted that this session was an abbreviated version of the Executive Staff and District Engineers meeting.

Although the length of the discussion was abbreviated, the process for incorporating comments from the Bureau Chiefs was the same. The suggestions provided by Bureau Chiefs were incorporated into a revised version of the Assessment Criteria that was shared with Internal and External Advisory Committee in Manhattan two days later. Bureau Chiefs were also given copies of the Resident and Stakeholder surveys. Although time did not allow a detailed discussion of the surveys, those attending were asked to review the documents and provide comments by the end of the following week. All of the comments received were incorporated into the final versions of the surveys and the Assessment Criteria.

6. Advisory Group Consensus Building Session

The KDOT Partnership Project workgroup met with the Advisory Group July 25, 2003. Secretary Miller opened the meeting emphasizing the importance of the KDOT Partnership Project and the importance of KDOT leadership involvement in the project. She also emphasized how important the input from the Advisory Group was to the project process.

Review of Tasks Completed. Chris Tatham, ETC, provided an overview of the activities conducted during the past month to gather information. This included:

- 40 Internal interviews were conducted with KDOT leadership (Bureau Chiefs and above)
- 24 External interviews were conducted with external partners such as consultants, contractors, local government officials, and other transportation stakeholder
- 9 internal focus groups were conducted, 1 in each district and 3 at headquarters
- 6 external focus groups were conducted, 1 in each district

The purpose of these activities was to gather information on improvement areas and to narrow the focus for the recommendations.

Review of Project Priorities. Julie Lorenz, HNTB, facilitated a discussion regarding what the priorities are for the Advisory Group. Each member of the Advisory Committee was asked to identify their top two priorities for improvements. The following lists the priorities noted by the group. The number next to the priority indicates how many times it was mentioned.

- Efficiency of operations (streamline of decisions, work process broken down, prioritize improvements) - 11
- Communications both internal and external—timing of communication—5
- Partnering—re-establish activities for external partners—4
- Working with local government—4
- Single point of contact to assist external partners if understanding the roles and responsibilities within KDOT—3
- Addressing poor job performance both internally and externally—3
- Knowledge of job and agency - 2
- Attitudes at the mid-level needs to be more team oriented—2
- Better communication with labor contractors—2
- Where (at what level) decision are made—2
- Sensitivity to external and internal responsiveness-1
- Field and design interaction-1
- Time management for employees-1
- Cultural change -1
- Better relationships internally-1
- Educate external partners on the how's and why's of processes-1
- Leadership-1
- Need more PR to promote the good things KDOT and what works well now-1
- Retention of quality employees -1
- Consistency between and within Bureaus-1
- Improve relationships with Legislatures -1

Review of Assessment Criteria and Survey Instruments. Members of the Internal and External Advisory Committee spent more than four hours reviewing and discussing the proposed Assessment Criteria and the two survey instruments. Chris Tatham, ETC, and Julie Lorenz, HNTB, facilitated the discussions.

The suggestions provided by the Internal and External Advisory Committee members were incorporated into the final drafts of the Assessment Criteria, Resident survey, and the Stakeholder survey. The revised surveys and Assessment Criteria matrix were resubmitted to Advisory Group members a few days after the meeting. All comments received were incorporated into the final survey instruments and Assessment Criteria.

7. Meeting with APWA and KCE

Mike Lackey, former KDOT Assistant Secretary and State Transportation Engineer along with Julie Lorenz, a member of the consultant team for the KDOT Partnership Project, met with representatives of the Kansas Consulting Engineers and American Public Works Association – Kansas Chapter on July 23, 2003 in Emporia, Kansas. The purpose of the meeting was two-fold: first, to provide information on the Partnership Project and second and most importantly, to listen to the groups' comments and concerns regarding their interactions with KDOT. The discussion was facilitated and generally followed the format of the one on one interviews that were conducted with key external partners. Participants were asked to identify which groups they work with at KDOT, rate their interactions on a scale of one to ten (with ten being BEST), highlight the positive aspects of work with each group as well as provide suggestions for improvement for each group.

Before specific KDOT groups were discussed, meeting participants were asked to list what things or actions they would not want KDOT to change as well as to identify what sorts of things or actions KDOT could improve.

A summary of their comments is provided below.

What Participants Said Should Not Be Changed About KDOT

- Traffic Engineering moves quickly (identified by more than one person).
- Funding programs are good, the approach is fair. It is helpful for STP funds to be provided “in a 5 to 7 year chunk” so that smaller communities can complete a relatively large project. The selection criteria are good. /funding fair.
- Not all communities are aware of the GI/ED (Geometric Improvements and Economic Development) programs.
- While the GI/ED programs are relatively fair more understanding is needed on rationale [the basis for decisions of whether to fund or not].
- Often times the 90/10 split ends up being 70/30 and communities need more explanation [need to be made aware of this fact].
- Consider raising KDOT maximum share for smaller communities [even the 10 percent match can be more than a community can manage].
- Good responsiveness from District(s) and Area(s).

- TEAP is an excellent program. Like the approach now of doing what it takes rather than a cap on the study. The \$2500 cap was a problem.
- There seems to be an increase willingness to confer and communicate with other groups since Deb [Secretary Miller] has arrived.

What Participants Said Should Could Be Improved at KDOT

- Not enough explanation for decisions [from KDOT].
- More effective workshops where KDOT and the local governments (or other partners) set the agenda together. These workshops should have more of a training/communication atmosphere rather than [a KDOT] “telling” atmosphere.
- More dialogue between KDOT and partners.

Comments About ENGINEERING SUPPORT

- [This group is] quick to answer any questions.
- They should have told me up front [that my project] didn’t meet [the] criteria for selection for the Transportation Enhancement program.
- Higher turnover in this group – I’ve worked with 3 different people – it’s frustrating.

Comments About DESIGN

- They are helpful – they will pull a group together because you [a local government] don’t have a contact person to go to.
- They are too rural highway focused. They don’t think about sidewalks, even if you’re in a more urban area. Need to be more context sensitive. If the project is in a city be more sensitive to where you are. They hold standards too stringently but very helpful in terms of design.
- Inconsistencies between Squad Leaders. One participant noted a project that was split between two squad leaders and they had differences on both large and small details. “Complaint falls on deaf ears.”
- Participants suggested that standards need to be compared to what the industry has pre-made and is readily available. For example, flow bars for standard culverts are not really needed. With KDOT moving back to English from metric, this moment is a golden opportunity to evaluate standards since KDOT is converting back. It was specifically suggested that KCE and KDOT form a partnering sub-committee to review those standards and eliminate redundancy.
- The pressure is on the consultants to adhere to project schedules even if KDOT prolongs the review time or contracting takes longer than expected. It was suggested that deadlines for both the consultant and KDOT be written into the contract.

Comments About PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

- They explain the Program well and provide information.
- [This time, in the System Enhancement portion of the CTP] big projects were funded but little projects got kicked, and it takes a lot of time to put applications together. However, personnel are fine.
- There is a lot of turnover which is frustrating.
- I like the effort to see program through and finish what was promised [despite cuts in transportation funding].

Comments About FISCAL

- Final audits are getting done more quickly
- Final invoices from KDOT can be very late – more than a couple of years which can be hard on a city's budget.

Comments About COORDINATING GROUP

- Al Cathcart – does a good job.

Comments About TRAFFIC ENGINEERING

- They are responsible, responsive, and helpful from top to bottom.
- Flexible – they do what it takes to help.
- Linda Voss is very helpful to get things done.
- Group willing to stand behind us- say no for us. We don't want to just blame KDOT – we want you to support us [and our technical decisions].
- They seem to be hung up on roundabouts-can't seem to get past it. However, I do like the supplement guide and effort to provide some guidance.
- The TEAP Program should be given to this bureau. They are good enough to do more.

Comments About DISTRICTS AND AREAS

- D1-Area 5: nightmare on change orders for construction projects
 - hard to get responses on supplementals at the area and district level
 - good during project but closeout is the nightmare. We have work completed in '98 but change orders still aren't complete yet
 - not giving us much CE work as other Districts-good place to prioritize
- Corridor Management is always a hot topic – know it's right but it's a hot thing

- New form for permits-didn't communicate change
- Traffic Impact Statement – is that just something for the file? Is that a requirement statewide or just in District 4?
- Working with the districts is a real good experience-they're helpful

Comments About LOCAL PROJECTS

- Like the 5 year plan approach- it enables smaller cities to do a project about every 7yrs.
- I'd rather see [the Bureau of] Traffic Engineering and Local Projects put together rather than having Local Projects under Design – based on personalities.
- Don't care where you place the function – rather have a single point of contact – we need a liaison (local governments). Make sure you have enough resources!
- Incorporate some of the philosophies of design where you manage the project from beginning to end – regardless of where [Local Projects is] located have one point of contact.
- The problem is in personalities.
- Want to deal with flexible people who can get things done-Local Projects doesn't have that now.
- One point of contact – good idea – maybe 1 person handles geographic area.
- Right now the review process includes 5 perspectives. That is not necessary and review time takes forever.
- Beyond taking too long, there are contradictory reviews.
- Need to change the culture and personalities.
- Getting contracts signed is soooooooooo difficult-----1st response is to beat down cost.
- Boiler plate contracts could be used. Need to be reviewed at a very high level at KDOT.
- Why can't locals approve contracts? Which contracts does KDOT have to be involved in?
- Why review plans over and over again when professional engineers develop plans?
- Local Projects get involved in plan review issues that they don't need to be involved in. Think about the interaction between city review and KDOT review (recognizing the need to meet federal requirements.)
- Both APWA and KCE look forward to working together with KDOT on Local Project issues.