

Robust asset management vital to meet requirements, expectations

It just makes good sense for ODOT to manage public infrastructure based on appropriately informed decisions. That's what ODOT's Asset Management program is all about. But proactive Asset Management offers even more benefits.

AASHTO and many other transportation groups, as well as the SAFETEA-LU Commission, strongly support a significant increase in federal funds made available to support the nation's transportation system. Coupled with that recommendation is one calling for stronger accountability. The capacities gained through Asset Management prepare ODOT to respond to expanding external expectations, especially an increasing focus on performance and public accountability. AASHTO's reauthorization proposal would require state DOTs to adopt a policy-driven and performance-based business practice, called "performance management," to direct their federal transportation program investments and demonstrate accountability for those funds.

Performance management is now widely accepted as a "best practice" in the transportation community. The concept includes asset management programs, performance-based long-range plans, and/or performance monitoring in key areas such as system operations, safety and program and project delivery. As the diagram shows, performance management, asset management and increasing pressure to communicate accountability all require reliable data.

What it means to ODOT

The AASHTO reauthorization proposal is only one example of the increasing emphasis on performance and accountability. There are other sources of this emphasis within state government and at the federal level. Other examples include performance reporting requirements required as part of the state budget process; performance reporting requirements that seek to inform the public about government performance; emerging audit programs to review agency-level performance measure data; FHWA stewardship agreements that include performance measures; higher standards set by the Government Accounting Standards Board (GASB) that require accurate reporting on transportation assets; and more. ODOT's current Asset Management efforts are aimed at helping the department efficiently and routinely obtain and maintain reliable corporate data about these assets that includes performance information such as condition and functionality. Examples include ODOT's history of managing pavements and bridges based on inventory and condition, but program needs and external expectations extend far beyond these two assets.

Pilot program provided insight

During the Asset Management pilot (see May 2007 Inside ODOT), it was discovered that ad hoc data collection was a common occurrence throughout the Highway Division. Staff from different program areas could even be found gathering very similar data about the same asset in the same location during common timeframes. Three such efforts were discovered on the same 15-mile segment of I-5 during the data collection

for the pilot: Maintenance staff, project staff and program staff all needed data from the area, and each were busy collecting it. An active and robust Asset Management program would mean this kind of important data would be collected more efficiently and, once collected, would be available for everyone to access instead of collecting it themselves.

Data collection has a cost – especially when collected multiple times – but lack of data also has a cost. Something as simple as a substandard ADA ramp can become an issue. One Region was recently required to address about 200 substandard ramps that had gone unaddressed as a part of two projects. The lack of information caused a significant budget issue as the ramps had to be rebuilt to meet standards. The right information at the right time — made possible by a robust Asset Management program — means fewer surprises, reduced costs and improved performance. ODOT staff is already working to be proactive instead of reactive.

Celebrating success

The Asset Management pilot helped prioritize efforts to improve the state of ODOT's inventory. Building on data that has regularly been made available for pavements and bridges, additional data on the following assets will be available later this year:

- Signs (100 percent)
- Traffic Barriers (100 percent mainline)
- Bicycle Facilities (100 percent urbanized areas)
- Sidewalks (100 percent urbanized areas)
- Retaining Walls (20 percent - mostly I-5 and I-84)
- Culverts (8 percent)

One example of progress — and success — is the work of the Sign Asset Management (SAM) Team. The SAM Team, made up of members from management and technical staff, ODOT Regions and Headquarters, tackled the seemingly daunting task of inventorying an estimated 150,000 plus signs around the state. But the Asset Management pilot demonstrated that basic inventory — a shorter list of critical data — could be gained efficiently and relatively quickly. This basic inventory, then, becomes the foundation for informed decisions and additional data collection later. Basic inventory includes type, size, location and First Level Condition (FLC) that allows responses to be triaged (for signs, FLC was determined to be retro-reflectivity). A manual outlining the sign inventory process was developed and efforts spread across the state to fill the gaps in information.

The SAM Team also had to decide where the data would be stored. At the time, each district had a separate database; each also had a different emphasis on maintaining current data; and some used a completely different system. A few modifications to one form of the database, recently completed, now allow one single application to store the data, but it will temporarily remain separate in each district while the data collection is completed. A data warehousing project later this year will bring the district databases together for quality assurance and statewide reporting. This will be an interim solution until the permanent storage system is chosen and ready

to receive data that will be up-to-date and reliable.

Collaboration and co-operation have been the hallmark of every effort in this process as staff from around the state, as well as across divisions, have worked together toward a shared view of success. Their success is an excellent example of how progress can be made relatively quickly. To find out more, please contact Greg Stellmach, ODOT Sign Engineer at 503.986.3603

More work ahead

Reliable data based upon efficient collection efforts is vital to the increasing focus on performance accountability — and critical to the success of any Asset Management program. Construction and maintenance activities regularly modify ODOT's transportation assets, but reliable and consistent processes do not currently exist to update asset data to reflect those modifications. A process for as-constructed (or as-built) plans has been developed and will soon be released.

An effort is also underway to identify asset data that should be used for project identification and then continued through project scoping, survey, design and construction. This effort builds on increasing amounts of asset data that will be available later this year so that ad hoc efforts can be reduced as new inventory becomes available. The process would then ask those who modify an asset to provide new information so reliable data can be maintained.

This endeavor sought first to understand which assets and what data about them is critically necessary based on input from ODOT staff. The next effort involves ongoing work to create simple, reliable processes for sharing and updating data. One objective is that successful processes implemented for construction projects can be adapted for maintenance projects. Efforts may be small at first and build over time, but it's clear that a vibrant, reliable Asset Management program will help ODOT continue to be responsible to taxpayers while fulfilling our mission of creating a safe, reliable transportation system.

To learn more about Asset Management, visit www.oregon.gov/ODOT/TD/asset_mgmt/ or contact Mark Wills, Asset Management Integration Section Manager at (503) 986-4232.

Next month: Read about how Asset Management efforts are helping Bicycle and Pedestrian program staff turn accountability from a negative into a positive.

Inside ODOT comments?

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