



Asset Management Online and in Real Time

Asset management in real time. The Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) Office of Asset Management and the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) Subcommittee on Asset Management have launched a series of free online seminars to provide support to transportation agencies as they develop and implement asset management programs.



The online "webinar" series began April 26, 2007, with an "Introduction to Asset Management." The 2-hour event drew 50 participants. The webinar provided background on transportation asset management, which is a strategic and systematic process of operating, maintaining, upgrading, and expanding physical assets effectively through their life cycle. As presenter Lance Neumann of Cambridge Systematics noted, "asset management is about providing information and tools and capabilities to help agencies make good decisions." With the growing number of challenges faced by transportation agencies, including traffic congestion, an aging network of facilities, and financial constraints, decisions about allocating resources to best maintain assets need to be policy driven and performance based. What level of service is an agency working to achieve? How will conditions and service levels be measured? Agencies also need to look at a wide range of resource allocation scenarios to understand the benefits and drawbacks of different allocation strategies. "It is all about helping you decide where the dollar should go," said Neumann.

The webinar included presentations on State and local implementation of asset management. Kirk Steudle, Director of the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT), told participants about how Michigan is shifting its focus from where funds are spent to whether the State is getting the results it needs. The asset management process in Michigan starts with policy goals and objectives. "You have to have a goal for what you are reaching for. You then have to put the planning in place to make sure you have got the right projects identified and that they are programmed to get there," said Steudle. Investment strategies guide the allocation of capital resources, with investment focused on where the dollars will most benefit the public. MDOT's current goals are to have 90 percent of its pavements classified as good this year, with 90 percent of its bridges meeting that goal by 2008. Since 1996, average pavement life in Michigan has increased nearly 32 percent.

Data is key to Michigan's asset management program. "There has to be a strong focus on data as a foundational piece for performing asset management," said Steudle. Consolidating that data is also key. All MDOT project data is entered into a single database, following a strategy of collecting data once, storing it once, and then using it over and over again, instead of different offices maintaining multiple databases. MDOT has used asset management data to help justify funding levels for its 5-Year Transportation Program

Steve Warren, Deputy Director of Michigan's Kent County Road Commission, presented a local perspective, focusing on the importance of changing an agency's culture to embrace asset management. "There needs to be champions to lead and manage the change and buy-in is required from top levels of management," noted Warren. Asset management goals and strategies need to be communicated not only to external groups, such as politicians and citizens, but also to employees.

Kent County developed its asset management strategy after experiencing a boom in economic development and population growth in the early 1990s. The county responded to that development by investing in expanding some of its major arterial corridors, but saw that the number of roads needing reconstruction was on the rise. "We weren't pumping enough money into preservation work. A new approach was needed. We needed something more system based and something with the ability to not only look at conditions today but to give us an idea of what would be happening in the future," said Warren. Using an asset management approach, the Road Commission now defines its vision as achieving 70 percent of roads in good condition and less than 5 percent in poor condition by 2016. Other goals include increasing the county's network of all-season routes (roads not subject to seasonal weight restrictions) by 38 km (24 mi) and reconstructing and widening 41 km (26 mi) of roads to eliminate existing and future congestion.

Asset management principles can also be applied by metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) and transportation planners. As Carmine Palombo of the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments described in the webinar, his MPO supports efforts to collect, evaluate, and report on regional pavement and bridge conditions. This data can then be used to make regional transportation funding decisions that are cost effective. The new asset management process provides elected officials with options and identifies future outcomes of current actions, so that the transportation network can be managed to meet both current and future demands.

Throughout the webinar, participants had the opportunity to ask questions and make comments. "We received positive feedback from participants regarding the usefulness of the webinar and their interest in learning more about asset management," said Steve Gaj of FHWA's Office of Asset Management.

For more information or to suggest topics for future webinars, contact Linda Riggins at FHWA, 202-366-4847 (email: linda.riggins@fhwa.dot.gov).

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