

# National Accessibility Evaluation Technical Advisory Panel Meeting

January 10, 2017  
Minutes

## **Present:**

Deanna Belden, Minnesota Department of Transportation  
Katie Benoir, California Department of Transportation  
Kristin Carlson, University of Minnesota  
Stephanie Dock, District Department of Transportation  
Marsha Fiol, Virginia Department of Transportation  
Brian Gardner, Federal Highway Administration  
Michael Henry, Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department  
Jessie Jones, Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department  
Subrat Mahapatra, Maryland Department of Transportation  
Laurie McGinnis, University of Minnesota  
Doug McLeod, Florida Department of Transportation  
Stephen Miller, Maryland Department of Transportation  
Brendan Murphy, University of Minnesota  
Colleen O'Connor Toberman, University of Minnesota  
Peter Ohlms, Virginia Department of Transportation  
Andrew Owen, University of Minnesota  
Virginia Porta, Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department  
Chris Porter, Cambridge Systematics  
Toni Rice, Wisconsin Department of Transportation  
Rahul Srivastava, California Department of Transportation  
Jean Wallace, Minnesota Department of Transportation

## **Welcome and Introductions**

Jean Wallace welcomed attendees; introductions followed.

## **Project Update and Discussion**

Andrew Owen shared that the Accessibility Observatory program is completing its transition to be housed within the Center for Transportation Studies at the University of Minnesota. The Observatory was formerly housed within the university's Department of Civil, Environmental, and Geo-Engineering.

Owen shared an update on each task. Tasks 1.2, 1.3, and 1.4 are complete. The Transit 2015 report was published just this week and has already received some press coverage, including by the Washington Post. A summary report, including links to all task deliverables, will be sent out soon. The Transit 2015 report will also be sent out.

Task 1.5 involves the TAP review of the deliverables and methodology, will be complete after this TAP meeting.

Year 2 (2016 data) is underway. Task 2.2 is complete. Task 2.3 is underway and datasets should be available to members in February. Task 2.4 draft reports are underway, but changes suggested in Year 1 are still being incorporated. **The publication schedule for Year 2 national reports will be discussed at the spring 2017 TAP meeting.**

Jessie Jones asked about the ability of members to develop templates and dashboards to use with their datasets. Owen responded that this is underway for Year 2. He is identifying hosting options for the data. His next step will be to assemble a working group of TAP members interested in deeper discussion about the desired functionality of this interface (Jessie Jones, Stephanie Dock, and Stephen Miller volunteered for this group). **An e-mail invitation will be sent out so that TAP members or their interested colleagues may join.** Stephanie Dock asked about the ability to incorporate visualization into this new tool; Owen responded that the opportunities and limits of this will be explored and may be enhanced over time.

### **Review of Year 1 Deliverables and Methodology**

**Owen plans to contact members next week to get further feedback on Year 1 deliverables and methodologies.** He is open to any feedback but will also provide some targeted questions for members to respond to. Owen invited members to discuss this over the phone if that is preferred.

Jones shared that since accessibility reports are new for her agency, the first-year report served as a baseline and she may not have more detailed comments this early in the project. **Jones asked for future meetings to include discussion about how members are manipulating and analyzing their data.** Dock noted that trends over time will be helpful to discuss as future years' data becomes available. Owen invited member feedback about how reports can best show and discuss these changes.

Dock asked to be informed about future press releases in advance so that member DOTs can reinforce those stories with the media and share context, nuance, and stories. **The research team will do this starting with the reports coming out in the spring of 2017; release dates will also be discussed with the TAP when they are set.** Members requested 2-3 weeks' notice of future press releases. Chris Porter suggested having future press releases include some comparison and discussion of large year-over-year changes. Jones noted that a data interface would enhance agencies' ability to be actively involved with public and media discussion.

### **Future Plans**

Owen shared a draft TAP member website that will contain meeting materials, datasets and reports, member contact information, and contract details. The site will be live shortly.

Dock asked whether methodology information will be available on the website; Owen responded that it will. Rahul Srivastava asked about how non-member agencies (such as MPOs) could access this information. Owen stated that datasets produced from the project become the property of the member agencies; members are free to share their datasets as they wish. Should all members agree to make their datasets a public resource, the University could host these sets in one centralized location. Srivastava spoke in favor of public access.

Jones asked whether this would allow other agencies to access the data without funding the project themselves. Owen responded that the transit accessibility datasets are compiled from publicly-available

information. The auto accessibility datasets are based on proprietary information that the project purchases on behalf of members, with a separate fee for each jurisdiction. Laurie McGinnis noted that open, free access to state-level data would likely reduce cities'/MPOs' interest in funding the project in the future.

Members agreed to launch the website with password protection and allow members to use the website for a few weeks and then revisit the question of open public access. Members agreed to share datasets openly with other members. **The website will be launched for members soon and a link will be sent out.**

Jones suggested that freight accessibility would be a useful future project direction. Owen responded that this is a challenging area to study; he would like to form a member subgroup to discuss how to measure freight accessibility. **An invitation for this discussion will be e-mailed and the conversation will take place before the next TAP meeting.** Srivastava noted that the National Highway Freight Program has some new accessibility-related funding.

Jones suggested creating case studies and graphics to recruit new members to the fund. McGinnis asked members whether they would be willing to provide testimonials about how the project has provided value to them. Owen requested that members also let him know if they are hearing from cities and MPOs about the value of this data, as those testimonials would be valuable for recruiting new local agencies as members.

Dock suggested reaching out to NACTO (National Association of City Transportation Officials) and offered to connect Owen to this group. Cities tend to not be well-informed about pooled fund programs. Owen noted that even if a city or MPO is located within an existing member state, joining the pooled fund would grant the MPO access to much more detailed reporting about their area (potentially to the neighborhood level) as well as the ability to join the TAP and shape the future of the program. Member costs would be different for MPOs than for states due to different data costs. If the state DOT is a pooled-fund member, the fee for an MPO within that state would be roughly half of what it is for the state.

Dock suggested that the D.C.-area MPO may make a valuable first local-agency TAP member to lead the way given that D.C., Maryland, and Virginia are all members. **Peter Ohlms requested materials to help members recruit city/MPO members.**

### **Member Updates**

Doug McLeod shared that the new edition of the Highway Capacity Manual has been released, and the promotional brochure specifically mentions accessibility as an area needing more attention. He also shared a draft of the Florida DOT's 2017 Multimodal Mobility Performance Measures Matrix. He is conducting outreach with all 27 Florida MPOs and is finding high interest in accessibility measures, particularly for non-motorized transit. Members agreed that non-motorized accessibility metrics are very desirable on both state and local levels. Owen noted that this information will help the project prioritize expanding to these modes in future years, although the data available for these modes presents challenges.

McLeod shared that FHWA just released its rules on highway performance measures yesterday afternoon; they are auto- and freight-focused. Brian Gardner noted that while interest in other modes is

high, it must be acknowledged that many state agencies would struggle to gather data for these modes. Brendan Murphy agreed that consistently codifying local bike/pedestrian infrastructure on a national level is very challenging.

Gardner said that open street maps are also a resource of high interest, acknowledging the challenges in nationwide coverage and detail. Owen requested to hear about future updates in this realm.

Dock shared that D.C. just completed a multimodal mobility study. The next iteration of the online mobility tool will include access to jobs using this project's data. Some of the District's mapping work could offer insight for other cities and districts working to produce similar work around reliability and congestion. Every street in the District has been assigned a level of traffic stress as relates to cycling, incorporating the existing bike infrastructure. This will make it easier to examine routing and gaps. Murphy noted that he'd like to learn more about this methodology as the Accessibility Observatory has been considering similar methods.

Jones shared that Arkansas has examined cycling infrastructure by ADT and shoulder design. Srivastava noted that Google has created bike maps for the area around their headquarters including advanced features such as topography. Owen stated that he looks forward to continuing the examination of bike-related measures and tools. Members encouraged the research team to release work in this area as soon as possible, whether or not it is perfectly refined in the first iteration. Virginia Porta shared that People for Bikes is also doing some work in this area.

Srivastava asked how bike accessibility would be calculated in future reports. Owen shared that accessibility will be examined by varying stress levels to help reveal how much accessibility is being sacrificed due to lack of low-stress bike infrastructure (highlighting areas where riders avoid travel altogether or take circuitous routes to avoid high-stress roads).

Stephen Miller shared he's hearing interest in weighted decay information that weighs the "value" of the job based on its travel time. Owen responded that the existing datasets support creation of these weighted metrics should member agencies want to do that. He agreed that this metric could be added to future-year reports, as well. Dock suggested that decay measures could be used as an example of what prospective members can do with their datasets should they join.

Michael Henry asked whether there has been interest in calculating access to housing (or calculating access to members of the workforce) as a reverse way of examining access to jobs. Owen agreed that the program is interested in studying this; reversing the calculation processes will take some effort but is likely possible. This can be considered during future prioritization discussions with the TAP. McGinnis noted that this could be attractive to private or MPO members.

Owen shared that he is eager to participate in studies related to scenario planning. The Accessibility Observatory has done this kind of work before. He asked members to connect him to agencies seeking scenario-planning services.

Owen recently participated in a workshop with the Organization for Cooperative Development, which is looking at global accessibility evaluations. He will share updates about this as this conversation develops.

The Brookings Institution is hosting a Moving to Access Initiative event tomorrow morning. This event will discuss the importance of using accessibility measures to evaluate transportation system.

Wallace and Owen thanked members for their participation and adjourned the meeting.