

# National Accessibility Evaluation Technical Advisory Panel Meeting

September 7, 2016  
Minutes

## **Present:**

- Deanna Belden, Minnesota Department of Transportation
- Lois Bush, Florida Department of Transportation
- Stephanie Dock, District Department of Transportation
- Brian Gardner, Federal Highway Administration
- Jessie Jones, Arkansas Department of Transportation
- Tori Kanzler, California Department of Transportation
- Steven LaBedz, Iowa Department of Transportation
- Subrat Mahapatra, Maryland Department of Transportation
- Laurie McGinnis, Accessibility Observatory, University of Minnesota
- Brendan Murphy, Accessibility Observatory, University of Minnesota
- Colleen O'Connor Toberman, Accessibility Observatory, University of Minnesota
- Peter Ohlms, Virginia Department of Transportation
- Andrew Owen, Accessibility Observatory, University of Minnesota
- Virginia Porta, Arkansas Department of Transportation
- Brenda Thomas, Accessibility Observatory, University of Minnesota
- Jean Wallace, Minnesota Department of Transportation
- David Wasserman, North Carolina Department of Transportation

## **Welcome**

Jean Wallace welcomed attendees and introductions followed. New fund members Washington State and the District of Columbia were welcomed.

## **Project Update and Discussion**

### *Accessibility Observatory organizational update*

Andrew Owen shared that David Levinson, Accessibility Observatory managing director, will be departing for the University of Sydney this fall. The Accessibility Observatory will move from its current home (Department of Civil, Environmental, and Geo-Engineering) to operate within the University of Minnesota's Center for Transportation Studies. This offers an exciting opportunity to bring more connections to other researchers and resources at the university as well as streamline the program's administrative efforts. Owen expressed his gratitude for Levinson's guidance in launching this program.

Laurie McGinnis shared that the research team will continue to work from their current office in the Civil Engineering building for the time being but hope to eventually move into offices at the university's Humphrey School of Public Affairs.

### *Current project status*

Owen thanked members for their patience and continued feedback during the first year of the project. The project team has refined its data calculations and reports this year and is nearly ready to mark all Year 1 project deliverables as complete. Owen briefly shared maps from the national transit and auto accessibility dataset calculations. Members will receive their area's datasets via e-mail this week; members will also be able to access the datasets for all other pooled-fund members. This will serve as the completion of Task 3.

Members received draft reports for Task 4 earlier this summer; member feedback is being incorporated into the final reports. Final reports will be sent to members within the next two weeks. The Auto national report will be published next week and the Transit national report will be published in November. CTS will be providing publicity efforts to bring national attention to this research. Owen provided brief highlights from the national reports, including cities' accessibility rankings. He noted that many large cities rank highly for job access by both transit and auto; given that these metrics are raw counts of job numbers, large cities naturally have the most jobs.

Owen shared that "congestion impact" is defined as how much congestion reduces job accessibility. This is determined by calculating the difference in jobs reachable by car within 30 minutes at 8:00 am versus 4:00 am. Stephanie Dock asked how the congestion rankings are determined and why D.C. isn't high on the congestion impact list as often is on other reports. Owen noted that D.C.'s jobs are dispersed across the region, meaning that while individual travelers might be experiencing congestion in their commute, they are likely driving past many closer jobs on their way to the job of their choice.

### *Year 2 timeline*

Owen shared that the Year 2 workplan has been finalized and it is undergoing contracting with MnDOT. The Year 2 timeline is similar to the original Year 1 timeline; Owen feels confident that this schedule can be achieved given how many challenges in calculating the datasets were resolved in Year 1. Tasks 2.2 (collect data) and 3.2 (calculate datasets) are underway. Datasets will be distributed to members in December 2016 and reports in February 2017. Members will review these deliverables from January-March 2017 to allow reporting and wrap-up before the project year ends in June.

### *Future plans*

Owen and Brendan Murphy are continuing to plan Year 2 enhancements based on member feedback. They are planning to offer a web access for datasets; they are currently evaluating hosting options' services, setup and maintenance effort, and cost to ensure that the service can be maintained throughout the life of the project. A public-facing portal, offering easier analysis of the data, is also tentatively planned for Year 2. This portal could be used for policymakers, citizens, and others who want to use this information but don't have the expertise to understand the more complex data. The research team hopes to identify a host option that can support both of these forms of web access to the data, both for members and the public.

Members also discussed studying the reliability of accessibility. This is not currently planned for Year 2; members have mentioned that this would be interesting research but use cases don't yet exist. This would also require additional data that the Accessibility Observatory doesn't currently have access to. This could be a potential enhancement for future years if the data sources are found to be available and within the program's budget.

Owen will continue to share updates about these enhancements and invite member feedback when needed. Brian Gardner asked whether Year 2 will involve a further examination and refinement of how measures are calculated. Owen responded that he hopes to discuss this with members at the next TAP meeting in January; that discussion will inform the Year 2 reports and Year 3 dataset calculations and reports.

### **Member Updates**

Jessie Jones asked other members how they use these reports for long-range planning and performance management. Owen responded that the year-over-year findings that will come from continuous annual reports will yield useful information for members. He invited members to share about their accessibility initiatives.

Lois Bush shared that Florida is examining how Complete Streets and mobility performance measures can best be used to inform their planning, with accessibility having a significant role. Florida DOT has partnered with Brower County and its MPO to pilot use of accessibility metrics and plan to continue coordinating with other entities in the state. Bush mentioned that "data commons" in Florida offer opportunities to share accessibility data with non-traditional partners. Owen asked members to keep him informed about members' use and sharing of data in these forums and offered support to help with the datasets and questions that may arise about their use in these settings.

Deanna Belden mentioned that "observed" data could provide helpful information—for instance, are people really walking in areas ranked as highly walkable? Are D.C. residents experiencing high congestion because they're traveling far across the metro area to jobs of their choice?

Peter Ohlms shared that Virginia's Smart Scale prioritization process for project funding uses accessibility metrics (access to jobs, access to multimodal choices, and access to jobs for disadvantaged populations).

Owen shared that he was scheduled to participate in a Caltrans workshop but was prevented by Delta Airlines' technical problems.

Dock shared that District DOT is building a web tool to better understand and communicate congestion measures. It looks at congestion in terms of reliability, number of vehicles on the road, and access to jobs and destinations by various modes. They plan to integrate this project's data into future years. The project's website and first report will be completed this fall; Owen offered to distribute these with TAP members when complete.

Belden shared that MnDOT will report accessibility metrics at the 30-minute time threshold for both auto and transit in its upcoming reports

Owen confirmed that he'll be responding to members' feedback and questions on the draft reports. Datasets will be available for member download this week; Owen will e-mail access links and a documentation file to members. Members are welcome to share the data locally through their own portals and programs; Owen is happy to help if members have questions about this.

Wallace asked whether bike and pedestrian accessibility data will be included. Owen responded that he does consider this part of the project, despite it being delayed due to refining the auto and transit data. Pedestrian data is currently better-developed than bike data; Andrew hopes to have more information to share at the next TAP meeting.

Members asked about freight accessibility and how that could fit into this project. Owen responded that he isn't sure what metrics would be the most helpful when calculating freight accessibility and how to specify and acquire origin/destination data. He hopes to explore this in the future but isn't ready to do so as part of this project at this time. He suggested that interested members could form a subgroup that would meet to discuss metrics and early steps towards calculating meaningful freight accessibility information.

### **Other Business**

Colleen O'Connor Toberman shared that the TAP's next meeting will take place during the TRB Annual Meeting on Tuesday, January 10 from 5:30-7 pm EST. Members attending TRB will meet in-person at or near the conference facility; a call-in option will be provided as well.

Thomas reviewed the next steps and upcoming products that will be coming out over the coming months. Owen and Wallace thanked members for their active participation and adjourned the meeting.

**Meeting slides are available at <http://bit.ly/2d50Z1K>.**