



Peer Exchange Report

National Operations Center of Excellence Public Communications and TSMO Peer Exchange

Purpose And Overview

NOCoE’s Public Communications and TSMO Peer Exchange was intended to exchange information on best practices, learn about regular challenges, and identify resources needs around public communications and transportation systems management and operations (TSMO).

Public sector practitioners from the TSMO and public communications disciplines play a key role in advancing traveler information strategies and services: timely information sharing with the traveling public improves their mobility, reduces stress, and enhances safety for commuters and transportation agency field workers. Additionally, the collaboration between these functions also supports the sharing of benefits of TSMO to the traveler and in soliciting public feedback on TSMO strategies. The peer exchange addressed these two topics while also hosting a roundtable on additional transportation issues that intersect with TSMO and public communications.

Agenda

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 18, 2023 (ALL TIMES LISTED BELOW ARE EDT)

Time	Topic	Key Outcomes
9:00 am – 9:10 am	Welcome and Goals: Ahnaf Morshed	All attendees understand the day’s process and goals
	Communicating the benefits of TSMO	
9:10 am – 10:00 am	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>Presentation:</u> Laurie Matkowski, Gannett Fleming and NOCoE TAC• <u>Panel Discussion:</u><ul style="list-style-type: none">• Communicating to key stakeholders• Building a new program• Communicating benefits to the public• <u>Poll Questions</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Best practices and lessons learned• Resources identification• Resource needs
10:00 am – 10:15 am	BREAK	

Traveler information		
10:15 am – 11:00 am	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Panel Discussion and Poll Questions</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traveler information programs • Winter weather and work zones • Use of social media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Best practices and lessons learned • Resources identification • Resource needs
Rapid Roundtable Discussion		
11:00 am – 11:50 am	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Presentation:</u> (Colby Fortier-Brown, Maine DOT) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional partnerships • Wireless emergency alerts • Highlighting TSMO investment • Equity and Inclusivity • <u>Poll Questions</u> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify topics for ongoing resource development
11:50 am – 12:00 pm	<u>Closing</u>	Build consensus on next steps

Panel Discussion

The Public Communications and TSMO peer exchange was an agile format, an in-person, 3-hour meeting. There were two plenary sessions followed by a roundtable discussion session.

1. **Communicating the Benefits of TSMO:** The peer exchange kicked off with Laurie Matkowski's presentation, offering an insightful overview of TSMO strategies and their associated benefits. Emphasis was placed on the critical role of public communication. A noteworthy example involved implementing Ramp Meter Activation, Winter Weather Anticipated Restrictions, and Regional Collaboration for storm management in the Ferry system. Challenges arose from unforeseen emergencies and sudden changes, triggering public complaints. The response demonstrated adaptability by adjusting plans, reinforcing communication through consistent messaging and partnerships with weather services, and utilizing graphics shared with the National Weather Services for clearer dissemination. This experience underscores the significance of flexibility, robust messaging, and collaborative endeavors in overcoming public skepticism and garnering support for TSMO initiatives.
2. **Traveler information:** The panel discussion started off with a short overview of ADOT's Safety Message Contest which was presented by Jon Brodsky. The summary of few important key points is noted below.
 - a. Leveraging social media for traveler information involved consolidating multiple Twitter (X) accounts into a unified approach through the 511 platform.
 - b. Emphasis on app development aimed to direct users from social media highlights to the 511 system.
 - c. Targeted communication, like accident alerts, addressed public preferences for localized information.
 - d. Collaboration with agencies was evident through regional control of Twitter accounts and local control of apps.
 - e. Innovative technologies included Maine's use of maps for information sharing and Amazon GPS in New Jersey for winter deliveries.
 - f. Challenges arose from outdated maps and the fragmented nature of navigation apps, emphasizing the importance of a unified approach.
 - g. Exploration of partnerships with vehicle manufacturers, exemplified by conversations with Maine and ADOT's relative success, indicated potential collaboration opportunities while acknowledging the risk of technological investments becoming outdated.
3. **Rapid Roundtable Discussion:** The rapid roundtable discussion commenced with a presentation by Colby Fortier Brown, highlighting the functionality of public communication in TSMO. The presentation covered aspects such as traffic emergency responders, broadband utilization, and regional collaboration involving New Hampshire and Vermont.
 - a. Successful regional partnerships in TSMO communication initiatives were fostered through collaboration, exemplified by a project in Ohio Dot's Emergency Operations Center. Positive outcomes stemmed from feedback, emphasizing the importance of information from the scene.

- b. Integration of wireless emergency alerts involved coordination with FAA and emergency management agencies. Pre-canned messages automatically required approval from the emergency director, highlighting challenges in communication dispatch queues.
- c. Tailoring TSMO investment messages for different demographic groups involved addressing disparities. In Vermont, translation challenges and fractured processes were encountered, prompting the creation of communication channels to bridge gaps with communities.
- d. Ensuring accessible and inclusive information for diverse communities involved navigating complicated translation processes. Efforts to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion included collaboration with communities and institutional leaders, as seen in NHDOT.
- e. Pathfinder initiatives focused on consistent messaging and clear communication with weather agencies, particularly for unpredictable events like snow squalls. The use of Teams Channels for regional communication, collaboration with weather agencies, and exploring AI and camera usage showcased proactive approaches in improving TSMO communication.

Poll Question/Answers

A poll was set up during the peer exchange, panelists were asked to participate in the poll Q/A session and responses were displayed live.

How crucial do you believe regional partnerships are in advancing effective transportation strategies?

- 88% of respondents: Extremely Important
- 12% of respondents: Important

In your opinion, what is the most effective means of utilizing wireless emergency alerts for communication during critical transportation events?

- 50% of respondents: Targeted messaging based on location
- 50% of respondents: Combination of targeted and broad alerts

When highlighting TSMO investments, which communication method has proven most successful in gaining public support?

- 88% of respondents: Collaborative storytelling with real-world examples
- 12% of respondents: Engaging visual presentations (infographics, videos)

Which platform do you find most effective for disseminating traveler information during winter weather and work zones?

- 0% of respondents: Traditional media (TV and radio)
- 0% of respondents: Dedicated traveler information websites or apps
- 20% of respondents: Social media platforms
- 80% of respondents: Combination of the above

How frequently do you rely on social media for accessing real-time traveler information?

- 20% of respondents: Always
- 60% of respondents: Often
- 20% of respondents: Occasionally

In your experience, what type of traveler information programs have proven most successful in enhancing public awareness and safety?

- 63% of respondents: Interactive online maps with real-time updates
- 20% of respondents: Social media platforms

- 13% of respondents: Public service announcements through various media channels
- 13% of the respondents: SMS or push notification systems
- 13% of the respondents: Others

How do you prioritize your communication efforts when conveying the benefits of TSMO to key stakeholders?

- 43% of respondents: Tailoring messages to specific stakeholder interests
- 67% of respondents: Utilizing a combination of storytelling and data-driven approaches

When building a new TSMO program, which aspect do you consider most critical for successful implementation?

- 17% of respondents: Strategic planning and goal setting
- 8% of respondents: Establishing effective communication channels within the team
- 67% of respondents: Collaborating with key stakeholders from the outset
- 8% of respondents: Adapting to evolving challenges and feedback

What resource identification strategy do you find most effective in TSMO initiatives?

- 8% of respondents: Utilizing technological tools for resource tracking
- 88% of respondents: Collaborating with industry experts and partners
- 8% of respondents: Conducting comprehensive needs assessments

Next Steps

NOCoE will review the key takeaways from this peer exchange work on next steps. Based on participants' feedback, it is anticipated that priority topics that need to be further explored are:

- Successful regional partnerships
- Consistent communication strategies
- Seamless data analysis and communication methods

Further, NOCoE plans on continuing to deliver "agile" peer exchanges.