

I-90 Closure Planning Study Traveler Information System

Discussion Notes

*Friday, April 13, 2018
11:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.
Phone Conversation*

ATTENDEES

- Brandi Hamilton (MDT Traveler Information System)
- Jeff Hochmuth (CDM Smith)

PURPOSE OF CONVERSATION

This meeting served as an opportunity for CDM Smith to understand current and planned corridor and statewide traveler information system capabilities.

TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

Background

Jeff Hochmuth provided a quick overview of the project, although Brandi Hamilton had passing knowledge of the project.

Brandi explained that the 511 system for Montana was created and has been maintained by MDT staff – both her group and the MDT IT staff. She added that the MDT.gov site does have a truckers page, although the focus is more on permitting and restrictions than real time information.

Current Operations

The 511 web page had over 10 million hits this past winter. Brandi believes that a lot of truckers continue to call 511 as it is more of a national norm.

Construction information is entered manually every week. Project managers are supposed to update if there are any changes, although compliance is sporadic. During winter, snow plow drivers report conditions through the MDT radio dispatch center. The information is not automated but is updated within minutes.

Known Issues

Brandi stated that without a central traffic management center – a place dedicated to collecting traffic information – it is difficult to keep the information current. During the winter (typically November to the first week of April) the traveler information systems are staffed 24/7. Outside of winter, Brandi and one staff are on call to remotely add events as needed.

The 511 system is Oracle based and “near the end of its life”. The maintenance division just purchased a major system to upgrade their asset management system.

Statewide communications is an issue. There are many passes and valleys with no cellular or radio coverage. Fiberoptic cable statewide is too expensive for the small amount of traffic. Crowdsourced information such as Google and Waze are also sporadic due to the lack of coverage and lack of “crowds” in a large rural state.

Planned Efforts

Brandi added that the Motor Carriers Service division of MDT is creating a truck routing software application. She is not sure if it will have real time information included.

Brandi is pursuing federal funding for upgrading the traveler information system. If state funded, she would need legislative approval. They are trying to use FHWA highway safety planning funds and already have federal approval but now need to obligate the funds. The money may be used to purchase and modify an off the shelf traveler information system or may be used to pay MDT staff to create.

MDT does work some with the Western Transportation Institute out of University of Montana (Steve Albert). Brandi is also the MDT representative for the Northwest Passage coalition. Some of the other states in NW Passage have citizen reporting systems that allow everyday citizens to call in or use an app to report events and conditions. This has been fairly successful. Montana may try to implement this system.

This study may support the need for traveler information system improvements; Brandi will have an opportunity to comment on the draft study report.