

# Peer Exchanges

Planning for a Better Tomorrow

FHWA/FTA  
Transportation Planning Capacity Building

*Transportation Planning Capacity Building Program*

– Peer Roundtable Report –

## “Forming a Transit and Rail Division in a State Department of Transportation”

- Event Location:** Denver, CO
- Event Date:** January 20-22, 2010
- Roundtable Host:** Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT)
- Roundtable Participants:** Federal Transit Administration (FTA), Office of Systems Planning  
Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT)  
Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT)  
Washington Department of Transportation (WSDOT)  
U. S. Department of Transportation (DOT), Volpe National Transportation Systems Center (Volpe Center)

## **I. Introduction**

This report highlights key recommendations and best practices identified at a peer exchange on how to form a transit and rail division within a state Department of Transportation (DOT). The peer exchange was sponsored by the [Transportation Planning Capacity Building \(TPCB\) Peer Program](#), which is jointly funded by the [Federal Highway Administration](#) (FHWA) and [Federal Transit Administration](#) (FTA).

The TPCB Peer Program advances the state of the practice in multimodal transportation planning nationwide by organizing, facilitating, and documenting peer events to share noteworthy practices among state Departments of Transportation (DOTs), Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO), transit agencies, and local and Tribal transportation planning agencies. During peer events, transportation planning staff interact with one another to share information, accomplishments, and lessons learned from the field and help one another overcome shared transportation planning challenges.

The report summarizes key information shared during the peer exchange and is organized in the following sections:

- I. Introduction**
- II. About the Peer Exchange**
- III. Background on Colorado DOT's Request for a Peer Exchange**
- IV. Key Recommendations and Best Practices for Creating a New Transit and Rail Division**
  - A. Overarching Recommendations for Integrating a New Transit and Rail Division within an Existing state DOT
  - B. Initial Recommendations for Forming a New Transit and Rail Division
  - C. Longer-Term Recommendations for Forming a New Transit and Rail Division
- V. Conclusion**
- VI. Next Steps for Colorado DOT**
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## II. About the Peer Exchange

The Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) hosted this TPCB peer exchange at its headquarters in Denver from January 20-22, 2010. The goal of the peer exchange was to explore lessons learned and recommendations for how to integrate a new transit and rail division within an existing state DOT in order to promote multimodal statewide transportation planning and programming. The selected peer agencies were:

- Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT)
- Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT)
- Washington Department of Transportation (WSDOT)

Two representatives, one from the executive level and another from the technical arena, were invited to participate from each peer agency. An executive-level representative could address issues of forming a new division, related policy-issues, and working with political officials, stakeholder groups, and the public. A technical expert could address the day-to-day issues of program management, technical assistance provision, and grant oversight. Peer representatives covered a wide range of issues with CDOT leadership and staff during the 2-day exchange, including statewide transportation planning, project programming and prioritization, project development and implementation, program evaluation and performance measurement, and FTA grant management (*see full event agenda in Appendix A*). Peer representatives also attended and presented information during a 3-hour meeting of an Interim Transit and Rail Advisory Committee, which is overseeing the creation of a new transit and rail division at CDOT.

The Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Washington state DOTs were selected as appropriate peers for CDOT's request based on the following criteria:

- Existence of a DOT division/s that oversee public transit, passenger, and/or freight rail.
- Adopted state rail plan.
- Experience overseeing a mix of urban, rural, and community transit systems.
- Documented efforts to promote livability, sustainability, and multimodal planning and project development.

## III. Background on Colorado DOT's Request for a Peer Exchange

In May 2009, Colorado Governor Bill Ritter signed Senate Bill 09-094 (SB 94), which required that CDOT create a "transit and rail division" in order to more effectively advance public transportation and rail opportunities statewide. The new division will be responsible for planning, developing, operating, and integrating future transit and rail service into the statewide transportation system, as well as coordinating with current service providers statewide to improve efficiency and access to existing transit and rail service.

SB 94 also established a special interim Transit and Rail Advisory Committee to advise the Colorado Transportation Commission and CDOT staff on:

1. An initial focus for the transit and rail division.
2. A long-term advisory structure for the division.

The 16-member Interim Advisory Committee includes representatives of Colorado transportation planning regions,

**Colorado Governor Bill Ritter signs SB94 into law.**



Source: Colorado DOT

cities and counties, the rail freight industry, both urban and rural transit providers, and the statewide transit association.

CDOT requested a peer exchange to gain input and advice from agencies with existing rail or transit divisions situated within a state DOT. Recommendations from the selected peers were shared with CDOT staff and the Interim Advisory Committee to plan and establish a structure and vision for CDOT's new transit and rail division.

Peer representatives were asked to focus discussion on the following key questions during the exchange:

- What is a desirable structure for a new transit and rail division?
- What qualifications and skills should an effective Director and new staff for the Division possess?
- What types of planning should the new division focus on (e.g., transit, commuter rail, high-speed rail, freight, human service transportation)?
- What are the most important steps the division could take in the near-term to demonstrate its value for advancing statewide transit and rail?
- What are the most important steps the division could take to create a long-term vision for multimodal statewide transportation in Colorado?

#### **IV. Key Recommendations and Best Practices for Creating a New Transit and Rail Division**

During the two-day exchange, peer agency staff shared experiences and lessons learned from their respective state DOTs with CDOT staff and the Interim Transit and Rail Advisory Committee. The following section summarizes key recommendations that emerged from these discussions. Where applicable, best practice examples are also described to illustrate how the participating peer agencies are addressing key recommendations in their respective state contexts.

Three types of recommendations were discussed by peer representatives during the exchange:

- A. Overarching recommendations for integrating a new transit and rail division within an existing state DOT.
- B. Initial recommendations that should be considered within the first one to two years of creating a new transit and rail division.
- C. Longer-term planning and organizational development recommendations for creating a new transit and rail division.

##### **A. Overarching Recommendations for Integrating a New Transit and Rail Division within an Existing State DOT**

Peer presenters made several overarching recommendations, which apply to both initial and longer-term planning and organizational development considerations for forming a new transit and rail division at CDOT.

**Build on the agency’s current strengths.**

Peer agencies recommend that CDOT assess its current assets (e.g., staff, resources, finances, political will, public attitudes) and plan for how to build on them. Peers also recommended that CDOT not lose sight of what it has already accomplished with transit, rail, and multimodal planning, because that is the new transit division’s base.

**Focus on longevity and adaptability.**

Participating peer agencies suggested that CDOT strive to build a foundation that is strong enough to weather political changes, the turnover of administrations, and emerging policy issues. It is critical to establish and build staff relationships within and across organizational divides to provide resilience for times when leadership changes or organizational re-structuring occur. Develop a strong set of core programs that provide value to key constituencies and stakeholders, while remaining flexible enough to respond to changing needs and conditions.

**Invest in strategic relationships.**

The importance of relationships with key public and private stakeholders to partner on projects and build public and political support cannot be overemphasized, especially when initial funding for a new division is limited or uncertain. Building strong inter-departmental relationships is another important step for CDOT to take because it may not be possible, or even desirable, to bring all transit, rail or freight-related employees of the state DOT into the new transit and rail division.

**Focus on identifying potential transit and rail markets.**

Identify what the division’s transit and rail markets are, what each market’s needs are, and how the new division can be structured to best meet those needs. What are the strategic communications and program development directions CDOT can take to capture those markets? Remember that transit and rail market needs and opportunities will differ across different modes (e.g., intercity rail, freight rail, fixed-route transit, inter-city bus, community transportation providers).

**B. Initial Recommendations for Forming a New Transit and Rail Division**

Peer representatives made the following initial recommendations to help focus work during the first one to two years of CDOT’s new transit and rail division. Where applicable, best practices from peer agency presentations are included to highlight specific examples of how these recommendations are addressed at the three state DOT peer agencies.

**Develop a strategic plan for the division.**

According to PennDOT, WSDOT, and ODTA, it is important to develop and publish a strategic plan that presents a long-term vision and goals for the division within the first 6-9 months of its creation. Then the division could conduct an inventory to assess current capacities relative to long-term goals and identify short term actions the division can take to build towards its long-term vision. The division should establish performance measures and milestones for the first 1 to 2 years in the strategic plan (see table to right). It is also important to periodically evaluate milestones to measure progress and demonstrate that goals are met. Progress should be shared with the state legislature, any relevant stakeholders, the public and the media.

**Example of a Strategic Plan Check List**

| Strategic Goal  | Milestone   |
|---|-------------|
| Hire Director   | 2 months    |
| Complete 5-year Strategic Plan                            | 6-9 months  |
| Restructure FTA grant program management                  | 9-12 months |
| Develop performance measures for transit grant management | 9 months    |
| Release State Rail Plan (consultant)                      | 1-2 years   |

**When hiring new staff, seek passion, adaptability, and people skills in addition to technical expertise.**

Dynamic leadership is desirable, but cannot carry organizational change on its own without support staff that are committed to working together to advance division goals. Flexibility and adaptability are important staff characteristics, as jobs will change to meet emerging needs and conditions in a new division. It is important to ensure that any potential new staff member has strong technical skills, but the peer representatives cautioned against making hiring decisions based solely on technical expertise. Success for a new division will be built on communication and relationship-building.

**Build on existing capacity by identifying existing strengths.**

Thinking broadly will be important over the long term. For the short-term, peer agencies recommended that the division staff remain focused on tasks that the division can actually accomplish in order to demonstrate the value of its work. The following questions were offered for consideration in helping to identify the foundation on which future accomplishments will be built:

- What skills related to transit and rail experience exist within the current staff?
- What FTA programs or other transit funding sources does the state DOT already manage/oversee?
- What type of rail and transit planning is already taking place within the state DOT?
- Does the state DOT have existing relationships with public and private transit and rail providers throughout the state?
- Are there any multi-state transit or rail projects currently under consideration?

It is by building on the current value of existing staff and programs that a new division can develop the capacity and earn the legitimacy to take on larger, higher-profile, longer-term projects.

**Seek a dynamic and visionary leader.**

Dynamic leadership helps set the tone for longer-term success. Peer agencies stressed the importance of having a leader who is involved as early as possible in crafting the vision for the division and tracking initial accomplishments. Ideally a new Director will have the skills necessary to build relationships both inside and outside the DOT, and the experience to make difficult decisions. Characteristics to look for include:

- Experience in strategic thinking and coalition building
- Skilled in inter-personal relationships
- Entrepreneurial
- Ability to take risks and make tough decisions that positively advance the division/program

**Develop and release a statewide passenger rail plan**

A statewide passenger rail plan can be an invaluable tool to generate energy and enthusiasm for the future of the new division. Peer agencies recommend that the plan be concise, visually appealing, easy to understand, and written to appeal to a wide range of readers. It should include a needs assessment of where the state DOT is today and articulate a high-level vision for a future rail system statewide, as well as identify the major steps needed to get there. A state rail plan can be used to generate interest and political support for not only passenger rail, but freight rail, supportive transit investments and feeder service, and other multimodal projects that support the development of a comprehensive multimodal transportation system. Ohio DOT noted that the development of its Ohio Hub Rail Plan, for example, served as a critical outreach tool and a basis for the passenger elements of the full State Rail Plan.

**Best Practice Example:** ODOT's [Ohio Hub Rail Plan](#) explores opportunities for regional passenger rail and high-speed rail in Ohio and has been an important step to support

more multimodal transportation planning statewide. ODOT has used it as a critical outreach tool for gaining public attention and developing political support to resume passenger rail service through the state, and enhancing freight rail capacity for the movement of goods. Specifically, the plan articulates a vision for improving inter-city Amtrak passenger rail service to connect all the major cities on the “3C corridor” of Cleveland-Columbus-Cincinnati. The Ohio Hub Rail Plan also serves as a base for the passenger elements of the recently released [Ohio Statewide Rail Plan](#).

**Ohio Hub Rail Network Plan**



Source: Ohio DOT

**Best Practice Example:** WSDOT’s [Long-Range Plan for Amtrak Cascades](#), published in 2006, provides a long-range vision for intercity passenger rail in Washington State. WSDOT staff reported that planning documents such as this have been critical to gain the public support and political will necessary to develop intercity passenger rail service in Washington. A [2009 Performance Report](#) provides additional information about trends in ridership and on-time performance along the corridor.

**It is important to demonstrate the value of early investments, even if they are modest.**

Developing consistent communications highlighting the value of the division’s early investments will raise awareness and help to establish momentum for continued transit program and project development. Peer agencies recommend that CDOT seek opportunities to showcase short-term achievements, even those with modest funding, to demonstrate success and bolster support for future, more substantial investments. For example, the division could create a new competitive grant program for purchasing hybrid paratransit vehicles and invite local media, community-based organizations, and civic leaders to host a ribbon cutting ceremony to launch new “clean, green service for seniors.” Events such as this can help the rail and transit division gain greater exposure for its early programs, while building positive political will for partnering with key stakeholders on future projects.

**C. Longer-Term Recommendations for Forming a New Transit and Rail Division**

Peer presenters made the following longer-term recommendations for CDOT’s new transit and rail division. Best practices from the peer agencies are noted where applicable.

**Invest in larger-scaled projects that engage the public and build toward the division’s long-term goals.**

Larger-scale projects will help to raise public awareness of rail and transit, and build towards the new division’s long-term goals by creating primary infrastructure that can support auxiliary services and investment in the future. For example, peers observed that a major infrastructure investment or upgrade along a transit corridor can help to spur the development of feeder service in surrounding communities to support it moving forward. When identifying appropriate larger-scale projects, it is important to focus on projects that the division can accomplish. Successful completion of projects on this scale will help to capture broad public attention and bolster support for other major multimodal projects and initiatives around the state. As the best practice below shows, PennDOT has found that the major capital upgrades made on the Keystone Line lead to ridership gains and greater public awareness of and use of rail as a transportation option statewide.

**Best Practice Example:** One of PennDOT’s major transit initiatives has been reviving passenger rail service along the Keystone Line, which runs from Harrisburg to

Philadelphia, and then along the Northeast Corridor to New York City. PennDOT partnered with Amtrak to have the line designated as a commuter corridor, invested in capital improvements to increase speeds to 110 miles per hour, delivering premium high speed rail service. PennDOT continues to contract with Amtrak to provide enhanced commuter service along the line, and has recently launched a major marketing campaign called "[Catch the Keystone](#)". PennDOT has accomplished the following:

- Significant ridership resulted in this corridor becoming the 4th busiest Amtrak route,<sup>1</sup> with the Keystone being one of the three regional corridors in the Amtrak system to carry over one million passengers;
- Service was expanded by 18 percent from 134 trains per week to 158 trains per week<sup>2</sup>, many of which also provide service to New York City; and
- One-way trip times between Harrisburg and Philadelphia have been reduced to 1 hour and 15 minutes. The same one-way trip takes more than 2 hours by car.

Based on these successes, PennDOT is now evaluating rail investments to increase the speed along the Keystone Line to up to 125 miles per hour, which will increase competitiveness and help expand public awareness and use of rail options statewide.

**Use data and evidence to demonstrate the value of the division's work.**

At the outset of creating a new division, DOT staff will be able to share success stories to gain support, but over the long-term the legislature and the public will require more rigorous data and evidence to demonstrate the value of the state DOT's multimodal transportation work. Each individual agency's reporting and regulatory requirements will guide what performance measures will best fit the agency's needs. The transit focused performance measures required by the National Transit Database (NTD) can serve as a starting point in the development of a comprehensive performance measurement system. Peer representatives emphasized the importance of framing performance measurement as an opportunity for improvement and growth, rather than a system of penalizing poor performance.

***Anecdotal success stories may gain initial support, but data and evidence will be necessary to demonstrate the value of a new division over the long-term.***

**Best Practice Example:** ODOT's [Office of Transit](#) developed a public transit index (PTI) tool that establishes specific performance metrics that transit providers in Ohio must use to track progress towards attaining statewide performance goals. The PTI is not used for funding purposes, but to help track performance and support continuous improvement. ODOT staff set performance goals and work with transit agencies to provide the technical assistance and support that transit agencies need to attain them. ODOT staff revise goals and metrics in the PTI on a periodic basis, as new data become available or as past goals are attained.

**Best Practice Example:** WSDOT has instituted performance measures throughout its programs to support continued improvement and demonstrate the value of state and Federal investments in transit and rail. For example, the [Regional Mobility](#) program requires that all funded projects adopt performance measures (e.g., reduced private vehicle miles travelled [VMT] and reduced private vehicle trips) and also requires that project sponsors continue reporting on program usage and vehicle trip reduction for 4 years after project completion. WSDOT's [Commuter Trip Reduction](#) program measures and reports on reduced trip performance using biennial surveys at worksites with 100 or more employees who commute during morning peak hours.

<sup>1</sup> Source: Amtrak National Facts, [www.amtrak.com](http://www.amtrak.com)

<sup>2</sup> Source: PennDOT Office of Transit

**Best Practice Example:** Pennsylvania's Act 44, passed in 2007, recognized the importance of maximizing public transportation investments and mandated that the State conduct performance reviews, evaluate transit system performance, and publish performance information annually. PennDOT's Bureau of Public Transportation (BPT) prepares a [Pennsylvania Public Transportation Annual Performance Report](#) that provides statistics on each transit system and highlights major trends and performance accomplishments for all transit and rail systems within the Commonwealth. The BPT has also consolidated performance reporting through its electronic grants management system. The BPT is currently using the performance data it has collected to develop transit agency peer groups statewide, which measure agency performance in relation to peer agency performance as well as performance trends for the agency itself. PennDOT will use this information to establish performance goals for each agency's next review in five years.

**Provide technical training and capacity building for regional transit providers.**

As illustrated within the three best practices noted below, a state DOT transit division can provide technical assistance and training to local and regional transit providers. Technical assistance can be delivered through the use of in-house DOT transit division staff, contractors or through grant awards.

**Best Practice Example:** A significant part of ODOT's [Office of Transit](#) mission is to support local transit agency capacity building through Quality Assurance Reviews (QARs). The QARs function in the same manner of a triennial review, which is an oversight mechanism utilized by the FTA. ODOT's QARs allow headquarters-based Office of Transit staff to work in the field and better understand local contexts and transit operating conditions. During QARs, ODOT staff review materials and discuss questions with transit agency staff within the following categories:

- Administration and Planning
- Financial Management
- Human Resource Management
- Service Delivery
- Fleet Management
- Facility Maintenance (*applies only to FTA/ODOT-funded facilities*)
- System Safety, Security, & Vehicle Reliability
- Regulatory Compliance

ODOT sees the QARs as an opportunity to identify additional technical assistance needs at the local level and support transit grant-recipients. During the QARs, ODOT staff compile and share best practices among transit agencies, which enhances the community of practice and fosters peer learning statewide.

**Best Practice Example:** WSDOT's [Public Transportation Division](#) (PTD) supports Regional Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPOs) throughout the state by providing funding to develop a local Human Service Transportation (HST) plan. The HST plans identify local needs and opportunities that, in turn, help to guide PTD funding, program, and technical assistance decisions. The PTD also requires that each region develop a 6-year transit capital improvement and asset management plan. PTD staff then provide the technical assistance and support necessary to help regions complete their plans.

**Best Practice Example:** PennDOT maintains an on-call technical assistance contract to address requests for support from transit grantees and local agency partners on

planning, environmental review, construction, auditing, and other technical assistance needs. PennDOT staff serve in a centralized oversight role and work with on-call contractors to respond to transit agency needs. PennDOT has found the contract to be an extremely effective mechanism for responding quickly to grantee needs and providing value for local agencies, stakeholders, and state government.

**Develop a long-term strategy for securing additional transit and rail funding.**

It is critical to identify stable sources of funding for capital projects, as well as ongoing maintenance and operations for transit and rail. A dedicated funding source, as described in the Pennsylvania best practice below, can help provide stability in the planning and programming for future transit projects. A visually compelling, easy to understand long-range plan or vision document can be an important tool to conduct outreach and build support for the funding needs of rail and transit projects. The new division can then build on that support to establish the funding to deliver projects. Dedicated transit and/or rail funding will not only enable new projects to move forward, but may also help to create the financial basis for integrating multimodal transportation planning throughout the DOT.

**Best Practice Example:** In 2007, the Pennsylvania Legislature passed [Act 44](#), legislation which established a long-term dedicated funding source for transportation investments statewide. This included the creation of a Public Transportation Trust Fund (PTTF) that allocates approximately \$775 million in transit operating assistance and \$125 million in transit capital assistance each year. Act 44 also authorized and PTTF funds a program which provides an 85 percent subsidy for persons with disabilities for transit rides outside an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) service area. In addition, the state allocates \$150 million of state lottery funds towards programs that subsidize transit for all seniors (65+). Act 44 transportation program management principles base funding on performance and accountability at the state and local levels.

**Earn trust through the use of a transparent decision-making process.**

Each peer agency stressed the importance of keeping their state legislature fully apprised of decision-making processes, as well as building credibility with stakeholder groups and the public. Gaining input from the public and ensuring open and transparent decision-making will help to build confidence and trust in the work of both the division and the DOT at large.

**Best Practice Example:** WSDOT has invested significant resources to develop a fair and transparent approach to awarding transit grants. Nearly all state and Federal funds are combined into one consolidated grant program that awards funding on a single, two-year grant cycle. The evaluation criteria are clearly articulated in the [transit grant application package](#) on the Public Transportation Division's (PTD) website. Each proposal is compared against all other proposals to ensure that only the most qualified applications rise to the top. The evaluators represent a diverse range of expertise (e.g., finance, operations, human service transportation) to enable a more balanced review.

**Best Practice Example:** In 2008, Ohio's Governor convened a [21<sup>st</sup> Century Transportation Priorities Task Force](#) to engage the public and develop a multimodal long-range vision for the state's transportation future. The effort has led to unprecedented levels of public engagement and will result in the most integrated, multimodal long-range plan ever released by ODOT, the [Go Ohio Transportation Futures Plan](#).

**Seek opportunities to promote transit and rail planning throughout the DOT organization.**

A transit division is just one part of a multimodal state DOT. All peer agencies agreed that it is important for any transit division to work with the other modes to ensure that transit and rail are well represented in the planning and programming process to meet the state's multimodal transportation needs. The four best practices demonstrate how the transit division staff can play a

key role in working with other modes and divisions throughout the DOT to develop a coordinated state transportation investment plan that includes transit and rail components.

**Best Practice Example:** WSDOT locates its [commute trip reduction](#), [vanpool investment](#), and [regional mobility](#) programs alongside transit programs in the Public Transportation Division (PTD) to realize synergies among these programs. WSDOT has also made the PTD the agency co-lead on statewide sustainable transportation and climate change initiatives. WSDOT believes that in order to make an impact on climate change, trip reduction, transit, and alternative transportation strategies must be coordinated and leveraged more effectively across modes. To that effect, the PTD facilitates a working group that works closely with WSDOT's planning and highway divisions to integrate transit and construction traffic management strategies throughout highway planning, programming, design, and construction phases.

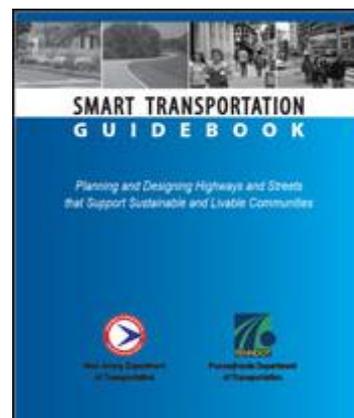
***WSDOT has found that it can complete highway construction faster and cheaper when transit service and other construction traffic management strategies are integrated into the process.***

**Best Practice Example:** ODOT recently restructured to create a more direct linkage between transit and planning. The reorganization placed the Office of Transit in the same division as the Office of Multimodal Planning and established a transit planner position in the Office of Multimodal Planning.

**Best Practice Example:** At WSDOT, the Division of Strategic Planning and Programming prepares the [Washington Transportation Plan](#) (WTP), which is the state's long-range transportation plan. Public transportation planners are located in WSDOT's Public Transportation Division (PTD), however. This organizational structure reflects the fact that the PTD serves as WSDOT's primary liaison to transit agencies, trip reduction and other public transportation programs. As such, it streamlines coordination for outside organizations. It also requires collaboration among WSDOT divisions. To ensure proper coordination, the PTD assigns a public transportation division staff member as a transit liaison to the WTP. The transit liaison helps to foster communication and build working relationships between the two divisions, and is responsible for ensuring that new transit projects and developments are included in the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP)..

**Best Practice Example:** In 2008, PennDOT partnered with the New Jersey DOT to develop a [Smart Transportation Guidebook](#), which provides guidance on how to design highways and streets that support sustainable, livable communities and encourage usage of alternative modes. It provides information on integrating bicycle and pedestrian facilities in roadway design, improving transit stops and accommodations, landscaping and street-scaping, traffic calming measures, and surrounding land-use development. The Guidebook received a [Transportation Planning Excellence Award](#) from the U.S. DOT and has been adopted into PennDOT's design manual practice series for use by PennDOT engineers.

Cover of the PennDOT Smart Transportation Guidebook



Source: PennDOT

### **Position the division to respond to emerging issues and Federal initiatives.**

Each peer agency stated the importance of having enough flexibility built into the structure of the new division to be able to take advantage of emerging opportunities, needs, and state or Federal policy initiatives. Peers suggested that CDOT position the transit and rail division as a leader on issues of livability, sustainability, and multimodal transportation planning and a convener of DOT divisions across modes and project development phases.

**Best Practice Example:** PennDOT created a livable communities grant program with Federal funds in 2009 and evaluated proposals on criteria that mirror the goals of the Federal [Sustainable Communities Partnership](#). \$600 million in project proposals were received for the \$60 million that PennDOT had in available funding. Final selections represented a range of urban, small urban, and rural projects and approximately 30 percent of the awarded funding was used for transit projects.

**Best Practice Example:** WSDOT's Public Transportation Division has been designated as an agency-co-lead on Sustainable Transportation. One of the program's legislatively mandated strategies is to reduce transportation sector greenhouse gas emissions. Greenhouse gas reduction strategies are based on a [four prong approach to address climate change](#) through the improvement of the transportation system efficiency; support for improved vehicle technology; lowering the carbon content of fuels; and increasing travel options to decrease vehicle miles traveled.

## **V. Conclusion**

This TPCB peer exchange assembled representatives of state DOTs in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Washington to discuss best practices, lessons learned, and recommendations for the Colorado DOT as it creates a new transit and rail division. Peer agency representatives shared overarching recommendations, initial recommendations, and longer-term recommendations for how to successfully create a new transit and rail division within an existing state DOT organization.

Overarching recommendations for creating a new transit and rail division are:

- Build on the agency's current strengths.
- Focus on longevity and adaptability.
- Invest in strategic relationships.
- Focus on identifying potential transit and rail markets.

Initial recommendations for creating a new transit and rail division are:

- Develop a strategic plan for the division.
- When hiring new staff, seek passion, adaptability, and people skills in addition to technical expertise.
- Build on existing capacity by identifying existing strengths.
- Seek a dynamic and visionary leader.
- Develop and release a statewide passenger rail plan
- Demonstrate the value of early investments, even if they are modest.

Longer-term recommendations for creating a new transit and rail division are:

- Invest in larger-scaled projects that engage the public and build toward the division's long-term goals.
- Use data and evidence to demonstrate the value of the division's work.

- Provide technical training and capacity building for regional transit providers.
- Develop a long-term strategy for securing additional transit and rail funding.
- Earn trust through the use of a transparent decisionmaking process.
- Seek opportunities to promote transit and rail planning throughout the DOT organization.
- Position the division to respond to emerging issues and Federal initiatives.

## **VI. Next Steps for CDOT's Transit and Rail Division**

The Interim Transit and Rail Advisory Committee completed its work and provided a final report and presentation to the Colorado Transportation Commission in April 2010. The report included a section on the TPCB Peer Exchange and cited the helpful information obtained from it, including recommendations regarding the desired attributes for the position of Director of the new CDOT Division of Transit and Rail.

The report also identifies initial focus areas for the Division and a proposed structure for a long term advisory committee. It is anticipated that the Director will be hired in July and the advisory committee would be formed by fall of 2010. A first year deliverable will likely be a strategic plan and vision for the Division along with the first list of grants and programs for the initial allocation of funds received through new state transportation legislation, called [FASTER](#).

## **VII. The FHWA/FTA Transportation Planning Capacity Building (TPCB) Program**

The [Transportation Planning Capacity Building \(TPCB\) Program](#) is a joint venture of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) that delivers products and services to provide information, training, and technical assistance to the transportation professionals responsible for planning for the capital, operating, and maintenance needs of our nation's surface transportation system. The TPCB Program website ([www.planning.dot.gov](http://www.planning.dot.gov)) serves as a one-stop clearinghouse for state-of-the-practice transportation planning information and resources. This includes over 70 peer exchange reports covering a wide range of transportation planning topics.

The [TPCB Peer Program](#) advances the state of the practice in multimodal transportation planning nationwide by organizing, facilitating, and documenting peer events to share noteworthy practices among state departments of transportation (DOTs), Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO), transit agencies, and local and Tribal transportation planning agencies. During peer events, transportation planning staff interact with one another to share information, accomplishments, and lessons learned from the field and help one another overcome shared transportation planning challenges.

## VIII. Appendix

### A. Agenda

*Wednesday January 20, 2010*

|           |   |
|-----------|---|
| 1:00-1:10 | Welcome   |
| 1:10-1:45 | Colorado DOT Background Information/Presentation                              |
| 1:45-2:00 | Facilitator Ground Rules and Expectations                                     |
| 2:00-2:30 | Showcase Presentation – Ohio DOT  |
| 2:30-2:40 | <i>Break</i>  |
| 2:40-3:10 | Showcase Presentation – Pennsylvania DOT                                      |
| 3:10-3:40 | Showcase Presentation – Washington DOT  |
| 3:40-4:00 | <i>Break</i>  |
| 4:00-4:30 | Planning  |
| 4:30-5:00 | Project Development and Programming   |
| 5:00-5:30 | Program Development and Implementation  |
| 5:30-5:45 | Recap of the Day  |
| 5:45-6:30 | <i>Break</i>  |
| 6:30-8:30 | Dinner and Discussion on “How to Effectively Build Relationships within DOTs” |

*Thursday January 21, 2010*

|             |   |
|-------------|---|
| 7:45-8:00   | Debriefing  |
| 8:00-8:30   | Program Evaluation and Performance Measures   |
| 8:30-9:15   | Addressing and Responding to Passenger and Freight Rail within the State DOT Structure                        |
| 9:15-10:15  | Discussion with Regional Transportation Directors: The Pro's and Con's of Centralization and Decentralization |
| 10:15-10:30 | <i>Break</i>  |
| 10:30-11:45 | Managing the FTA Grant Program  |
| 11:45-1:00  | <i>Lunch and Preparation for Afternoon Session</i>  |
| 1:00 – 4:00 | Interim Transit and Rail Advisory Committee Meeting   |
| 4:00 – 5:00 | Committee Member Question and Answers/Open Forum  |
| 5:00-5:15   | Daily Wrap up   |

*Friday January 22, 2010*

|            |  |
|------------|--|
| 8:00-8:30  | Debriefing and Committee Meeting Recap             |
| 8:30-9:30  | Best Practices and Lessons Learned from State DOTs |
| 9:30-9:45  | <i>Break</i>                                       |
| 9:45-11:00 | Development of Action Plan and Next Steps          |
| 11:00      | <i>Closing/Adjourn</i>                             |

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### **C. Agency Websites and Resource Links**

Transportation Planning Capacity Building (TPCB) Program  
[www.planning.dot.gov](http://www.planning.dot.gov)

Transportation Planning Excellence Awards  
<http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/tpea/index.htm>

Federal Highway Administration  
<http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/>

Federal Transit Administration  
<http://www.fta.dot.gov/>

U.S. DOT Volpe National Transportation Systems Center  
<http://www.volpe.dot.gov/>

Pennsylvania DOT (PennDOT)  
<http://www.dot.state.pa.us/>

PennDOT, Bureau of Public Transportation  
<http://www.dot.state.pa.us/Internet/Bureaus/pdBPT.nsf/TransHomepage?openFrameset>

Keystone Corridor  
<http://www.catchthekeystone.com/>

PennDOT Smart Transportation Guidebook  
<http://www.smart-transportation.com/assets/download/Smart%20Transportation%20Guidebook.pdf>

Pennsylvania Public Transportation Association

<http://www.ppta.net/>

Pennsylvania Training Resource and Information Network

<http://www.penntain.net/>

Ohio DOT (ODOT)

<http://www.dot.state.oh.us/Pages/Home.aspx>

ODOT Office of Transit

<http://www.dot.state.oh.us/Divisions/TransSysDev/Transit/Pages/default.aspx>

Ohio Hub Rail Plan

<http://www.ohiohub.com/>

Ohio 21<sup>st</sup> Century Transportation Priorities Task Force

<http://www.dot.state.oh.us/groups/tft/Pages/default.aspx>

Go Ohio Transportation Futures Plan

<http://www.dot.state.oh.us/groups/goohio/Pages/default.aspx>

Washington DOT (WSDOT)

<http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/>

WSDOT Public Transportation Division

<http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/transit/>

WSDOT Regional Mobility Program

<http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/TDM/Mobility/>

WSDOT Commute Trip Reduction Program

<http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/TDM/CTR>

WSDOT Vanpool Investment Program

<http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/TDM/Vanpool/>

WSDOT Trip Reduction performance Program

<http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/TDM/TRPP/>

WSDOT Climate Change Initiatives

<http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/environment/climatechange/>

Washington Transportation Plan

<http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/planning/wtp/>