



RESEARCH SOLUTIONS

As leader of a regional AASHTO research committee, Iowa DOT fosters collaboration

Midwestern states have more in common than just their central location. With four distinct seasons, a mix of big cities and small towns, and like-sized transportation budgets, the states share similarities that provide a clear opportunity for collaborative problem-solving. As the leader of a transportation research cooperative in the mid-American region, Iowa DOT has helped these states strengthen their connections and leverage each other's research results through peer exchanges and an emerging regional technology transfer program.

BACKGROUND

Helping states find common ground on transportation-related issues is a goal of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO). As a national organization representing state departments of transportation (DOTs) from all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico, AASHTO is home to dozens of committees

that bring DOTs together on a variety of topics. For those working in transportation research, the Research Advisory Committee (RAC) serves as a network and forum for sharing ideas and addressing common challenges.

To further facilitate discussions among its member states, AASHTO RAC is organized into four smaller regional committees. Iowa and eight other Midwestern states—

Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, and Wisconsin—make up RAC Region 3.

PROGRAM

While all of the regional committees hold regular meetings and strive for effective interstate collaboration, Region 3 has a particularly successful track record. It has the fewest members of the four AASHTO

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“The DOTs in Region 3 all face similar challenges and opportunities. The more we can learn from each other and help each other out, the better off we’ll all be.”

— BRIAN WORREL,
Iowa DOT Research Program Manager



regions, which helps it operate nimbly. And having similar features helps the member states agree on common research goals and project ideas that provide value across the entire region.

The role of committee chair rotates among the member states every two years; since assuming the position in January 2019, Iowa DOT has made a point of finding new opportunities to help states work together.

SUCCESS STORIES

During Iowa DOT’s tenure as chair, the Region 3 members have identified simple changes to improve the states’ collaborative abilities.

- **Round-robin peer exchanges.** Understanding that meaningful collaboration is dependent on strong relationships, Iowa DOT hosted an in-person peer exchange in May 2019 that

simultaneously served to fulfill federal research funding requirements. Over the course of two days, representatives from seven of the nine Region 3 states gathered in Ames to share experiences and discuss opportunities for collaboration.

The event marked the first time many of the members had met face-to-face, and it offered a social aspect that’s difficult to replicate in a typical meeting held remotely. By encouraging

members to get to know each other in a less conventional setting, Iowa DOT hoped to break down any barriers that might prevent successful collaboration. The format proved so successful that a Region 3 SP&R peer exchange has become an annual event, with member states taking turns as host (Michigan DOT hosted in 2020).

- **Regional technology transfer program.** Effective communication and marketing efforts help state DOTs share promising research outcomes and transfer technologies from one agency to the next. This not only promotes research successes, but also helps states avoid unnecessary duplication—meaning valuable research dollars can stretch further. A new **project** funded by the National Cooperative Highway Research Program will help Region 3

states identify the various communication tools available—such as videos, webinars, articles, and newsletters—and provide guidance for how DOTs can maximize each medium’s impact. Through these efforts, every Region 3 member will have a better understanding of how to develop and deploy effective technology transfer strategies and make the most of the research conducted across the region. This project is slated for completion in 2022.

These initiatives are providing Region 3 members with additional resources to effectively work together—adding value for states across the Midwest.

IOWA BENEFITS

By collaborating with other state DOTs to develop and deploy transportation research with a collective impact, each RAC Region 3 member state is able to benefit from shared research results for a fraction of the project’s cost.

As committee chair, Iowa DOT has gained national visibility and furthered its reputation for innovative thinking. These efforts help secure Iowa’s role in shaping the trajectory of research across the country, which will be felt for years to come.

ABOUT THIS PROGRAM

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