

User's Guide to This Handbook

Where to start

This handbook is divided into eight focus areas. You may want to start with an area that addresses your agency's most pressing needs. You can also use the handbook's online capabilities to explore how these reform initiatives can work together, as well as how certain strategies can help to address multiple issues.

Focus Area 1: Revenue Sources

The era when fuel taxes alone could cover robust construction and maintenance programs is over, and funding transportation out of general revenue is equally problematic. DOTs need new sources of dedicated revenues, preferably tied to user fees.

Common DOT challenges addressed in this focus area:

- State DOT revenues depend on gas tax revenue, which is not keeping up with capital needs.
- Non-highway modes may be highly efficient, both for direct users and those traveling on congested roads, but dedicated revenues for these modes, especially for their ongoing operation, need to be identified.

Focus Area 2: Revenue Allocation and Project Selection

Scarce transportation dollars need to be spent where they do the most good. Many agencies have reformed project selection and formula funding processes for sub-state units of government, often tying proposed spending to state, departmental, and/or local goals and objectives. Such changes can save money and get needed projects off the ground faster.

Common DOT challenges addressed in this focus area:

- Transportation dollars are siloed, and it is hard to pursue some very cost-effective projects because of internal funding complexities.
- Political pressure dictates project selection and spending.
- Performance measures often focus on vehicle mobility rather than access, and they don't allow for easy comparison to other modes or demand-management solutions.

Focus Area 3: Pricing

Appropriate pricing strategies can raise revenues and manage demand, keeping costs down. On the other hand, when users do not see appropriate price signals, demand is artificially increased, resulting in more congestion and pressure for new capacity.

Common DOT challenges addressed in this focus area:

- States are unable to easily raise needed revenue through the traditional user fee, taxation of motor fuels.
- Pricing tools can help replace those revenues and provide appropriate price signals, but will involve new partnerships between DOTs and other stakeholders in many cases.

Focus Area 4: Increasing Transportation System Efficiency

It is often prohibitively expensive to add lane-miles to relieve congestion. Where dollars for capacity are available, expansions may run counter to community development and environmental goals, and may only induce more traffic. Faced with this challenge, agencies have come up with operational improvements and other ways to improve the efficiency of existing systems without major new capital investments.

Common DOT challenges addressed in this focus area:

- Uni-modal standards aimed at creating free-flowing traffic at peak times may require unrealistically big projects and, if used in isolation to determine priorities, may prompt projects that undercut economic and community development and other goals.
- Local street networks and state-owned arterials and freeways can work synergistically, or they can work at cross-purposes.
- Managing travel demand may be the most cost-effective and sustainable option, but DOTs traditionally do not have this capability.

Focus Area 5: Improving Options for Mobility and Access

State transportation departments are tasked with improving travel options and experiences for everyone, not just drivers. Sometimes walking, cycling, or public transportation can provide access to destinations more efficiently and cost-effectively than automobiles. These modes are critical to providing access to jobs, school, and other destinations for those who cannot drive.

Common DOT challenges addressed in this focus area:

- Transit makes sense in key corridors or parts of an urban area, but generally state DOTs do not operate transit systems or have a dedicated funding source to support locally owned systems;
- Walking and biking facilities can be very inexpensive, but they also require new ways of understanding land-use connections as well as cooperation with local units of government.

Focus Area 6: Providing Efficient, Safe Freight Access

With the emergence of just-in-time manufacturing and highly dispersed activity centers and markets, trucking has become a dominant freight mode. Increased truck traffic, in turn, adds wear and tear on infrastructure and can be a source of congestion and emissions. State DOTs with limited budgets cannot simply build and re-build highway capacity to cope with these problems. Many DOTs are responding to this reality by looking for innovative ways to help shippers move freight more efficiently and with less impact on infrastructure and communities.

Common DOT challenges addressed in this focus area:

- Shipping by rail often is cheaper and has lower impact on communities than does trucking, but most railroads are privately owned and may not cooperate with DOTs.
- Cities both present a bottleneck for through freight, whether on highways or by rail, and create a difficult environment for local pickup and delivery, with trucks competing with cars for scarce roadway and parking capacity.

Focus Area 7: Integrating Transportation and Land Use Decision-Making

A century ago, developers paid for streetcar lines when they developed new housing and commercial areas, so land use and transportation were by necessity considered together. As government took over transportation responsibilities, agencies wound up trying to respond as best they could to new development. At the same time, local zoning authorities increasingly separated commercial and residential areas, increasing the need for travel over longer distances. State DOTs' highway infrastructure, originally intended for intercity travel, became clogged with local travel. All of these trends have pushed transportation costs up significantly. Today, DOTs are working to reconnect land use and transportation in order to lower costs and improve community and economic development.

Common DOT challenges addressed in this focus area:

- DOTs lack authority over land use, and must work with local partners.
- Common practices by both transportation agencies and land use authorities, such as providing highways that induce inefficient development and requiring separation of uses, can lead to increased infrastructure and travel costs.
- Commonly employed mobility-related metrics ignore land use considerations and may result in decisions that run counter to community development goals.

Focus Area 8: Improving DOT Processes

State DOTs are well served when they work together to tap into their ingenuity and talent, pool resources, and identify affordable solutions to meet transportation needs. Setting appropriate goals and then working together to achieve them is vital to reforming processes, cutting costs, and strengthening state economies with innovative transportation projects.

Common DOT challenges addressed in this focus area:

- DOTs can support state priorities by setting meaningful goals that are measurable and useful for enacting policies and making day-to-day decisions, but many DOTs lack the technical resources or the decision-making authority to explore the connection between transportation and land use, economic development, and other state concerns in a meaningful way.
- Transportation agencies are expected to deliver more projects than ever before, and the environment in which projects must be delivered is increasingly challenging. The project development process used by many state agencies today is inefficient and unpredictable.