

National Accessibility Evaluation Technical Advisory Panel Meeting

September 28, 2015

10:00-11:00 CST

Present:

Farideh Amiri, Minnesota Department of Transportation
Deanna Belden, Minnesota Department of Transportation
Brian Gardner, Federal Highway Administration
Michael Henry, Arkansas Department of Transportation
Jessie Jones, Arkansas Department of Transportation
Peggi Knight, Iowa Department of Transportation
Lauren LeJeune, Florida Department of Transportation
David Levinson, Accessibility Observatory, University of Minnesota
Doug McLeod, Florida Department of Transportation
Laurie McGinnis, Center for Transportation Studies, University of Minnesota
Colleen O'Connor Toberman, Center for Transportation Studies, University of Minnesota
Peter Ohlms, Virginia Department of Transportation
Andrew Owen, Accessibility Observatory, University of Minnesota
Virginia Porta, Arkansas Department of Transportation
Rahul Srivastava, California Department of Transportation
Brenda Thomas, Center for Transportation Studies, University of Minnesota
Jean Wallace, Minnesota Department of Transportation
David Wasserman, North Carolina Department of Transportation

Welcome from MnDOT

Jean Wallace welcomed participants and thanked them for their commitment to the pooled fund project. She encouraged members to continue promoting this project to their colleagues.

Introductions

Brenda Thomas, project manager, led introductions of the research team, TAP members, and Center for Transportation Studies staff.

Project Overview

Andrew Owen shared an overview of the National Accessibility Evaluation. The project's goal is to produce datasets that measure job accessibility (at the Census-block level) by different modes of transportation within different time windows. Jobs will be categorized by industry and wage level.

Each pooled-fund member will receive datasets for their jurisdiction. This data will be shared in Shapefile and tabular formats; Owen encouraged members to contact him if they prefer a different format. Members are welcome to share their datasets with other partners (counties, MPOs, etc.). The Accessibility Observatory can also host public access to all of the datasets if members would like this; this can be discussed later in the project.

The project will produce multiple publications; one will be a national-level report highlighting major metropolitan areas and job access by auto and transit within each. Each partner will also receive reports customized to the partner's jurisdiction, broken down by counties, metropolitan areas, or other zones as requested by partners.

Each year, members will meet to review the project's methodology and deliverables, as well as explore more opportunities (modes, communication tools, destination types, etc.). The project will expand in scope each year and continue to provide new and interesting information.

Owen provided an updated project timeline. Task Two, collecting input data, is complete. Task Three, calculating the accessibility datasets, is in progress. Owen plans to have Tasks Four and Five as complete as possible before the January TAP meeting, though they are officially due in February and March, respectively.

David Wasserman asked whether the speed data licensed from TomTom will be shared with partners; Owen replied that the licensing agreement only allows use of speed data for use of accessibility datasets but not other distribution.

Ohlms asked what timeframes will be measured and reported, for instance, over the course of the morning rush hour. Owen responded that they anticipate having several time periods/increments. Partners may be asked for their input about the most important priority timeframes to measure.

McLeod inquired whether metro-area datasets will be based on the state/MPO/Census boundaries or the FHWA smooth boundaries. DOTs are required to report based on FHWA boundaries. Owen responded that while they've used Census boundaries in the past, this is flexible. He will reach out to partners to ask what boundaries they need to use when he reaches this point in the project.

McLeod asked about including bicycle and pedestrian modes. Owen is currently studying these for the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area and is open to studying them for other areas as the project and datasets allow.

Future TAP Meetings

Colleen O'Connor Toberman shared that the TAP will meet in person during the TRB Annual Meeting in January 2016. All TAP members participating on the call confirmed that they will be attending TRB. January 12 or 13 at 7:30 a.m. is being considered as a possibility, but O'Connor Toberman will poll members for their schedule preferences.

Other Business

Owen shared that he is also working on an FHWA project to study how accessibility metrics can be used as an evaluation within a planning context (for instance, comparing future development scenarios). He's seeking case studies for before/after analysis. Ideal studies would be significant build projects that are currently in progress or recently completed. He would like to study a variety of projects (highways, transit, and land use/development). Owen asked partners to share projects in their state that might serve as good case studies. The project report will include not only the accessibility analysis, but also discussion of how much effort it took to incorporate the analysis. Owen will send out an e-mail inviting partners' suggestions for case studies.

Owen reported that data access presents a challenge to the Accessibility Observatory's work. He asked partners to encourage their local transit agencies to publish GTFS transit schedule datasets, which offers a universal format that can be easily incorporated into data analysis. Some states offer a one-stop repository for agencies to publish this data. The Accessibility Observatory also offers GTFS dataset creation for interested transit providers.

Owen also noted that the pedestrian data relies on OpenStreetMap, which is an open-source program. Sometimes this means that the data doesn't get updated immediately when projects are completed. He encouraged agencies to include OpenStreetMap updates in their project plans when crosswalks, sidewalks, etc. are changed during a project. Owen offered to discuss this further with partners who may have questions.

Virginia Porta asked about land-use data. Owen responded that this dataset is based on Census data calculated from tax information. This provides national coverage, consistent format, and Census-level data.

Jessie Jones inquired why the current studies are focused on metropolitan areas. Owen shared that while focusing on metropolitan areas brought greater attention to the early reports, the ongoing project can and will measure accessibility in all environments, including rural, suburban, and urban. A consistent methodology allows for useful comparisons between different areas. He noted that small transit operators, such as those in rural areas, are less likely to have digital schedules available, so including these providers is an ongoing challenge.

Rahul Srivastava also spoke up in support of evaluating rural accessibility. Owen noted that the datasets provided to partners will include every Census block in the partner's jurisdiction, which includes every block in each partner DOT's state. Srivastava added that California Senate is considering a bill, SB-743, that could provide case studies for Owen's FHWA project.

Thomas thanked members for their participation. A follow-up e-mail will include meeting minutes and a poll about TRB meeting schedule preferences.