

**Department of Transportation
Office of the Secretary of Transportation (OST)**

**Plan for Increasing the Public Availability
of Information about Agency Operations**

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	1
1.0 Understanding Data in Demand	2
1.1 Review of Existing Practices	2
1.2 Improving Current Practices	3
2.0 Meeting Mandatory Posting Requirements.....	3
2.1 Congressional Reports	3
2.2 Congressional Testimony.....	3
2.3 Freedom of Information Act Request Logs	3
2.4 Freedom of Information Act Electronic Reading Room	4
3.0 Considering Additional Items for Posting	4
3.1 Funding and/or Apportionment Tables	4
3.2 Correspondence Logs.....	5
4.0 Protecting Sensitive Information from Release	5
5.0 New Initiatives	5
6.0 Conclusion	6

Executive Summary

This plan responds to a March 20, 2015 memorandum from the Department of Transportation General Counsel and Chief Information Officer that requires the Office of the Secretary of Transportation (OST) and each Operating Administration (OA) to develop a specific action plan for making “in demand” information publicly available on an ongoing basis. “In demand” refers to information that is frequently sought after, requested, popular, or of potential broad public interest.

The Deputy Assistant Secretary for Administration served as the Executive Champion for the development of OST’s action plan. He convened a cross-functional team of program owners and program support personnel that represent the wide array of missions and functions performed within OST. The team members worked within their respective program offices and together as a team to develop this plan.

OST has many responsibilities, including overseeing the formulation of national transportation policy, promoting intermodal transportation, and supporting the work of the Department’s OAs.

OST is demonstrating a clear commitment to transparency, continuously working to ensure that “in demand” information is available to the public. The webpages of the [Office of Drug & Alcohol Policy & Compliance](#), the [Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization](#), and [Governmental Affairs](#) all exemplify DOT’s determination to ensure that resources pertaining to regulations, grant information, budgets, testimony, relevant legislation, and much more are available to the public. These offices and others make these resources available in an easy-to-access, logical manner to ensure the navigation process is as positive and productive as possible for members of the public.

Though OST has demonstrated its commitment to transparency, it is working hard to continue making information as accessible as possible. Many offices plan to improve their sharing strategies, such as Government Affairs, which is working to ensure the posting of pertinent Congressional reports and testimony in a more comprehensive and timely manner. OST is also looking to ensure that FOIA request logs are posted more frequently. OST is also exploring the idea of posting correspondence logs.

Lastly, DOT’s many offices are working on an array of exciting new initiatives. This report elaborates on many of these efforts, including the Bureau of Transportation Statistics’ proposed National Transportation Atlas and DOT’s exploration into utilizing a new data set management system (DMS).

While there is always room to improve, this report demonstrates DOT’s strong commitment to continually serving its customers and stakeholders with relevant and timely information about OST.

1.0 Understanding Data in Demand

1.1 Review of Existing Practices

Currently, each OST program office maintains and posts its own information, working with its stakeholders and customers to identify data and information that should be made available. Following are several examples of current releases responding to a demonstrated need for the information.

The Office of Drug and Alcohol Policy and Compliance maintains a robust website (www.transportation.gov/odapc). The site delivers a ‘one-stop shopping’ experience that provides concise and current information about the Department’s drug and alcohol testing regulation, as well as additional information and resources regarding the five DOT OAs (FAA, FMCSA, FRA, FTA, and PHMSA) and the Department of Homeland Security’s United States Coast Guard that are subject to the Department’s drug and and/or alcohol testing regulations. The user-friendly site consists of searchable text in plain language on every page. Its content is organized by category to include information specifically directed at DOT-regulated employers and employees. Forms, regulations, brochures, videos, modal contact information, FAQs, and guidance documents are no more than ‘three clicks’ away, no matter where the user lands or is on the site. With an ear to the ground via emails, conferences, and responding to phone calls, the office staff learns quickly about trending requests for information. With this knowledge, the site is updated to push that “in demand” information to the forefront or to make it more visible. The site is maintained by the office staff which has direct access to making content changes at a moment’s notice. The site content is updated on an ongoing basis, ensuring that all information is current and accurate.

DOT’s grants website (www.transportation.gov/grants), which continues to be of high public interest, provides user-friendly answers to many previously asked questions. Some of the most popular pages on this website provide information about MAP-21—the funding and authorization bill that governs U.S. federal surface transportation spending, TIGER discretionary grants, highway grants, transportation safety grants, public transit clean fuel grants, and the Delphi eInvoicing System. The pages contain cross-modal information, including interactive maps, Excel spreadsheets describing all grant applications, guidance, etc. Within the grants website, the TIGER portion of the website was designed for the needs of potential applicants and other users. It is easy to navigate, well organized, and highly readable.

DOT’s Disadvantaged Business Enterprise Program website (<https://www.civilrights.dot.gov/disadvantaged-business-enterprise>) is also designed to serve a specific set of stakeholders. In February 2014, Secretary Anthony Foxx, in an open letter to the general public committing the Department to the goals and objectives of the Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) Program, established the Departmental Office of Civil Rights (DOCR) as the lead OST organization for the DBE program, designating the organization to work aggressively with partners, stakeholders and customers to implement comprehensive actions, with goals, objectives, and an efficient timeline to further improve and strengthen the DBE program. This open letter to the DBE community has led to significant increases in visits to DBE content residing on DOT’s website.

Finally, DOT's Office of Governmental Affairs' website (<http://www.transportation.gov/government-affairs>) includes links to Congressional testimony and to selected legislative proposals to Congress. These two links provide the public with a snapshot of the work currently taking place at the Department. In addition, the website provides a link to DOT's budget and performance information – giving the public more information on all of DOT's initiatives, financial health, and implementation and operation.

1.2 Improving Current Practices

OST program offices identify information and data in demand for posting by regularly reviewing (a) web analytics for its various web pages, (b) FOIA logs, (c) public, press, and Congressional inquiries to Public Affairs, Governmental Affairs, and program offices, and (d) other input received from stakeholders.

To ensure the continued relevance of public information made available across OST websites, the OST Executive Champion will host quarterly meetings of the OST cross-functional team (January, April, July, October) to discuss our progress in plan implementation, address any new information/data identified across the various request channels for potential proactive disclosure, hold OST offices accountable for meeting stakeholder needs, and discuss future initiatives.

2.0 Meeting the Specific Posting Requirements Mandated by DOT's Proactive Disclosure Program

2.1 Congressional Reports

Certain DOT Reports to Congress are currently posted on the Government Affairs web page. Each OA is in the process of addressing how it will post Reports to Congress in a complete, consistent, and timely manner. OST Governmental Affairs will link to each OA's Reports to Congress, so that up-to-date Reports to Congress, DOT-wide, should be readily available in the future. Governmental Affairs will monitor progress.

2.2 Congressional Testimony

Current and historical DOT-wide testimony is currently posted, and Governmental Affairs includes a link from its website (<http://testimony.ost.dot.gov/test/default.htm>). Pending the identification of resources, we will migrate this site to the main DOT website (<http://www.transportation.gov/>), adding capabilities to filter and find testimony by OA and year. We will make a determination by December 31, 2015 on how to complete the migration.

2.3 Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Request Logs

OST currently posts a log of its incoming FOIA requests on an annual basis in OST's FOIA Electronic Reading Room under Category 4 – Frequently Requested Records (<http://www.transportation.gov/foia/ost-electronic-reading-room>). Logs from fiscal years 2007 through 2014 are currently posted. We plan to post the FY 2015 FOIA request log by March 31, 2016. In addition, by June 30, 2016, we will evaluate posting of the logs more frequently.

2.4 Freedom of Information Act Electronic Reading Room

OST will ensure that statutorily-mandated FOIA Electronic Reading Room records are current for all four categories outlined in 5 U.S.C. § 552. This will be part of the accountability prong of the OST Executive Sponsor's quarterly meetings, and each OST program office will address any new or updated items that must be included in the Reading Room at those meetings. The FOIA Office will discuss any frequently requested records – appropriate for posting in Category 4 -- from the previous quarter and the team will discuss where the information should be posted – either directly to the Reading Room or on the program office website accessible through a link from the Reading Room.

3.0 Considering Additional Items for Posting

3.1 Funding and/or Apportionment Tables

OST operates a small number of financial assistance programs. The programs are operated from the Office of the Undersecretary of Transportation Policy, the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Aviation and International Affairs, the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Research and Technology, and the Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization. OST does not operate any formula grant programs, meaning OST does not post any funding or apportionment tables. OST does, however, make a significant amount of data and information available about its discretionary grants, loans, and subsidy programs.

Within the Office of the Undersecretary of Transportation, the Assistant Secretary for Aviation and International Affairs operates financial assistance programs for small communities. The Essential Air Service program (<http://www.transportation.gov/policy/aviation-policy/small-community-rural-air-service/essential-air-service>) provides information regarding community and airport eligibility, as well the subsidy amounts made available through the program. In addition, the Small Community Air Service Development Program (SCASDP) (<http://www.transportation.gov/policy/aviation-policy/small-community-rural-air-service/SCASDP>) provides information on funding opportunities, as well as past recipients. The Assistant Secretary for Transportation Policy provides information about funding availability, among other things, for the Transportation Investments Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) program at <http://www.transportation.gov/tiger>.

The Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization provides short-term lending assistance and other educational resources to assist businesses with bonding. Resources for applicants are available at <http://www.transportation.gov/osdbu/financial-assistance>.

Finally, the Assistant Secretary for Research and Technology administers the DOT University Transportation Centers (UTC) program and Intelligent Transportation Systems Joint Program Office (ITS JPO). The UTC program offers multi-year awards, and funding opportunities are infrequent. Nevertheless, information about UTCs is available at <http://www.rita.dot.gov/utc/>. The ITS JPO offers a number of discretionary funding opportunities, and information is available at <http://www.its.dot.gov/>.

3.2 Correspondence Logs

OST plans to begin posting a monthly log of significant correspondence received by the Secretary, beginning with correspondence received in January 2016. Each log will be posted as a Frequently Requested Record in Category 4 of the OST Electronic Reading Room within a reasonable period of time. Our goal will be to post the previous month's log within 30 days after the end of the month. We will evaluate the public's interest in these logs, using web analytics, after 6 months.

4.0 Protecting Sensitive Information from Release

Each OST office is responsible for ensuring that private, privileged, or other sensitive data (such as information protected by the Privacy Act or Trade Secrets Act) is not posted on its websites. Although OST offices apply a presumption of openness when considering what information is appropriate to post, that is not at the expense of protecting privacy, confidentiality, and security. Numerous OST offices advise on whether it is appropriate to post information and on the protection of sensitive data – such as information protected by the Trade Secrets Act – including the Office of the General Counsel, the Office of Public Affairs, the Office of Security, Intelligence, and Emergency Response, and others. DOT is in the process of updating its data and information management policy and, not later than March 31, 2016, will provide updated guidance to assist all DOT OAs and OST offices in making determinations about the sensitivity of information they release.

5.0 New Initiatives

Civil Rights Dashboard. During FY 2016, the Departmental Office of Civil Rights (DOCR) will provide the public with a DOT Civil Rights dashboard featuring tools for displaying and sorting information and statistics related to the Disadvantage Business Enterprise (DBE) program. The tool will be built into the website's existing architecture. Once DOT establishes an enterprise public dashboard solution, DOCR will maintain and expand its disclosure practices by migrating current and future information into the corporate solution.

Small Business Transportation Resource Center. During FY 2016, the Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization (OSDBU) began posting on its website all grant opportunities for private sector partners to serve as a Small Business Transportation Resource Center. OSDBU will post this award information after the Request for Proposal is published for the general public in the Federal Register.

Hearing Reports. The Office of Governmental Affairs will post Hearing Reports from the 113th and 114th Congresses where Departmental leadership participated in the hearings. These reports include testimony from the witness(es), statements from the Chair and Ranking Member, transcripts, Questions for the Record, biographies (if it is a nomination hearing), and other materials submitted for the record from Members; therefore, this would be a useful resource for the public to have when seeking additional information on a specific Congressional Hearing and/or a topic of their interest. The Hearing Reports, which are produced by the House and Senate Committees, will be posted within 30 days of the Committee publishing the final report. Prior Hearing Reports will be posted no later than June 30, 2016.

National Transportation Atlas. Under development by the Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS), this effort encompasses a major migration of BTS geospatial data to a cloud platform. With this transformation, geospatial analytical capabilities will exponentially increase, as larger individual datasets and greater breadth across modes will be available to both internal and external customers. With more specialized geospatial analysis capabilities than ever before, the National Transportation Atlas will enable better integration of BTS and Departmental geospatial datasets to, in turn, support more robust and dynamic decision making.

Visualization Tools. BTS is investing in visualization tools that will provide customers with a multitude of entirely new analytical options for decision making. These new tools will allow end users to establish and sustain relationships with the transportation datasets of their greatest interest, and to better monitor transportation system activity and trends. BTS will create specialized dashboards to provide the analyses most commonly requested by its customers, in a form that will update with each data refresh.

Data set management system (DMS). DOT is exploring a new DMS. The new functionality will allow DOT offices the ability to more easily publish and manage their data sets. The DMS will also provide DOT data users with new capabilities, including simple filtering and visualization capabilities, access to the data sets in a variety of formats, and access to application programming interfaces (APIs).

Fast-Track Action Committee on Research and Development Reporting Standards (FTAC-RDRS). On behalf of DOT, OST-R is participating in a newly formed White House initiative to improve the transparency of the Federal Science and Technology R&D enterprise through better data sharing. The FTAC-RDRS aims to develop an R&D reporting schema and data standard to enable automatic identification and submission of Agency budget and financial data on R&D to the Office of Management and Budget and National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics, an arm of the National Science Foundation which collects, analyzes and disseminates data on science and engineering R&D nationwide. The group will share best practices to assist with phased implementation of the R&D reporting standard, and establish a mechanism for future governance of the R&D reporting standard. Ultimately, this should yield a robust resource for identifying the state of Science and Engineering R&D across the Federal government, including DOT.

6.0 Conclusion

OST has a significant amount of data of interest to the public. Although the data it currently posts is relevant and abundant, there is room for improvement in the area of proactive disclosures. Many of the individual OST offices have already recognized this, and plan to provide more resources online to the public. As a result of these and future efforts, OST will post additional information and/or data in a user-friendly format.

The Deputy Assistant Secretary for Administration, OST's Executive Champion for this effort, will convene quarterly meetings of the cross-functional team of program owners and program support personnel initially assembled to work on this plan to share ideas and work to improve overall transparency throughout OST.