Hello, I’m Katie McDermott with the Center for Transportation and the Environment. This is CTE’s National Teleconference Series. The purpose of this live forum is to engage transportation and environmental professionals in a dialogue about current policy, research innovations and best practices.

Today’s program explores the results of the first national survey commissioned by the Federal Highway Administration to assess the relationships and performance of transportation and environmental resource agencies. The survey and regional pilot studies were conducted by the Gallup Organization, and they focused primarily on two points: first, how these agencies perceive the quality and scope of their interactions within the NEPA process, and second, how they assess their progress on related stewardship and streamlining initiatives.

Our panel today includes representatives from Federal Highways as well as other federal and state agencies, who will respond to some of the key survey results, and also discuss where we go from here in order to continue to improve the efficiency of NEPA, as well as the use of performance measures for stewardship and streamlining. We invite
you to discuss today’s topic and share your experiences with our panel. You can use the numbers on your screen to phone or fax in your questions at any time during today’s broadcast, or you can email us at cte_email@ncsu.edu.

After the broadcast, we invite you to participate in CTE’s web-based After-the-Program discussion forum, where you can continue to talk about the issues raised during the live broadcast with our panel and other audience members. That forum will begin at 4:00 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time today, immediately following this broadcast, and will remain active for two weeks.

A few more details before we get started. First, I hope you’ve already had an opportunity to download your program handout and a copy of the panelists’ PowerPoint slides from CTE’s website. If not, I encourage you to do so, using the URL address that will be appearing on your screen. From this site, you can also learn more about the Gallup survey that will be discussed today and how it was conducted, and you can replay this broadcast in its entirety or order a copy of the DVD or written transcript. We’d also like to get your feedback on today’s program, and to do that, if you are participating at one of the satellite downlink sites, you can fill out the evaluation form located in your handout and turn it in to your site coordinator before you leave today. Or if you are participating via the web, please complete the online evaluation form located on CTE’s website. We thank you very much for your attention to this.

At this time it is my pleasure to introduce your moderator, Mr. Hal Kassoff. Hal is a senior vice president with Parsons Brinckerhoff in their Washington, DC office, and he also serves as manager of their highway practice area. Before joining Parsons, Hal capped a 30-year career in public service as State Highway Administrator for Maryland, where he initiated a customer-driven, environmentally-responsible philosophy that continues within the department to this day. Most recently, Hal oversaw the development of a new guide on environmental stewardship practices in construction and maintenance, which was funded by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO). Hal, it is a pleasure to have you with us today. Welcome to the program.

Kassoff: Thank you, Katie. It is a pleasure to be here at the Center for Transportation and the Environment. I’d like to begin by introducing our panel and thanking you for having us here today. First we have Lucy Garliauskas, who is the division administrator with the Federal Highway Administration’s Rhode Island Division in Providence, Rhode Island. Next we have Alison Simon. Alison is the senior researcher with the Gallup Organization
who was primarily responsible for doing this survey. Then we have Brian Smith. Brian is the deputy director of Caltrans for planning and multi-mobile programs.

Smith: It’s a pleasure to be here Hal, thank you.

Kassoff: Thank you for being here, Brian. And we have Anne Miller. Anne is director of federal activities for the Environmental Protection Agency, and she works at the headquarters in Washington, DC. And then we have Carlos Mendoza. Carlos is the acting chief, Habitat and Resource Conservation Division, with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. And we’re really fortunate of having the commissioner of the New Hampshire Department of Transportation, Carol Murray. Carol is the commissioner in Concord, New Hampshire.

Murray: Thanks Hal, it’s a pleasure.

Kassoff: Today’s program will consist of five parts. First we’re going to hear from Alison about the Gallup survey on performance and communication between transportation and resource agencies. We’re going to hear about why it was done, how it was done and what were the key findings. Then we’ll hear from our panel, who’ll be giving their perspectives on the approach that was taken—how valuable it might be to those who participate on a daily basis in the transportation, development and environmental review process. We’re also going to be asking you, our viewing audience, to call in, to fax, to send emails—give us your questions and observations. We hope you will participate actively in this program. We plan to talk about what other performance measurement approaches, in addition to this survey, might be in use or might be planned to assess the effectiveness of environmental stewardship and environmental streamlining. And finally you’ll hear about where all of this is heading and some insights into the plans at Federal Highways for the next survey.

So let’s begin with an overview of the Gallup survey. We’re going to ask the person who had a lot of responsibility for kicking this off from the ground floor, Lucy Garliauskas. Now Lucy, who is currently division administrator in Rhode Island, was a manager with the Federal Highway Administration Environmental Staff in Washington at the time. So Lucy, tell us why did FHWA undertake this survey?

Garliauskas: Well, the fact of the matter is that, for many people, the reality is that it takes far too long to build a highway project. The perception is that it is the project development process, and particularly the environmental review and NEPA process where the process gets bogged down. Congress, the transportation industry and the public really emphasize the need to take a look at how we might expedite project delivery. And Congress puts a
spotlight on project delivery, but they also felt that we could delivery projects in a timely way without compromising environmental protection. And so, FHWA began to systematically evaluate and conduct research that would enable us to answer a number of questions related to the perception that it is the environmental process that bogs down transportation project delivery. We conducted research that answered the question, “How long does it actually take to conduct the process? How long should it take?” As well as, “What are the reasons for some of the impediments or delays?”

Today we’re really going to focus on the perception survey which attempts to address that last question, which is, “Why do we get bogged down in the process?” So FHWA felt that it was useful for us in the transportation industry to understand how our colleagues in the environmental agencies perceive how well we do our jobs, and vice versa.

It’s important to understand and to look through the lens of our colleagues in order to have an appreciation of the dynamics of process. We really are in a position, as individuals and professionals who are in the business of conducting the NEPA process, to make some judgment calls, to make decisions. And if we perceive each other as being either uninformed or not trustworthy or obstructionist, we are going to have to stop at every step of the process and question and verify and request proof beyond reasonable doubt before we move on to the next step. But if we perceive each other as having integrity, as being knowledgeable and as being faithful to the process and our statutory mandates, then we will accept decisions. We will be less likely to question. We will have established trust. And understanding the dynamics of the process and having that trust is really what will accelerate project delivery, more so, if not as much as, procedural and process efficiencies.

Kassoff: So what was in your mind as far as building trust? What was your expectation as to the contribution that this survey might make in that overall process of improving relationships?

Garliauskas: Well, our expectation for the study was to establish a baseline of trends and perceptions that would help us to determine if there are patterns or assumptions that would direct us to predominate issues, process or procedural ones, to solve either regional or across-the-board causes of delay. We hope to, at some point, go back and do a post-test, so to speak, to see if the number of initiatives and the number of activities that we have been implementing and working on collaboratively with the resource agencies has an effect or has an inference of an effect on our perceptions. Over the past five years, the Federal
Highway Administration has devoted a fair amount of investment to moving streamlining forward. Along with the seven cabinet agencies, we developed a National Memorandum Agreement. We have the Executive Order on Streamlining. There are a series of regional agreements. Streamlining workshops, collaborative decision making for NEPA, advancing better linkage between planning and NEPA. All of these initiatives have taken root.

And FHWA has billed environmental streamlining and stewardship into one of our top national strategic performance measures. As one of administrator Mary Peter’s top three vital few, we have mobilized a significant level of resources and effort to advance, not only environmental streamlining, but the environmental stewardship agenda. And as an example, FHWA has, as one of its performance goals, replacing wetlands impacted by federal aid projects at a ratio of 1.5 for every acre impacted.

The reality is that in 2004, we were able to replace two acres for every one acre of wetland impacted. We’ve also emphasized exemplary environmental initiatives. And many of these initiatives have taken root across the country, and they focus on significant restoration of wetlands. For example, over 1,600 acres in Illinois serve as a regionally-based restoration site that serves as a floodplain for the Illinois and LaMoine Rivers. Over 3,000 acres in Mississippi serve as preservation enhancement efforts in the Pascagoula River, whose basin is the largest un-dammed and un-channellized drainage system in the lower 48 states.

There are a number of other ecosystem preservation efforts in New Hampshire and North Carolina, as well as the Colorado Prairie Grass Initiative, that are just a few of the realities of transportation’s commitment to the environment. And we hope to translate that into a positive perception among our resource agency partners.

Kassoff: Great. Thank you for giving us the background and for setting the stage for the rest of the program. Alison Simon is the principle researcher with the Gallup organization responsible for doing this survey. So Alison, tell us about the survey. Who did you interview? How was it done? What were the most important findings?

Miller: Well Hal, for this survey Gallup interviewed federal, state and local government officials who work directly with transportation improvement projects in the National Environment Policy Act of 1969, or NEPA. Specifically, the survey queried respondents on their perceptions of putting the NEPA documents together. First and foremost, this was a perception study. We wanted to hear what perceptions NEPA officials had of each other during this integrative and collaborative process.
We designed two questionnaires in order to accomplish this: one where transportation officials rated their resource counterparts, and a second, where resource officials rated their transportation counterparts. The study ran from October 2002 through May of 2003. Respondents were able to take the survey either over the phone or on the internet. In total, we spoke with 655 transportation officials and 554 resource officials across the country. About one-third of them were managers and two-thirds were reviewers. Because we wanted respondents to discuss specific counterpart agencies that they worked with, we needed to decide which sister agency to have them rate. To decide, each respondent first chose a project that they had recently worked on, say a bridge reconstruction. And then they listed those agencies that they worked with on that bridge reconstruction.

For example, if we were on the phone with the transportation reviewer, he or she would list those resource agencies that had contributed to the NEPA document for that bridge reconstruction. Once we had those lists of players, Gallup then randomly chose one to focus the survey on. Keep in mind that respondents were free to choose whatever NEPA project they wanted. Gallup did not influence that decision at all.

Finally, managers in our survey only rated other agencies, not other projects. So their set of questions were much shorter than that of the reviewers.

Gallup interviewed transportation and environmental officials who had worked directly with a NEPA project in the past 90 days. We talked to managers and reviewers on both sides, what I call third-party NEPA reviewers—those folks who had something to contribute or had an interest, but did not necessarily contribute to the NEPA document itself, were not surveyed in this study.

So who was it that we spoke with? Well, on the transportation side, our respondents included officials within federal, state and local transportation agencies, again, if they had recently worked on a transportation improvement project involving NEPA. On the environmental or resource side, respondents included officials mostly from federal agencies, but from some state agencies as well. Again, if they told us that they had recently worked on a NEPA project.

The two questionnaires, one for transportation officials, and then one for resource officials, were almost identical. We had a series of questions about the project that the respondent had earlier identified, including questions about problem incidence, general relationships, communication, timeliness and general overall project questions. Again, managers answered questions only about the agency overall—not about specific projects.
Before I leave this section, I want to show one more slide that showcased what I thought was one of the most interesting findings of the entire study, and that was really the vast differences that occurred from region to region on almost every single question that we asked. This slide shows reviewer responses only to the overall satisfaction question. Specifically, the question asked, “How satisfied were you with the performance of your sister agency on the project you chose?” To read this slide the regions are listed across the bottom of the page. So region one, two, three and so forth, all the way across to region 10. Going up the page is the percentage of reviewers in that region who answered at four or five to being satisfied—somewhat or very satisfied with their sister agency on that project.

The blue diamonds are the transportation reviewers and the pink squares are the resource reviewers. As this slide shows, the reviewers’ rating of each other are kind of all over the chart. Some, such as the resource reviewers in region two and eight were no very satisfied with only 45 and 43% respectively giving top two box satisfaction ratings. However, in other regions, the officials were very satisfied, such as the resource reviewers in regions one, three and five, where very high levels of satisfaction were seen with at least 80% of the reviewers rating a top two box satisfaction.

And such patterns are not just among the resource reviewers. Transportation reviewers have the same pattern. In regions two, three and seven, top two box satisfaction for transportation reviewers did not get above the 60th percentile range. Yet, in regions one, five, six and ten, transportation reviewers all gave at least a 70% top two box satisfaction score or higher.

I point out these differences among the ratings because it is a consistent pattern throughout this survey. We’ll see more of it on the slides I show later on. I also want to mention that individual reports are available for each group surveyed, resource and transportation, and managers and reviewers, for every single region. Please refer to CTE’s website and click on the view video clip, “How to read the Gallup survey results,” for more information on how to read these reports for your region.

Now that we have an overview of what we did, let’s talk more about some of the results, starting with the reviewer study, which again comprised about two-thirds of the respondents that we spoke with. Recall that reviewers rated both an agency’s performance on a specific project as well as the agency overall. First I want to start with some findings of interest, and then talk about three specific questions that showed interesting results when we look at them region by region.
A little over one-third of both transportation and resource reviewers, when asked, said they had some sort of problem associated with their project. Although overall, both sets of reviewers said about one-third of their projects were problematic, within a given region, that was not necessarily the case. And in fact, different problems were mentioned by different respondents, as would be expected when each person was rating a different project.

However, the more interesting part of this problem occurrence finding comes when we examine what the problems led to. In survey research, the presence of a problem almost always leads to lower levels of satisfaction or cooperation—not true in this case. When we ran the correlations to see what lower levels of problem occurrence indicated, nothing appeared significant. Or, in other words, the presence of a problem indicated almost nothing, as if the problem was somehow expected, and so did not necessarily indicate lower levels of satisfaction or lower ratings on other questions.

Now let’s look at three specific questions that were asked and how the reviewers rated those three questions. The second question of the entire survey asked reviewers, “Does your agency know what’s expected of it in this process?” For this slide alone, I’m going to show you only the percentage of people who answered a five out of five, or strongly agreed with this statement. I could have added the fours and fives together, but for this particular question, I’m more interested in knowing who felt comfortable enough to answer a five, and therefore, really knows what is expected of them in this NEPA process. As this slide shows, it’s the resource reviewers in almost every region who tell us they are much more likely than the transportation reviewers to know what was expected of them during the NEPA process.

Consider first the transportation reviewers. In one region, region four, two-thirds of transportation reviewers gave themselves a five out of five on this question. However, in seven other regions, less than 50% of transportation reviewers gave themselves a five.

Now, let’s look at the resource reviewers. Among resource reviewers, five regions had two-thirds of their resource reviewers rating a five out of five on this question. In the remaining five regions, bar only one, all gave at least 50% or higher percentage fives. I found this a very interesting finding, since the transportation agencies are the ones who initiate and shepherd these projects, yet they are also the ones telling us that they are not as confident as the resource reviewers as to what is expected of their agency during the NEPA process.
Another set of interesting results occurred when the discussion of trust and honesty was broached. The question asked reviewers, “To what extent do you agree that your sister agency was open and honest with you during this project?” For this question I’ve added the fours and fives together, because either a four or five would still indicate some level of honesty or trust existing. As this slide shows, high levels of trust and honesty were shown by both resource and transportation reviewers. A positive statement on how relationships are going in these regions, as both trust and honesty are fundamentals of relationship building.

One concern, however, did arise with regard to schedules. We asked the question, “To what extent do you agree that your sister agency adhered to schedules that were set throughout this process?” Again I pulled the top two boxes, fours and fives combined.

As the next slide shows, no one fell below 50% in their top two box ratings of their sister agencies in terms of adhering to schedule, although three regions of resource reviewers did come very close. But I would have expected higher scores in this category when adding the fours and fives together. So perhaps scheduling is one area that could use a bit more attention. Hal?

Kassoff: Thank you, Alison. Thank you for that summary of the findings of the survey. And now I’d like to turn to our panelists to get some reaction. Do these observations ring true to you as a representative of your organization? Are you surprised by anything that you’ve heard from the survey? How are you reading these results? Carlos?

Mendoza: Thank you, Hal. Before I answer the question, I want to say thanks to everybody here for inviting us and being part of this whole thing here. I appreciate it very much. Basically, it tells me that although we succeeded at being able to get some of the things that had been troubling us before in the past—getting them better, it looks like we still have some work to be done. I think that perhaps we need to work more towards our communication aspect of things in this kind of area. And I think if we can manage being able to keep things the way they are—strong and in those opportunities and make those stronger, we will be able to succeed better in the future.

Kassoff: Anne, if I recall correctly, you were a member of the panel that helped guide this survey all along, so you are a veteran. How do you assess what you’ve heard do far, particularly in relation to what you might have expected?

Miller: Well, I think I have two observations. One would be that while I agree we have a long way to go, having been involved in these projects for several decades, I’m afraid, I have to say that I was rather pleased at the high level of satisfaction, at the high levels of trust.
that were communicated. I think that had we done this 20 years ago, that would not have been the case. So I think we’ve come a long way. I think also what was surprising was the finding about how satisfaction didn’t relate to problems.

And as I thought about it I think there may be two reasons for that, because I think there are two kinds of problems. One are the problems where a resource agency, perhaps feels that it is not being given the information it needs, or the transportation agency feels that the resource agency is being unreasonable. In that case, you’re not going to have very high satisfaction. But I think there are also a number of areas where we just have very real problems, and it is tough. We have many competing uses for resources. We have areas where it is hard to really address mobility concerns while protecting the environment. But where the agencies are working together, they are going to say there is a problem, but they are working together, so their satisfaction will be higher.

Kassoff: Thank you. Now, Carol, as head of the Transportation Agency in New Hampshire responsible for moving projects through the system, what is your take on the findings? Were you surprised by anything?

Murray: Yeah, that’s probably the easiest question that you’ve asked so far. I didn’t find the results surprising, which I think is a credit to the Gallup Organization and what they did, because I think it is reflective, certainly from my experience, of the tensions, of the trust, of the actual thought. And I also think the difference between the managers and the reviewers is consistent as well. The reviewers meet on a monthly basis, and they’ve established relationships. They built those relationships. With the managers, I think, it’s a little weaker at our level. We haven’t done as well.

I guess the underlying thing that I keep coming back to all the time is we all work for the same people, whether we’re in a regulatory role, an environmental role, a transportation role, we’re still trying to serve the same people. If we can keep that in the back of our heads, then I think we can build that trust. The other component, and then I’m going to toss it back to you so we can get some other views, but the other component that I think is very critical is a basic, underlying respect for what everyone brings to the table, why everyone is involved in the NEPA process. It is important.

I mean, DOTs, we’ve built a wonderful interstate system. It’s 50 years old. It’s a great thing. But, we also ran rampant over everything that was in our way, including wetlands, historic properties—you name it, we’ve probably bulldozed it. That is not appropriate. We’ve learned that. We are getting smarter about what we do. So I think
we’ve grown up. I think we deserve some respect for what we do. Maybe we don’t market it well and maybe that is part of it. But I do think we’ve got to remember that we’re all working for the same people.

Kassoff: Thank you. Now I’d like to go to Brian to see if that viewpoint varies or is consistent as we go to the West Coast. Brian is deputy director of Caltrans and has planning and mobile programs. Brian, what is your perspective?

Smith: Well, you know, it’s a little bit easier going last in terms of this first discussion in some respects, because I don’t have to make a lot of good points, because a lot of those have already been made. You run the risk of sounding a little bit redundant. I wasn’t surprised by the results of the survey. And I think it really helps us key in on some of the things that we need to focus on in the future, to help continue to build the trust. I think the trust issue is getting much better than it probably was five years ago. We still have a ways to go. And with the communication issues.

And I think a lot of attention still needs to be paid, and more attention needs to be paid, to the culture issues. The transportation community and the resource management communities have different cultures. We share different missions, and often those missions are not congruent. And I don’t know if Carol mentioned the idea that we all work for the same folks, so I think we need to find a way of coming up with a commonly accepted mission that does talk about mobility and it does talk about enhancing the environment.

We have functional problems just in terms of *jargon*, and making sure that both the managers and the working level staff understand each other. There is a basic problem with communication—not speaking the same language. And I think we also have to recognize that the two communities come from different frameworks with regard to planning and why we do things, and the amount of planning and the acceptance of the validity of that planning. The transportation community has a very rigorous and sometimes rigid, but certainly well established planning framework that it comes from. And it accepts that what we are doing is correct, of course.

The resource communities are not coming from that same framework, and they don’t accept it on faith like we do. Again, that can lead to some communication where you need to break down that disconnect between somebody working on faith and somebody not working on faith, and really communicate the realities of how you got to where you are today and where you are trying to go and how you’re trying to serve the public.
Kassoff: Great, thank you. Before we go to Alison to get the rest of the story, so to speak, are there any reactions to any of the things that you’ve heard so far? Any comments? It almost sounds… Yes, go ahead, Carol.

Murray: I said I’d be quiet, and obviously…

Kassoff: No, please don’t. [LAUGHS]

Murray: I do intend to talk. But what we just did is we had a conversation that has not occurred before. So if you want a positive you can grab out of this effort, especially Lucy and Allison, you just had it. We started the dialogue. Maybe it is 20 years too late. Maybe it is five years too late, but bottom line is it is happening, so that is the positive.

Kassoff: Great. Now we’ve heard from Alison about how the survey was done. We’ve heard about what the reviewers had to say at both the transportation agencies and the environmental agencies. And now we’re going to kick it upstairs, at some risk, and see what the managers had to say, and see how that compared with what the reviewers said. Alison, do you want to tell us about the rest of the story?

Simon: Thank you, Hal. Even though Carol and Brian tried to steal a little bit of my thunder… [LAUGHS] …I’m going to go ahead and present the results of the manager’s survey anyway. To review, the managers comprised about one-third of the sample, and recall that the managers only rated their sister agencies overall. The managers were not asked about any project specifically. As with the reviewers, I’ll start with some overall findings from the manager group and then discuss two specific questions of interest.

Overall, managers were less optimistic about how things were going than were reviewers. Their scores tended to be slightly lower and slightly more negative than the scores received and given by the reviewers. In addition, and a bit more worrisome, managers perceived a lower level of trust existing between themselves and their sister agencies, compared to what the reviewers expressed. Let’s take a closer look at those trust data.

This slide shows responses to the question, “To what extent do you agree that there is a sufficient level of trust between the two agencies?” I’ve combined the fours and fives together for this slide. As you can see, transportation managers were much more negative about the level of trust occurring between the agencies than were resource managers. In fact, in only three regions were one-half of transportation managers able to say that there was a sufficient level of trust. In all other regions, not even one-half of the transportation managers could say that. And in two regions, regions three and nine, less than one-third of transportation managers were able to report sufficient levels of trust.
existing. There was one region, however, region five, where transportation managers
gave a slightly higher rating than resource managers on the sufficient levels of trust that existed.

On the resource side, resource managers were somewhat optimistic about the levels of trust. In only two regions did the levels of trust fall below 50%, while six regions had at least 60% of their resource managers or more saying there were sufficient levels of trust existing between the agencies. It is interesting to note that such a trust discrepancy exists between the managers—much more so than between the reviewers.

The last slide I’d like to talk about asked managers about their sister agency’s commitment to improving the NEPA review process. Specifically, the question asked, “To what extent is your sister agency committed to making the environmental review process run more efficiently?” For this slide I again combined the fours and fives together. The results here show that the regions fall into one of two categories: one where manager’s ratings were totally opposite of each other, and one where the manager ratings were nearly identical. In the case where manager ratings were totally opposite, and this applied to five regions, between one-half and two-thirds of resource managers said, “Yes, the transportation agencies are in fact committed to making the NEPA process run efficiently.” While in those very same regions, very few, one-third or less of the transportation managers, can say that about their resource counterparts.

In the second category, the remaining five regions, ratings by both sets of managers were nearly identical. Both resource and transportation managers strongly, somewhat, or not at all agreed that their sister agency was committed to making the process run smoothly, but the interesting aspect of this was that whatever they said, they were almost in total agreement about how they rated each other. So half of the regions voted alike with regard to their sister agencies being committed to making the NEPA process run smoothly, while half were almost polar opposites, with resource managers rating transportation agencies higher on improving the NEPA process.

I like this slide because it shows that already one-half of the regions are thinking alike. It is not necessarily the case that they find each other to be doing great jobs of improving the NEPA process, but at least they are somewhat on the same page in terms of rating each other. In two regions, region one and region five, 50% or more of both sets of managers rated a four or five to their sister agencies committed to improving the NEPA process. Hal, back to you.
Kassoff: Well, there is some real message in there that managers don’t seem to see the world quite as optimistically as reviewers, although the pattern seems to persist that the resource agencies have a little better view of how things are going than the transportation agencies.

Now we’re all at the management level here, are we in the way? Are we part of the problem or part of the solution as managers? What do you think, Carol?

Murray: That is an interesting way you phrased it. And before I answer that, we really didn’t try to steal your thunder, Alison. We kind of set the stage for you.

Simon: Oh, right.

Murray: Are we part of the problem or are we part of the solution? I think it is both. I suspect, and I don’t know this for a fact, but I suspect some of the difference… If a project is not happening as fast as the public thinks it should, the legislature or any other stakeholder, who takes the heat? It’s not the reviewers. It’s the state DOT and the resource agencies, because they get their own heat, you know, “You’re not making it happen either.” So, I think because we’re first line, we want to make things happen. We want to do the right thing, but they never seem to happen fast enough. So I think that is a dynamic and a tension that we have. But we’re part of the problem, I think, to the extent that we don’t engage. The reviewers talk regularly and we don’t. And I think shame on us to some degree. It is unfortunate. We should establish those regulations, for example, fish and wildlife. I should see Mike Bartlett more than once every six months. It’s very hard to step back and say, “We need to take the time and do that.” I think that’s where we have an opportunity to be part of the solution, but we have to make the time and take the initiative to do it.

Kassoff: Very, very interesting answer. Anne, what is your perspective on that?

Miller: Well, I agree with Carol, and I think another aspect is that when things are going well, managers tend not to be engaged. They are off doing other things. It is when there is a problem that it gets elevated. And I think that we don’t do well in communicating our successes and taking credit for our successes. We just continue trying to deal with the heavy workload and everyone moves on. So I think we need to talk more, communicate more, and also share successes.

I also find interesting the slide about the improvements to the process. The definition in the question was actually efficiency. And I think there may be the same problem with defining efficiency as we often have with defining streamlining, because to the degree that people consider it making the process go faster, it may be the resource
agencies go, “Yeah!” But the transportation agencies want to do that to the degree that the resource agencies may be looking at it as, “What is the effectiveness,” as well as the efficiency. I think we can’t necessarily say, “improvement,” unless we make sure that they are combining efficiency with effectiveness.

Kassoff: Okay. Brian, what is your take? Part of the problem or part of the solution?

Smith: Well, you know, Anne’s last answer just kind of took everything I was jotting down as notes. [LAUGHS] I would have been very surprised if transportation managers were not perceived as being interested in streamlining, so that really didn’t strike me as really too outrageous. It seems to me that if you are looking for ways to improve or maybe both reduce the difference in opinions and hopefully get the higher scores, I think transportation agencies have got to demonstrate, as Carol was mentioning, their willingness to do good for the environment—to be good stewards of the environment. And sometimes, particularly when we don’t see initial successes coming to fruition as fast as we’d like, there is a tendency to want to say, “Well then, let’s just skip the effort.” I think we have to continue to visibly demonstrate stewardship. It is absolutely fundamental.

I think the resource agencies have got to demonstrate a real willingness to work in collaboration, to develop more timely—and those effective decisions, but more timely decisions as well, and to really be interested in doing so. I think there are two keys to that: one, and I think Anne touched on it, but we do need to make sure that we have a mutually understood and accepted definition of what streamlining is. I’m not sure that that is permeated throughout both sets of communities throughout the country. And I think we also need to work on defining mutually acceptable and desired outcomes of streamlining: not just faster, but what is that more effective and efficient decision. And what is it for a transportation agency, and equally as important, what is it to the resource agencies?

Until we can identify those outcomes, I would expect that transportation managers would not necessarily see a resource manager as being interested in streamlining a decision. Sometimes it may be to your benefit to not streamline a decision if it is a bad decision. So anyway, I think we need to work on developing those outcomes—acceptable outcomes for both of those.

Kassoff: Now, Carlos, you have a unique opportunity having the perspective of a manager with the Fish and Wildlife Service from the field office in Houston, as I understand. But now you
are finding yourself in an assignment in Washington. What is your take on this response from managers?

Mendoza: Well, you know one of the interesting things in the project you are referring to is one of the priority highway projects in the nation. We have gone through a very active, collaborative, consensus-based process of actually sitting down and talking to each other—understanding and learning from each other what it is that we’re expected to have and so on and so forth. I’m presuming that the survey, as you went out to the various folks out there in the country and you were looking at specific projects that might not have been one of these particular priority-type projects where things like this were happening.

And to me it says, as Carol was saying, the field people know each other better. They understand each other better. They are giving each other better marks than the managers. The managers don’t get involved until a crisis occurs, and then you have to deliver. Although these things are the normal way of doing things, my experience has been that if we don’t do the normal stuff, and if we do sit down and talk to each other and actually agree that we’re going to go through a consensus process, and once a decision is made to not go back again, but to move forward, then that gets the thing done.

Kassoff: Great. Back to Lucy. Lucy also has a unique perspective, having been there at the beginning of the survey process in Washington headquarters, and now you are out in the field running a division office. First of all are there any surprises? And secondly, this disparity between managers and reviewers on the one hand, and also the disparity between the transportation agencies and resources agencies; what is your take on those?

Garliauskas: Well, I think that when I was in Washington heading up the streamlining effort, I saw a lot of good collaboration among the agencies. They had core [ph] agencies. And I think we developed the streamlining agenda through good discussion, good dialogue, and I saw a level of commitment to own the problem. But I really haven’t seen in the field, and that is a broad-berth statement. I think it varies to a great extent. That commitment in the field might be there in Texas, because they put the additional effort. That commitment might be there in the field among all the agencies to own the problem, or have the interest in solving the problem in varying degrees. But I think, as a broad generalization, it has always been—even a criticism that I heard when I was working in Washington, and went out to the field and made presentations about streamlining across the country, that the message needs to get down to the division, local and regional offices. I think that gap, in
terms of information, is probably narrowing, but I think of anything, that is probably the biggest disconnect that I’ve observed.

Kassoff: Back to a point that Carol made earlier that the bucks stops at the head of the transportation agencies, and the accountability for schedule, for budget—which are both impacted by this project development and environmental review process. Do you think that the tension of being responsible for those budgets and schedules, and yet not having the complete control, because there are other agencies commenting about what mitigation requirements may be and what further deliberation is needed—do you think that explains the difference between, and this is for both the reviewers and managers, why the transportation agencies tend to be a little less positive in their responses than the resource agencies? Does that make sense to you, Carol?

Murray: Yes it does, Hal, but I also think another component to it is the transportation agencies woke up. They realized we couldn’t continue doing business like we were doing it. We just couldn’t do it. That was important. We realized that if we always did what we’d always done, we were always going to get what we always got, which is an interstate through wetlands and things like that. We live where we build projects, so we care about the environment.

So we worked really hard to change our cultures. And believe me, changing the culture of a traditional DOT is like turning the Titanic, but we are getting there. And I think it gets discouraging that we don’t feel like there is any recognition of that. To some degree we’ve still got to teach those DOT engineers how to do things. We’ve got to teach them how to be sensitive. And we’re not perfect, and I’m certainly not saying that.

But we’ve made cultural changes. We’ve made changes in the way we approach our projects. We understand contact-sensitive solutions. We understand the environment. We’re looking to the resource agencies to be partners with us, to help make things better. And at times it is discouraging. You go home and say, “It doesn’t look like we made any difference.” So I think that comes into play as well.

Kassoff: Let’s get a reaction from Anne. Transportation agencies and resource agencies, are we partners? Have we made progress to the point where we can say we truly are in partnership, or is there still a bit of the policeman rather than partner syndrome?

Miller: I think we’ve made a lot of progress. I mean, I find it interesting and actually very positive that the resource viewers and managers were remarkable, I think, in their optimism in the process, so that I think that speaks to the fact that they do feel that they are increasingly a part of the process. I think the fact that now they are involved early in
the process, so that they are able to lay out in advance what are the types of information they will need to be able to make certain judgments for whatever permits or approvals are necessary. I think that that inclusion has been very important. I think there is always the push/pull because oftentimes they can’t take advantage of those opportunities for whatever reasons: resources, distance to meetings or distance to the field. And it is very frustrating for the transportation agencies when they say, “They didn’t come to our meeting,” and the resource people are going, “But it would have taken a whole day and I didn’t have the money.” So I think we have to increasingly work to figure out how to solve those problems.

But I think you also sometimes run into people who have the mentality, “Well, we only have so much resource. In any decision I make I’m going to lose, because I may lose big or I may lose small, but I can’t win.” And I think what Lucy was talking about in terms of mitigation banking and replacement, I think as resource reviewers and managers learn more about that sort of thing, there will also be a change in attitude on that. So again, it is the partnership. But the partnership really requires information exchange.

Kassoff: Let me ask Brian: partner or policeman? And California is unique. I’ve heard some claim, and I think Brian might even be among those who say that the environmental requirements in California under CEQA, I believe it is called, are at the very least comparable and perhaps even more demanding than federal requirements. What is your perspective on policeman versus partner and does it vary between federal and state?

Smith: I probably have been one of the ones who has said that California not only is unique in many ways, as everybody knows, but certainly we do have a complementary set of both general environmental laws, CEQA, the California Environmental Quality Act, which parallels NEPA, but goes a little bit farther in terms of really requiring mitigation to non-significance. Then we have an Endangered Species Act at the state level, and those kinds of things.

To really get to your question, I guess I’m going to answer it a little bit differently than where you were heading. But I guess I would say that we can’t really afford to be policeman or partner. We have to be partners. We all work for the public, as Anne was pointing out earlier. And they don’t expect for some of us to be bad and for others to be only going after the bad people as opposed to being some preventive crime prevention type stuff. So think that we have to be partners.

Now the survey also identified in some of the problem areas: things like purpose and need, the level of detail of the things that have to be analyzed in the environmental
review process, and looking at alternatives, which from a transportation department’s perspective, can chew up an immense amount of time and resources, as also happens in the resource side of the house when the resource agencies have to look at a lot of alternatives and that sort of thing.

That purpose and need, level of detail and alternatives are issues that I think, working in collaboration, the transportation community and the resource protection community can really address by moving some of those environmental considerations that we normally look at, at a project stage, farther up the line into the planning decisions that are made. And working on ways at which we can actually all look at planning level of detail to come to agreement on project purpose and need, to come to agreement on general location, to come to agreement on multiple alternatives.

And then we can then focus all of our resources much more narrowly when it comes to actual projects in the very formal and legal framework of NEPA, CEQA and all those state and federal laws. So it has to be collaborative. We’ve got to work in partnership. And I think we have to work in partnership to more creatively address the problems and maybe try and get beyond what Anne is talking about of having to make a decision that you know is going to be bad no matter what you make. I’d rather we seek to find not only the least damaging decisions, but actually some good, enhancing decisions. We can only do that by moving those considerations up further, or earlier in the process.

Kassoff: Let’s shift gears just a little bit and talk about the survey and the survey process. What is your perspective on the value of this process? Should we continue to do it? Were the results worth the effort? Are we finding out things that we otherwise would not have found out? And is the very process of the survey itself contributing toward the goals that you, Brian, were just articulating of a partnership. Anyone, jump in.

Mendoza: It is important, I think, as a tool, if we put it back in the toolbox and close the box and don’t use it anymore, we’re going to do a disservice to ourselves. I think that if we can actually use that tool and move forward to understand, like I said earlier, those things that were strong points—keep them strong. Those things that offer opportunity for improvement, let’s see what we can do. Find the trend later on and see what we’ve done. What is the scorecard? How well have we, as managers, gone back to the other managers and talked to them as well?

Kassoff: Anyone else on that?

Smith: Just really quickly, I think it has been really good to give some statistical rigor to looking at some of the issues that we can kind of sense. I think that can help us hone in on
solutions. The survey is almost three years old at this point. I think we have to find a way of turning it faster. And I think we need to try and maybe focus it down so that as a manager I’ve got to read it. I’ll be honest with you, if I hadn’t been participating in this panel I probably wouldn’t have gone through it in as much depth as I did to get ready. We only have a certain amount of minutes in the day, and I think we need to focus and really try and identify the critical elements.

Kassoff: That is a good point. And it leads to another question that I wanted to ask, which is have you heard anything about the survey from people in your own agencies? Has it stimulated any conversation to this point? Or is it pretty much confined to a relatively small group?

Smith: Just quickly, again, because I don’t want to monopolize. But it has been a subject for brown bag meetings. We try to have regular brown bag meetings between the Federal Highway California Division Office and our environmental and other related division staffs. It was a subject of one of those brown bag meetings. But again, a lot of folks didn’t really have to get into it in as much depth as one might have liked. And so I think we need to find a way of easily distilling what it is telling you.

Kassoff: Other thoughts on improving the process? Carol?

Murray: Well, I think Brian is absolutely right. It is easy to say, “I’ve got to get this, this and this done today. I have to. Oh yeah, and then there is that Gallup survey.” If the survey is done again, which I believe it should be, because that was our baseline and it needs to be done again. We have to make it part of our agenda to discuss the results, to look for the opportunities, to see where we are. But we have to make that a focused effort.

When we got together in region one and had the meeting and talked about the Gallup survey, all of a sudden we paid attention it. I don’t know if that is the tool, but if it is done again, we need to make the commitment to actually put it on the ground, discuss it and actually do something with it. I think that was a little weak this time.

Kassoff: Anne?

Miller: Yes, I think we also—we have to do that. And if we can do it again, I think we can start to have the discussions and really hone in, not just one what are the perceptions, but what are the differences and what are the things that are working? Where we have successes, why is it that we have successes? And let’s share that information and those tools so that we can build the process in all the regions.

Kassoff: Do you think that the very process of doing the survey will move us toward the partnership goals and the efficiency goals and the accountability goals faster than if we
don’t do the survey? Does the survey actually help that process, or do you think it is neutral, or can it do harm?

Miller: I think it helps from the standpoint that it makes people think. It makes people focus. There is an old saying, “As you speak, so shall you think,” and I think the more we really talk about being partners and working together and having common goals, we will develop that.

Smith: Another old saying, or maybe it is half-way new, is “If you can’t measure it, you can’t improve it.” And I think that this offers and opportunity to let people know that we’re really going to take a look at how well we’re doing, and not continue to just rely on perceptions or the old baggage of history.

Kassoff: Alison, any observations on what would be done differently in future surveys, very briefly?

Simon: Well, I think one of the things that Brian alluded to was to shorten it up a little bit. We’d like to do that so that the information can be distilled and put in a manner than can be quickly taken a look at. But towards Carol’s point as well, I think it is important that these results are taken to each individual region because the results and the way the survey is collected is on a regional level, it’s important that we take a look at each region individually and spend time together as a region deciding what those results mean.

Kassoff: And now I’d like to send a message to our audience: you time is coming up close. We’re going to have a break in just a minute, from 3:00 Eastern Daylight Savings Time to 3:10, but we have a request that those email addresses, telephone numbers, fax numbers, I hope you’ve jotted them down. Please use them. Send your questions and comments, and we want to hear from you. This is a national dialogue, and it’s important that we get your views. Both on what we are learning from the survey, the substance and the knowledge we’re gaining, and also on the survey process itself. So please become a part of the process here. We’re going to reconvene in just ten minutes. We’ve had an excellent discussion so far, yes, I want to thank our panelists.

We’re going to devote the first ten of fifteen minutes, depending upon the questions and comments we get, to the emails, the faxes, and the phone calls that we do get. And some of the phone calls, if you want to go live, you’ll have the opportunity to be on live coast-to-coast. So I want to thank you very much, panelists, and we’re going to take a ten-minute break.

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Transcript of CTE Teleconference #35: Environmental Stewardship & Streamlining: How Are We Doing? (Broadcast: May 12, 2005)
Kassoff: Welcome back. I’m Hal Kassoff, your moderator. And we have a distinguished panel here in the studios of the Center for Transportation and the Environment in Raleigh, North Carolina. We’re discussing the first ever Gallup survey on communication and performance in the environmental review process between transportation and resource agencies. Our panelists are Lucy Garliauskas, division administrator for federal highways in Providence, Rhode Island. Alison Simon, a senior researcher of the Gallup Organization. Brian Smith, deputy director of Caltrans for planning and multi-mobile programs. Anne Miller, director of federal activities for the USEPA in Washington, DC. Carlos Mendoza, acting chief, Habitat and Resource Conservation Division of the US Fish and Wild Life Service, and Carol Murray who is the commissioner of the New Hampshire Department of Transportation.

Just before the break we posed these questions to our audience and to our panel, actually, and then to our audience: “Do you think the survey can be of help to you in improving your working relationships as you participate in the environmental analysis and review process? Can the survey be a constructive part of the process?” I’d like to throw that out to our viewing audience. This is your time. We’ve got a few questions in, and I’ll get to them in a moment, but please get your questions in by email, by fax, or you can go live on this program with a telephone call.

Let’s start with the first question that we got. It had to do with the regions themselves. We were showing maps of region one and two through ten. How do we know what these regions are? This is a question from Michael Gordon with URS Corporation in Tampa, Florida. How do we know what regions you are discussing? Are these EPA regions or Federal Highway Regions? And where can I find a map or a slide to show which regions? Lucy?

Garliauskas: Well, as most of you probably know, EPA, Fish and Wildlife and the Corps of Engineers do not share contiguous regional boundaries. And FHWA, of course, no longer has regional offices. But awhile back congress had defined standard federal regions. And for the purposes of this survey, that is what we used. And I believe Alison indicates this. It is on the video that you prepared as part of this conference.

Simon: That’s right. There is a map on that video that shows what the regions are for each of the ten that are noted there.
Kassoff: Thank you. Our next question is from Patti Lorenz, Judy Oranda and Lindsey Royce. And the question is, “Who are the DOT reviewers and project managers: the environmental staff or other folks?”

Simon: Can you repeat the question?

Kassoff: Who are the DOT reviewers? Were they project managers?

Simon: They were.

Kassoff: Were they the environmental staff of the DOTs?

Simon: They were anyone who had directly touched a NEPA document in the last 90 days. So sometimes they were project managers. Sometimes they were folks who worked on environmental issues—anybody who had worked on a NEPA document qualified for this study.

Kassoff: Okay.

Murray: But Alison, didn’t they have to be completed?

Simon: That’s right. The documents themselves which actually answered another one of the questions listed. The documents had to have been completed before somebody could talk about that project. If it was a project that was still in the process of putting the document together, that project would not have been eligible to be considered in this survey.

Kassoff: Great. Thank you Patti, Judy and Lindsey with PB in Colorado. Our next question is actually from the same group. They are really sending questions in. We have to get this spread around a little bit. Did the study include the timeframes of projects from Notice of Intent to Record of Decision, and if yes, what was found? Why don’t we start with that question? Alison, I guess that would make sense for you to answer.

Simon: Well, again, the project had to have been—the NEPA document had to have been completed before the project would have been eligible to have somebody rate it within the survey. I believe that those are early components of putting the NEPA document together. So any projects that were still in those phases would not have been eligible at that time.

Kassoff: Right.

Murray: If you went all the way through Record of Decision, you could say that NEPA was completed at that point. And the time—number in terms of days or months or weeks wasn’t really as much of a focus of the survey as kind of opinions, attitudes, thoughts and perceptions.

Kassoff: Great. And again, I’m encouraging our audience to get in touch with us. At this point, we have one more question, and then we’ll go back to the panel unless we get more
questions from the audience, but this is a very good question that I’d like each of our panelists to answer. It refers to a point that Brian Smith made about the need to define the concept of streamlining. The question, from Jessica Swanson of North Carolina State University, right here in North Carolina is, "How does the panel define environmental streamlining?" Brian, since you raised the question…

Smith: Well, I guess at its simplest, it is allowing the delivery of the right project at the right time. The right project is the project that provides mobility and access in an equitable fashion and in a way that reflects community values regarding the environment, the economy, social issues, et cetera. Right time and streamlining to me doesn’t mean that you take pieces off of the process, but rather you move forward and you don’t backtrack. So if you think about what happens when you streamline an aircraft or a car, you are reducing the eddies of the air current going over. You aren’t taking off the wings or the tail or whatever, because then you have a crash. So making forward motion, not back tracking decisions, constantly moving forward to deliver the right project from an environmental and a mobility standpoint and a safety standpoint, and the right time is when it is needed by the people we serve—by the public, not ten years after the fact.

Kassoff: Great. Carol?

Murray: You hit that very well.

Smith: Aw…

Murray: No, actually you did Brian. And I hadn’t heard you, until right then, define streamlining. And I think you echoed exactly what I’ve always thought streamlining was. It is to keep things moving forward—not to make bad decisions, not to rush through it. Not that it is steamroller streamlining, it’s not. It’s really an enhanced process that keeps things going forward. I think it is fair to say that we’ve had several projects where you are almost to the point where you are ready to issue the environmental document. And all of a sudden, “Oops! We’ve got to go back and revisit purpose and need.”

And every time you go back it is frustrating. We want to make timely decisions and not constantly second guess those decisions. I think that is a part of streamlining. But the biggest misconception, I think, about streamlining is that it is in fact a way to cram bad projects through. And that is definitely not what it is. It is almost a definition by what it is not.

Kassoff: And now I’d like to ask Anne and Carlos, how does the environmental community view this advocacy of environmental streamlining? First of all, what is your definition of it? Secondly, how is it viewed within the environmental agencies?
Miller: I think the definitions that I’ve heard from Carol and Brian are right on track. I mean, it is trying to make decisions intelligently, to keep things moving. So often things either get off track or things happen sequentially instead of concurrently. There will always be instances where new information becomes available and ends up in the “do” loop out of necessity, but those are very rare. And by in large I think it is getting up ahead and then moving expeditiously through the process while protecting the environment, while taking into consideration all of the community values that you would normally expect to be taken, and also getting to the end of the mobility analysis process so that you can complete a project that is in the best interest of the community overall. And I think that includes the environmental values, as well as mobility values.

Kassoff: Okay. And we’re not going to let you off the hook on the second part of the question, but let’s get Carlos’ perspective on the definition. And then I want to get back to perceptions, particularly at the staff level within the environmental agencies. Are they welcoming streamlining because it carries with it the kind of positive objectives that were described, or is there still a lot of anxiety? I’ve given you a little heads up on what that is going to be about, but Carlos, the definition?

Mendoza: My perspective of this is using Brian’s as a basis from which to start. And that is, if you are moving forward, if you are making decisions and not going back to revisit, that requires a consensus, collaborative-based effort that I had mentioned earlier in the first hour of the program. And I think that if you consider not just that as you foundation and reducing the eddies, but then also, say, for the group that you are working with or whatever, this is consensus-based. This is collaborative. We are agreeing now to agree on things as we move forward. Should we disagree on something and should we not be able to work it out, we understand that that is going to be part of that project as we go along. But I think that that would be the way that I would look at streamlining. It is that consensus-based, collaborative effort.

Kassoff: Back to the perception, and I’ll start with a small story. This is leading to the second part of the question. [LAUGHS] There were at least three or four hearings held by congress on environmental streamlining. In fact, Carol and I appeared on one of them together.

Murray: Right.

Kassoff: And there were environmental representatives that I remember, particularly from the private sector—not the agencies—who were very skeptical, to say the least, about streamlining. And the reaction to it was it was watering down the environmental process. And what I’ve just heard in terms of definition, as I think we’d all agree is anything but
watering down. And while the private environmental organizations clearly have a legitimate role to play in this process as stakeholders, it is the agencies that make the decisions. So I guess my question particularly to Anne and Carlos is, is there reason to be hopeful that at the staff level in the field among the environmental agencies—EPA, Fish and Wildlife, the Corps of Engineers—that this anxiety, this fear is subsiding to some extent? Have they seen the transportation agencies trying to do the right job, but just doing it more efficiently?

Miller: I’d like to take it from two directions. One direction would be at that Senate and Environment Public Works Committee Hearing. One of the things, I thought, that was striking is that there was testimony by the assistant secretary of the Department of Transportation, the inspector general of DOT, and GAO, which I think then was still the General Accounting Office, but the Government Accountability Office, that in fact the environmental review requirements were not the primary cause for delays in transportation construction. So I thought that that was a very interesting message.

When it comes to the staff, I think, in fact, that those review results indicate that indeed the staff understand. I mean, within EPA, one of the interesting provisions of the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century was that the state transportation agencies were empowered, if you will, to move resources to the resource agencies, because there was a recognition that the resource agencies were stretched rather thin because they were dealing with transportation, energy, mining and everything was a priority. So that in EPA our field resources from the NEPA standpoint were actually increased by about one-third for highways.

And people now have an opportunity to actually get engaged at an earlier stage, and I think they feel, in many cases, much better about what they can do because they are not just sitting at their desk and getting a document and going, “Oh darn.” They get to go to the meetings early on and help scope out the process. They understand better the overall problems that come up—the relationships are closer so that they share the frustrations that they often see on the transportation agency side. And I mean, there are many, many things that cause delay or that drive any agency in a particular direction.

So I think, by in large, my sense from staff is that they in many ways feel better about what they do. Even if it is the end of the day, the project might not be all that they might want it to be. They understand that it’s better because they have willing partners who want it to be better and they’ve had a chance to participate.
One more thing. I’ve always said, at least from the standpoint of a NEPA reviewer, to be successful you have to have a fairly low reward threshold and a very high frustration threshold, because what you are doing is helping to appropriately develop the country in an environmentally sound way. And yes, there will be environmental damages. There will be adverse effects that you cannot totally mitigate, but you can mitigate a lot.

And what you have to do is take the full picture of where did you start, where might it have gone and where did it, in fact go. And I think that there is a good recognition that the people in the state departments of transportation and the Federal Highway Administration, are not out to destroy the environment. They are out to serve the mobility needs of people. And to the degree that we can make that happen while protecting the environment, everybody wins. So I probably sound like Pollyanna, but I really do sense that.

Kassoff: That was an excellent answer. Carlos?
Mendoza: I’m sitting here thinking while everyone is answering. There is a line in a movie—I forget what movie it was, but it says, “Ditto.” [LAUGHS] But in essence, I think the word itself, streamlining, and the use of what we’re using it as now, may be somewhat new. Some people say it is an old word, but I think for me and my experience with staff, the staff has already been doing these kinds of things. We’ve been working with the core. We’ve been working with the highway folks. We’ve been working with the local areas. We’ve been going to the media as much as we can to give them the information and the basis from which to make the decisions. If they are the ones responsible for making decisions, we’ll point that out to them. If they need to be pointed in the right direction, we already do that.

So talking to the staff they are saying, “But Carlos, we are doing those kinds of things. Why does it look like it is new?” Well, I think it is doing this because, from the standpoint that there is a focus now, previously, you know, that perception that it was the environmental aspect of things that was slowing things down. My folks are saying, “We don’t see that because we keep working with folks as much as we can. We do it early on as much as we can.” Maybe we haven’t gone to all the meetings and everything else, and maybe that’s a problem.

Kassoff: Well, I want to thank our viewer for that great question. It leads me to ask the next question.
Garliauskas: Well, before you…
Kassoff: I’m sorry, Lucy.

Transcript of CTE Teleconference #35:
Environmental Stewardship & Streamlining: How Are We Doing? (Broadcast: May 12, 2005)
Garliauskas: …skip over that question, I was curious as a consultant and being part of the consulting industry.

Kassoff: Oh! You’re turning the tables on me! [LAUGHS]

Garliauskas: Yes I am. And as far as having looked at this from the state perspective as well, what, do you think is the consultant community’s view on streamlining?

Kassoff: Well, it is interesting. We had a senior representative on AASHTO staff, and I’m not going to name this person. He is a good friend. He said, “Why would the consultant community be interested in streamlining? After all, the longer it takes, the more money we make.” And yet, the ACEC, with whom I’ve worked very closely on this issue, without hesitation has been among the strongest advocates for streamlining. And I think it is this idea of the engineering community and the consulting world and the environmental community and the consulting world, just saying that the highest obligation is to do the right thing.

And when we redo work that seems to be going in a circular motion instead of moving forward, as everyone said, yeah, you may be generating more billable hours, but it is very frustrating from the professional point of view, and you know you are not serving your client’s best interests. So it is kind of interesting that ACEC has responded as among the leaders of something which you could say could actually generate less income to the consulting community.

Actually, now that you’ve turned that on me, I really did forget to ask you a question, because Federal Highways is at the nexus between the states and… It is a federal agency dealing with other federal resource agencies, yet the states are customers. So what is your perspective of this streamlining initiative? Is it a word that we can now use in mixed company and not worry about push back? We all recognize that it means efficiency without compromising quality and commitment to the environment.

Garliauskas: I think you are absolutely right in terms of that definition. That was actually Congress’ intent—the statutorily intended definition is the one that FHWA has adopted, and one we try to implement. I think it is very interesting because FHWA as a lead federal agency has a unique role. We are, in many ways, the advocate for the transportation project sponsor. While at the same time, it is our responsibility to ensure that all of the environmental laws and requirements under NEPA are adhered to and addressed fully. And so I think oftentimes the perception is that we can’t be effective stewards of the environment because we also have to serve as the advocate for the transportation project sponsor.
I think we are, again, doing a much better job of balancing that role. And I think that also is facilitated through the cooperation, dialogue and the number of initiatives that we’ve had going on that, for example, establish some level of acceptability of the planning decisions and having those transferred to the NEPA process—the integration between planning and NEPA. It all goes to some of the comments others have made in terms of pushing the decisions forward and getting involved and up front early on. That is a very difficult thing to do. It is a very time consuming thing to do. And I think that as our initiatives have called for reviews of procedural requirements and regional agreements, people are getting smarter about the way to do this. I think we are becoming more confident in that environmental streamlining is about ensuring environmental responsibilities are adhered to, as well as realistically dealing with expediting projects.

I think we need to be very clear that the congressional intent was to improve the timeliness of projects for delivery. Having said that, I think for the most part, we all recognize in the transportation community that a good number of our projects don’t require an environmental impact statement. And those projects that do involve an environmental impact statement are the ones that we ought to be spending the time on.

Kassoff: Well, the good news is we suddenly had a rush of questions. [LAUGHS] The bad news is we’ve just about run out of time. So I’m going to have to just select one or two more. I do thank our audience out there for sending these questions in. Very quickly, from Mary Ann Rondinella at the FHWA Resource Center in Colorado: “I thought Mr. Smith’s comments”—you’re getting a lot of notoriety Brian—“about improving consideration of the environment during transportation planning are very insightful. But during the Linking Transportation Planning and NEPA workshop held here in Colorado, resource agency staff expressed a concern about not understanding the planning process. They were also concerned about having the staff resources to become more involved in the planning process. Can the panel suggest ways that these impediments, the understanding and the staffing, can be addressed?” And this may have to be the last question.

Smith: Let me quickly respond. From my perspective—I think we’d like to hear from Carlos or Anne. Hi, Mary Ann. I used to be out in Sacramento, but I didn’t put her up to asking the question. I think I mentioned it at the very beginning, actually my comments that the frameworks that the transportation community comes from—the resource community both at the state and federal levels come from are different.

We do have a fairly well-established, relatively complex process of making planning decisions in the transportation community. It’s tough for us to understand from
time to time, and I think it would be absolutely unfair to expect a number of resource agency staff to all of a sudden understand it. We need to make an effort to make it more transparent, first of all. There are some real challenges, I think. I think from a streamlining perspective, the idea of making general decisions to more specific decisions, the more specific decisions to project decisions makes a lot of sense. It allows you to look at a project and not have to go back and look at cosmic issues—there are global kinds of issues. So, with none of those back aches.

Having said that, we need to have mutual understanding of the framework the decisions are made in, particularly those early planning decisions. The transportation agencies, I think, have to make a commitment that when decisions are made and programs of projects start moving forward, and ultimately individual projects move forward, that the project that moves forward is really pretty much the same project that was looked at, at the planning stage. It is with changes as necessary, and everybody knows about what those changed are, but there can’t be any tricks.

The challenge, I think, to the resource agencies is being able to accept planning level data early on and be willing to make certain kinds of decisions, whether it is about locations or about choices and those kinds of things and allow forward movement without having project-specific level information. Otherwise the whole process starts breaking down. And then, living up to those commitments.

And a problem that we all collectively face, and why I want those surveys to be done faster in the future is that over a three year timeframe we probably have 50% staff changes. And so there has to be a way of institutionalizing some of those decisions that may be made over a five or seven year timeframe because the same people that started working back at that plan may not be the same people that are now working on the project. So I think there are some real challenges, but I think there are some real opportunities. It is incumbent on us to make that planning process transparent and understandable to others.

Kassoff: Good answer, Brian. Does anybody want to add to Brian’s answer? Yes, Anne?

Miller: Yes. I think there are several challenges. I think one is that traditionally we have a very strong transportation planning process. It is done at the local level and there is a lot that goes on. The resource community does not have a commensurate level of planning. The resources have never been there. And I think states are beginning to do more watershed plans. They are doing more resource management plans. So I think that if we can find a way to strengthen that so that the information is available at the planning process to kind
of level the playing field, then we’ll be able to get projects that are in fact more able to carry through on that streamlined process.

I think the other thing though, is that in the future that may work better than it does now, because I think there are instances where you have projects that have been on the planning books for decades. When they were first put on the master plan there was no thought of a NEPA or the wetlands, which were “swamps.” And so I think as we move forward, we will be more successful, because we’ll have more attention to those details.

Kassoff: We’re going to take a few more questions because it is very important that we communicate with our audience. Thank you again for sending them in. From Mary Ivey, New York State DOT: “Would you please discuss ways in which streamlining success or effectiveness can be specifically measured?” Anybody want to tackle that one?

Garliauskas: I’d like to start.

Kassoff: Please.

Garliauskas: At the Federal Highway level, we’ve been working on trying to measure timeliness of the process as well as the effectiveness of the process. And in doing so, we have, as our performance objective, the goal of negotiating timeframes for project delivery with the state DOTs and with the resource agency partners. And our ability to meet those negotiated timeframes, 90% of the time, is one measure of success that we are tracking as an agency. Secondly, I think measuring the effectiveness of streamlining can be seen in what we’re doing with our Exemplary Ecosystem Initiatives. However, if we truly believe and we say that streamlining is about timeliness, we have a measure of timeliness and we have to have a measure of quality.

And our measure of quality is establishing exemplary ecosystem initiatives. And we have over 20 of those, which have to adhere to very specific criteria. It’s not doing routine mitigation. It’s really going above and beyond, and we have 20 of those initiatives that are posted on the FHWA website. These are initiatives that are taking place at the state and local levels. I think those are two good measures.

Kassoff: Thank you.

Smith: Quick reaction. I think that one needs to be careful, when developing performance measures, of unintended consequences. I can meet and negotiate a time by negotiating an incredibly long time. I can demonstrate that I’ve shortened the time by doing everything up front before I officially trigger the process with a notice, and then I can shorten my delivery time. But in fact, the overall length of time may have been the same.
The real measure to me is, “Was the project delivered when the public needed it?” If it is a safety project that is an existing safety project, that was yesterday. If it is a capacity increasing project and your area has a congested condition, but it is going to get to gridlock in the near future, when did the plans say you needed to put that project online? We ought to all be collectively working to achieve that. That, to me, is the real measure. You can’t gain that.

Miller: I want to just toss in though, because that is the timeliness part of streamlining. But I think you still end up struggling with outcome-based performance measures. And certainly the Government Performance Results Act speaks to that. It is very hard to measure what doesn’t happen, but I think as we go through these processes, one of the things you also have to look at is what are the outcomes you are seeking? What are the outcomes you might otherwise get? And then develop measures—I think quantitative measures are terribly difficult. At the very least we can have anecdotal or ad hoc measures that will help us know that we’re really reaching that.

Kassoff: Okay.

Garliauskas: Can I just say one more thing?

Kassoff: Sure.

Garliauskas: I think we really have to make the attempt to demonstrate that we’ve tried to measure how long it takes to get through the process so that we can answer the question of how long should it take.

Kassoff: Good point. Another question from Amy Phillips with BNA in Washington. It is a question to Alison—a very quick question: “Is this the first of its kind, survey, of government agencies rating one another and achieving public policy objectives?”

Simon: This is the first study that Gallup has ever conducted like this before, and it is the first one that I’ve ever seen of this nature. So it is quite groundbreaking, I have to say.

Kassoff: We are seeing history in the making.

Simon: History in the making right here.

Kassoff: And a question for the panelists. How will FHWA, the DOTs, the resource agencies, use the results of these surveys? That is really a good one to address, assuming that there are future surveys that are succinct, are fast turnaround and the kinds of things we’ve been talking about. How would you make use of these surveys?

Mendoza: I think I, for one, would go back and continue to encourage staff to continue to strengthening part with all of their DOT counterparts and all the other agencies. I think I now also have a challenge to not have to visit someone every six months like you say, or
maybe once a year. But to move forward and go knock on the door. Or at least call on the
phone and say, “Do you want to talk? Do you want to visit?” And I’ve got, what? 25
DOT regions there in Texas, and I’ve got at least three or four in my area of
responsibility, so I know one or two of the district engineers, so I need to go visit the
others. I have both a need to strengthen what is going on and a challenge.

Kassoff: Excellent.

Murray: This survey sets the baseline, and if that’s all we do then shame on us. But now we’ve got
a baseline, and it is not a line in the sand. It is here is where we are. It is a snapshot in
time. We have to follow up on that. And it may be a different type of question, but I think
we have to keep measuring: are we closing those dots on those graphs, and are we in fact
getting to the point where communication is effective, where things are moving forward,
where we are establishing that trust? We’ve got to measure it. And we can just measure
it, put it up on the shelf and say, “Boy, didn’t we do a good job? We’ll come back in a
year and see if we still like it.” It has got to be a continual process. So we can’t walk
away from the survey saying, “That was a fun exercise. Thanks, Gallup. You did great.”
But we’ve got to build on it.

Kassoff: Great. Well, our thanks to the audience for sending in those questions and my apologies
to those we weren’t able to get to. We need to move on to another question. We’ve spent
most of our time discussing, of course, this history-making Gallup survey, but we also
know that, as Carlos put it, one tool in the toolbox, and a very important one. I’m hearing
general agreement that we should keep it in the toolbox. The question is: what other tools
do we have when it comes to performance measurement in the areas of environmental
streamlining and environmental stewardship? What else is going on in your agencies that
you would like to share that our audience out there would be interested in? Does anybody
want to lead off with that one? Anne?

Miller: I’ll jump in briefly. I mentioned before that under the Government Performance Results
Act, we’re under considerable pressure to come up with outcome-based performance
measures and goals. And I have to say for EPA, from last year to this year, we are now to
a point where almost 60% of our performance goals and performance measures either
have environmental outcomes or intermediate outcomes as opposed to activity results.
And it varies in many ways.

If you are talking about pollution prevention or enforcement, which is probably
the closest, in a way, to what we’re talking about, we’re talking about tons of pollutants
that are taken out of the air or out of the water. We’re talking about water saved, not
used, in working with voluntary programs with industry. We’re talking about money saved for industry in being able to modify processes to protect the environment in a more effective way.

We also are doing surveys. We have compliance centers—virtual compliance centers on the internet that have exit surveys that poll people and say, “Did this improve your knowledge of what your responsibilities are? Has this helped you to put new management controls in?” And we are actually getting fairly—let’s just say 70% results in terms of improved knowledge. So this is perception again. There is no way outside of doing that. But I think that we are moving more in that direction.

Kassoff: Brian, how about Caltrans?

Smith: Well, particularly in the area of performance measures, the Schwarzenegger Administration has been very forceful. In truth, Business Transportation and Housing Secretary Sunny McPeak, in trying to turn the department into more of a mobility company, as they call it. But more importantly, to try and base decisions on, “Gee, I have future decisions on projects on how well the system as a whole is performing, and that includes parts of the transportation system that are outside of Caltrans’ direct control.” So we’ve been involved in an effort for at least a year now of developing system performance measures in partnership with the regional agencies and the MPOs and the transit agencies, the private sector, etc., and the environmental community, to give a range of outcome based performance measures for how well the system is working. That is whether it is accessibility, safety, reliability or those kinds of traditional transportation issues. In addition we’re also struggling, I’ll be very honest with you, to how we look at what the impacts of the transportation system are on the environment and how you define outcomes. Tons of pollutants emitted isn’t necessarily the same as a health effect or a habitat effect that results. So trying to get to outcomes is not easy. We’re struggling with it, but we’re still trying.

That also then starts translating into organizational performance measures. In other words, for those parts of the system that we are responsible for, or in the case of the environmental issues, for those environmental impacts that we might have responsibility for or enhancement or whatever, those then become a subset of organizational performance measures. How well is the Department of Transportation as a state agency doing itself? We are trying to move to a much more of a quantitative approach. The environmental issues are a set of issues that are just kind of tough to handle, honestly.

Kassoff: Carol?
Murray: Can I take this in slightly a different direction? With each incoming AASHTO president, they get to define emphasis areas. And the current president, Commissioner Jack Lettieri from New Jersey—and I won’t do my long monologue of jokes about New Jersey. [LAUGHS] But he had three emphasis areas, and one of them really resonated with something that I’ve been trying to push for 15 or 20 years. That is the direct connection between land use and transportation. We’ve got to get it, because if we don’t get that linkage, both fail. And it goes beyond just both those things failing. The environment is going to fail. We’re going to still continue our patterns of development, which put the post office three miles outside of town. We’re not going to reinvest in our urban centers. Is that something that you can go out and measure? Probably not immediately. But it is a conversation every one of us should be having. And trying to get a general awareness of, “Look, we’ve got to think about what we’re doing. What is our land use pattern? What is our transportation pattern?” Because transportation is like the game board that everything gets played on. Whether it is getting to your son’s soccer game or getting to healthcare or going to the grocery store. And if we don’t make our land use and transportation complement each other, they are both going to fail, along with all those other things that depend on it.

Smith: If I don’t say, “ditto,” I may not have a job when I get back. [LAUGHS] The administration, transportation, land use, housing and the economy and they are all interlinked. And in fact, part of our system performance measures are trying to look at that transportation and land use connection, and coming up with, again, quantitative measures that can measure how well that relationship is being addressed.

Murray: And we’re talking about environmental streamlining. That is kind of a global environmental streamlining. It is environmental streamlining so that our patterns are set so that in the future we’re not worried about so much of the planning process of transportation because we’ve thought about it in advance.

Kassoff: You mention environmental streamlining and Brian is concerned about having a job when he gets back. I’m going to make it a little easier just in the event that Michael Brady—do you know Michael Brady?

Smith: Oh yeah, hi, Mike.

Kassoff: I just don’t want to give him a reason to be upset with you—that we didn’t read this. And this, I think, is interesting. It is a comment from Michael Brady, and not a question. Michael who is with Caltrans says, “I like the simile of streamlining and airplanes—not steamroller. You streamline to reduce drag, not push through bad decisions. Steamrollers...
move slowly back and forth and back and forth. Airplanes get somewhere.” I think there is pretty good consensus on that.

Murray: Yes.

Kassoff: So Michael, good job. And now we’re going to go to a surprise guest on this program. We have on the telephone the person who is trying to fill Lucy’s shoes, actually, in carrying forward this tool and toolbox, as Carlos has called it. And I think we’ve sensed a consensus here that this should… It has been the first and historic survey. It shouldn’t be the last, necessarily, but it should move forward and be a foundation, as you said, Carol, to build upon.

So we’re going to go to Shari Schaftlein. Shari is with the Federal Highway Administration in Washington, D.C. Shari spent a number of years as an environmental manager with the other Washington—the Washington State in the Northwest. And she is now in charge of the survey process that we’ve been discussing, which includes not only doing the surveys, but getting the word out, and also moving them to a point where they can be used to improve the environmental process. I understand Shari is on the phone.

Schaftlein: Hi, Hal, good afternoon.

Kassoff: Hi. Can you tell us about your plans for the future?

Schaftlein: Yes. I think as everybody has mentioned in the teleconference today, there has been great work going on over the past three years, and we need an opportunity to try to capture what influence all that great work has had. We’re planning to do a second survey that will get started in the fall of this year. And between now and then we need help from NEPA managers and the practitioners in three areas.

The first is we want to increase the sample size when we do the next survey. And we’d like folks also to help us with reviewing the current survey for any adjustments that we might need. And then thirdly, we need help identifying outreach opportunities to use the results and leverage performance improvements which you all have been talking about.

On point one, we’d like to increase the sample size from about 1,200 people to 2,000 next time around—about 1,000 transportation folks, and about 1,000 non-transportation staff, to ensure that the sample provides adequate coverage of the regions, the states and agencies, and to ensure sufficient sample sizes for reliable analysis at the region level. We encourage the panel and viewers to contact the environmental manager in the Federal Highway State Division Offices, and offer names and contact information.
for NEPA managers and practitioners that are involved in transportation projects. As has been mentioned there is a lot of turnover, so we want to update the database.

This outreach effort will be supplemented with a review of websites, directories and other relevant documents so that we can identify eligible staff and update contact information. And the product of all this creates a large, updated database for all the NEPA contacts. Once the survey is under way, the snowball sampling technique will also be used. As Alison mentioned, this method can allow the interviewer to ask respondents to identify other eligible staff in their own and related agencies, and to provide their relevant contact information.

So prior to the phone or internet survey that eventually occurs, the participants will receive a letter. Those identified through the snowball technique will get a quick turnaround Priority Mail notice. And several attempts via email and phone call will be made to try to arrange the interview time. So we ask that folks who are contacted, please respond in a timely manner for what should be about a 15 minute interview.

As a side note to the sampling effort, we’ve arranged the opportunity for a state supplement—their respective states part of the national survey sample, with up to about 100 additional potential survey participants—maybe an additional 50 transportation or 50 resource. And that state might have an opportunity ask three or five additional questions relative to NEPA performance, of things that are going on particular to that state. We think this will offer a benefit to large states with big programs, or states that may have a unique NEPA effort relative to other states in their federal region.

The state would be able to receive a state-specific result, along with the regional rollup like the first survey. We hope folks can talk about that amongst themselves in the state, and they can give me a call for more information on this topic.

The second area that we need some help with is for the viewers to review the questions and the findings for their region and offer and suggestions on edits to questions or new questions. Alison has told us that some limited changes can be made without compromising the methodological comparability and consistency between the initial and subsequent national surveys. We would like to start getting input around June 15. A number of folks have asked me if we could perhaps add a question to get at: of all the interventions we’ve made over the past several years, which ones seem to be having the most influence on stewardship and streamlining perceptions? As we get some feedback along those lines, perhaps we can add a question.
Kassoff: Thank you Shari. That’s really great. Thank you for calling in. I really appreciate it. I need to do a little bit of a wrap-up here and then I’m going to turn it back to Katie.

First of all, thank you to my colleagues on the panel for making this such an enjoyable experience. And thank you also to Shari Schaitlein who not only just called in and talked about the future survey, but did so much to prepare for this broadcast. This has been a wonderful discussion of an historic event, as Amy Philips reminded us. The event was government agencies doing a performance measurement on behalf of the people they all collectively serve. Several of our panelists, Carol mentioned it, and others, that we all work for the same people. And I think that has been the focal point of this discussion and this survey.

And while there have been variations in how reviewers and how managers interact and how they perceive their relationships, and certainly variations among the regions, the fact that there is so much reason for optimism that environmental stewardship and environmental streamlining are seen as going hand in hand, as moving forward, as making good decisions based on good information. This is the kind of response that we are seeing as a result of this survey. And I think what is also extremely hopeful about this survey is that the instrument itself keeps us focused on the endgame. That is doing a good job for the public that we all serve. And so that’s why I think looking forward to surveys in the future to keep us on track, to keep us on focus, is so important.

With that, I’d also like to thank Katie McDermott for being our host here, and turn it back to Katie.

McDermott: Thank you, Hal. And on behalf of CTE, thanks again to all of our panelists. And thank you, especially, for being an important part of today’s program. I’d also like to acknowledge the many downlink sites across the country, including EPA’s Air Pollution Distance Learning Network, which tuned in today’s program. I must also recognize the collective efforts of the Agency for Public Telecommunications, the UNC School of Public Health and nine systems, all of whom made possible the satellite broadcast as well as the web simulcast today.

Just a few reminders before we leave you. You can continue today’s discussion on performance measures as they relate to stewardship and streamlining in CTE’s After-the-Program discussion forum. For those questions that did not make it on the air today, we will post them on that forum and invite our panel and other audience members to respond. So we encourage you to go to the forum and take a look. We’ll keep that active
for two weeks, and then we’ll archive it. DVDs or written transcripts of today’s broadcast are also available and can be ordered from our website. You can also view this broadcast in its entirety from CTE’s webcast archive. Online versions of the handouts as well as the panelists’ PowerPoint slides and other information related to the Gallup survey are available from our site as well.

And finally, please remember to complete the evaluation form. If you are participating via satellite downlink, turn that in to your site coordinator before you leave today. Or if you are participating via the web, please complete the online evaluation form. We invite you to regularly visit our website and check out our newsletter for more information on programs coming up through the year. We hope you can join us next week on Wednesday, May 18, when our next broadcast will be innovative strategies for meeting conformity requirements.

That is our program for today. It has been a pleasure being with you. Until next time, thank you and goodnight from Raleigh, North Carolina.

[THEME MUSIC]
[END OF RECORDING]