Annual ITRE Advisory Council Meeting and TFF Speaker Series Held on April 14, 2011

ITRE held its 2011 annual Advisory Council Meeting on April 14. The meeting was well attended, both by Advisory Council members and senior ITRE staff. Prominent in the discussion to the Council was the Institute’s ability to withstand the current difficult economic environment by increasing our winning rate of national and state research proposals, by forging strategic partnerships nationally and internationally and by being blessed with a superb administrative staff that seem to always manage to do more with less. The quality of the work that ITRE produces was also highlighted through several national best paper awards as well as being recognized by peers and clients for our state-based safety initiatives. In the presentation portion of the meeting, our Public Transportation Group discussed the issue of benchmarking public transportation services in the state, while our faculty guest Dr. Joseph Hummer provided highlights on a joint ITRE/Civil Engineering research project on the application of “Super Streets” and “Diverging Diamond Interchanges” in the state and the nation.

At the conclusion of the meeting, many of the participants attended the annual Transportation Founders Fund (TFF) reception (see pictures below) where they met and greeted our keynote speaker and panelists for the evening seminar.

TFF Speaker Series Stresses Importance of Transportation to Economic Development

How does transportation relate to the economy? The Transportation Founders Fund (TFF) 2011 Speaker Series addressed this question by focusing on how investments, maintenance, and operation of interconnected, multimodal transportation systems in North Carolina can facilitate economic development and job growth in the state.

Keynote speaker Janet F. Kavinoky, director of transportation infrastructure in the Congressional and Public Affairs Division at the US Chamber of Commerce, talked about the funding of transportation projects at the national level. She stressed the importance of building strong narratives for legislators that illustrate successful practices funded by taxpayers, the result of which increased the public trust and confidence.

George List, professor and former head of NCSU’s Department of Civil, Construction, and Environmental Engineering, moderated the panel which represented the perspectives of governments and private industry. In addition to giving the keynote address, Kavinoky served as a member of the panel.

North Carolina Department of Transportation Secretary Gene Conti said that infrastructure plays an important role in where businesses decide to locate. Conti told the audience that the NCDOT builds and provides a diverse, effective, and integrated transportation network that encourages businesses to locate to North Carolina as well as contributes to the success of the businesses that are already located here. “Part of the day-to-day work of the DOT is to support the economy and help it grow,” he said.

Joseph Stephens, the managing director of Air-Ground & Freight Services for FedEx Express, presented a case study illustrating the benefits of the public and private sectors working together. He explained that the relationship of transportation to the economy realizes benefits, not just at the local and state level, but at the global level as well. When a consumer good arrives at a port, travels by train to one city, is put on a plane to another, and arrives to the consumer by truck, the benefits are global. Stephens reminded the audience that “It’s not just about a highway. It’s about trade, it’s about jobs, and it’s about economic growth.”

Following the speaker’s presentation, the 2011 TFF graduate fellowship award in the amount of $3,000 was presented to Thomas Chase, one of ITRE’s graduate students.
ITRE Associate Director Wins Research Unit Award for Excellence

Robert Foyle, associate director of the Institute for Transportation Research and Education (ITRE) at North Carolina State University (NCSU), is the recipient of a University Awards for Excellence at the Office of Research & Innovation (ORI) unit-level. Each year, the University rewards the accomplishments and achievements of permanent NCSU employees at both the unit and University levels.

Having been at ITRE since it was constituted over 30 years ago in 1980, Foyle is literally a founding member and has contributed to ITRE’s growth from a handful of employees and a budget of under $200 thousand to over 40 full-time staff and a budget that is more than 35 times greater than the 1980 amount.

In addition to serving as the associate director, Foyle leads the Highway Systems group. One of his greatest contributions has been his ability to train transportation engineers and technicians in concepts and methodologies they must apply on a day-to-day basis. Over the years, Bob has constructed numerous training materials that have been used to teach transportation professionals throughout the state. The programs that he has put in place teach more than 1,000 people in the transportation workforce on an annual basis.

Foyle has also been involved in numerous innovative transportation research and maintenance programs. He led one initiative that resulted in the development of a pavement maintenance program that is still in use after 20 years.

In addition to his work at ITRE, Bob exhibits a commitment to community service through his participation with several charitable organizations. He volunteers with the Appalachian Service Project, a mission group that helps with construction projects for those in need in rural central Appalachia. He also participates in Habitat for Humanity projects and has given his time serving in soup kitchens and assisting the Food Bank of Central and Eastern NC and NCSU Stop Hunger Now.

Foyle also serves as a Stephen Minister in his church, a volunteer position that is an extension of the pastoral care of the congregation. As such, he provides members of his church with one-on-one support and encouragement on sensitive issues and is receiving training so he can train others in his congregation to serve in this capacity.

At the ORI unit-level ceremony held April 7, Foyle received a plaque and a monetary award. He is in consideration for the award at the University-level in May. Other ORI nominees from ITRE were Linda Lancaster, David Robinson, and Nancy Bailey.

ITRE Research Assistants Win ITE Regional Competition

Three research assistants at the Institute for Transportation Research and Education (ITRE) at North Carolina State University (NCSU) put their knowledge of transportation to the test at the 2011 Southern District Institute of Transportation Engineers (SDITE) Traffic Bowl. Zachary Bugg, Katy Salamati, and Soheil Sajjadi walked away from the event, which was held on April 12 at the SDITE Annual Meeting in Lafayette, Louisiana, as regional winners after participating in the first tiebreaker in the six-year history of the competition. In addition to receiving a $3,000 scholarship, the three will go on to represent SDITE in the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) Intercollegiate Traffic Bowl Grand Championship at the ITE Annual Meeting in St. Louis, Missouri in August.

The three-member team, all Ph.D. students in the Department of Civil, Construction, and Environmental Engineering, represented the NCSU Student Chapter of ITE in the state competition at the North Carolina Section Institute of Transportation Engineers (NCSITE) Annual Meeting in the fall of 2010. After winning at NCSITE, they went on to compete at the regional level.

Nine teams competed in a Jeopardy style format and answered questions on transportation concepts and trivia. In the final round, Bugg, Salamati, and Sajjadi correctly answered the final question to come from behind to tie the game. Both teams answered the tie-breaker question correctly; however, the NCSU team secured the win by taking a bigger risk and wagering more points than their opponents.

The team members agreed that the knowledge gained through their work at ITRE helped them in the competition. Upon hearing the news of the win, Dr. Nagui Rouphail, ITRE director, said, “I am delighted and proud that the SDITE regional winners all had their roots at ITRE. This is a tough competition and not only must the winning team be knowledgeable about transportation facts and history, members must also show good judgment about when and how much to wager. I wish them all the best in their next big competition this summer. I am confident they will give it their best effort.”