



2-20.1 General

The image created by WisDOT as a competent public service organization depends on the conduct of its employees as well as the quality of their work. Department employees are encouraged to answer, within their area of competency, questions from the general public and news media. The employee is responsible for the factual accuracy of information and for interpretation of state or departmental policy.

The relationship between WisDOT and the public is to be viewed in the context that WisDOT is a business providing a service, and the public is the customer who pays for that service.

Questions and criticisms concerning road and bridge construction are to be answered with courtesy and tact. Reasons for the improvement should be carefully and fully explained, and all questions about the work should be answered, if possible. Those beyond the employee's knowledge or authority should be referred to the employee's supervisor.

An employee should not discuss the following confidential subjects with anyone:

1. Financial information requested from contractors, consultants, and minority business enterprises.
2. Construction estimates.
3. Real estate appraisals, price submittals, negotiation diaries, and administrative settlements associated with real estate acquisition.
4. Consultant contract negotiation files.
5. Appraisals of excess property offered for sale.
6. All data pertaining to matters in litigation.
7. Employee assistance files.
8. Employee social security numbers.
9. References concerning employees or prospective employees if the person providing the reference asks that it be kept confidential.

Department employees are encouraged to participate in all informational activities contributing to a better understanding of state government and department programs. The text of speeches and written articles should be reviewed and approved by the employee's supervisor.

WisDOT policy allows the public and media access to most information on file in the department. All formal meetings of state agencies and advisory committees are open to the public and to the media, except where exempted by Wisconsin statute 19.85.

A copy of the minutes of meetings at which controversial subjects are discussed with the general public should be promptly sent to region construction and the Bureau of Project Development for their information.

State employees are not to endorse any proprietary method, process, product, material, machine, or item of equipment.

Please refer to [CMM 1-10.5.4](#) – Communication Management and [CMM 1-10.5.5](#) – Stakeholder Management for a discussion of communication from a project management perspective.

2-20.2 Traveling Public, Abutting Property Owners, Businesses and Area Residents

Road and bridge construction can cause major changes in travel patterns and have significant impact upon these groups. Before work is started, they should be informed about the nature of the construction and its effects, such as road closures and detours, so they have the opportunity to plan alternate routes and schedules. A public meeting at which the contractor can present the work operations and proposed schedule should be held to answer questions and concerns of these groups. The meeting also provides an opportunity to identify the engineer and contractor.

The department recognizes how important it is that customers have access to businesses, regardless of any roadwork inconvenience. The website called "In This Together" is provided in the WisDOT Design and Construction pages to help business and community leaders prepare for local road construction.

<http://wisconsin.gov/Pages/projects/in-together/default.aspx>

The site includes a workbook and case studies detailing successes in past roadway projects. Engineers may

want to give this web address to local residents as they attend preconstruction public information meetings. Smaller meetings with residential and business owners should be considered in order to discuss specific topics, such as prior right of way agreements.

During the life of the project, the engineer should personally contact all businesses, property owners, and residents along the project route. A project extending over two seasons or affecting a great number of people may warrant assigning an employee solely to public relations. Concerns expressed at these contacts should be addressed promptly and the result reported back to the person having the concern. The contractor should be informed of the disposition of concerns that may impact operations.

Partial or complete loss of access even for brief periods can be critical to businesses and an inconvenience for residents. Reasonably direct, safe, all-weather, 24-hour access should be provided whenever possible to homes and businesses along the project. If that is not possible, action should be taken to shorten the time that access is lost, or to develop an alternate route. Changes in access must be explained well in advance to each affected party.

Construction work zone signing should clearly inform the road user of the advisory speed and safety hazards to be encountered, be well maintained, and be removed from sight when work is not in progress. Flaggers should be used liberally and be well trained and equipped for their task.

Steps must be taken to minimize noise, smoke, and dust resulting from construction work operations.

Businesses and residents should be informed of significant changes in the nature of the work or in the schedule before they occur. Consider conducting periodic meetings to keep everyone informed.

2-20.2.1 Local Services

Many services such as mail-delivery, school buses, police, fire, and medical protection will require special attention. People in charge of these services should be informed well in advance of the construction. Arrangements should be made to provide access across or through the project. When access is not possible, a detour route should be developed for continuation of vital services, with maps showing the detour distributed to these service groups.

The contractor must provide an advance warning of twenty-four hours to the fire and police departments before blocking off a road.

2-20.3 News Media

2-20.3.1 General

Good relations with the news media are a great help in establishing and maintaining good public relations. Local reporters are usually well known to residents in the area and can have a significant influence on attitudes of local road users, business owners, and residents along the project route.

An atmosphere of mutual confidence between the department and the news media should be developed so the media feels confident the information given to them is correct and complete. Media reporters typically work on a short time frame, seeking information for broadcast or publication within a few hours. Media inquiries, therefore, should be answered promptly.

The media should be informed early about the nature of the project work and the proposed scheduling. Invite the media to public meetings and consider a media tour of the project. Supply them with maps and current information about schedules, alternate routes, and major construction details. News releases written by the communications manager should be distributed at milestones such as changes in traffic patterns or detours.

Information should be presented to the media in an easily understandable form with technical terms held to a minimum. Remarks should be confined to factual statements. Personnel should not offer personal comments about department policies, supervisors, co-workers, subcontractors, or the contractor, and should politely turn aside all questions on those subjects.

2-20.3.2 Public Communications Records

Department personnel may answer, within their area of competency, questions from the media relating to the project or the program under which it is being constructed. Contacts with the media should be reported via the Public Communications Record (PCR) as outlined in TAM 15. Staff should work with the region communications manager (RCM) or project communications manager (PCM) when handling media responses or completing PCRs. The project manager or the RCM/PCM will e-mail the PCR to the PCR distribution list at "DOT DL PCR (Core Distribution List)" and other appropriate personnel in the region and central office. The PCR template, TAM 15, and more detailed information on the PCR are available to department staff at:

<http://dotnet/opa/opapolicies.htm>

2-20.3.3 Consultant Staff

Occasionally members of consultant staff speak with the media about project-related issues. If consultant employees interact with the media, the overseeing state staff should be immediately informed of the contact. State staff will then determine if a PCR needs to be filled out and forwarded. If correspondence about local project issues needs to be written in a letter, the consultant must use either their company letterhead, or that of the local municipality they are representing.

Additional public information guidelines for consultants, including specific guidance related to local program projects, is available on the Web at:

<http://wisconsin.gov/Pages/doing-bus/eng-consultants/cnslt-rsrcs/tools/pub-involve/default.aspx>

2-20.3.4 Local Governmental Officials

Department involvement in local road and bridge projects occurs because local projects financed in part with federal or state funds must be directly administered by WisDOT in accordance with existing agreements.

The engineer should make the acquaintance of the local officials before construction starts and inform them of plan details and the schedule of operations. Invite them to the preconstruction conference. During construction, keep them informed of any changes that could impact them positively or adversely.

Both local governmental and elected officials are rightfully interested in the progress of the project and can be expected to be on the job site from time-to-time as observers. Whenever a local official visits the project, be courteous and answer questions in sufficient detail. Suggestions should be accepted, but with the explanation that action cannot be taken until facts of the situation are gathered. A decision will be made by the engineer, or by the region office, whether to accept or reject the suggestion.

The engineer or representative should accompany local officials during their visits, in order to explain the work operations and work schedule, answer questions, and ensure the safety of the visitors. Contractor involvement in these visits is encouraged.