

Wisconsin Department of Transportation

Trans 29 Permit Process Lean Project Report



Project Summary

One of the responsibilities of the Railroads and Harbors Section is to review and approve permits to install and maintain utility facilities within state-owned railroad rights-of-way, as prescribed by the Trans 29 Administrative Code. The Section, with the assistance of Operating Railroads and WisDOT Region Offices, assures that industry standards are followed during installation. This process catalogues all utility facility installations along the R-O-W as part of the RHS asset management responsibilities.

Paper forms lead to inefficiencies in the Trans 29 permit process. Transit times associated with mailing physical forms can add up to 12 days to process time. The permit applications require four signatures for approval, which leads to high-generation scanning and low quality forms upon approval. The scanning, signing, and copying also consumes a non-trivial amount of time to complete. By transitioning to a digital permit application process and an internet based utility database, permit approval time will be shortened, asset management documents will be higher quality, and WisDOT staff will spend fewer hours on each Trans 29 permit.

This project was completed on June 7, 2017.

Improvements

- Reduced average permit approval time by 12 days.
- Eliminated paper permit forms.
- Implementation of digital permit database.

MAPSS Core Goal Area

- Service

Issue

The Trans 29 permit process was developed to standardize and codify utility facility installation and documentation along the WisDOT owned Railroad R-O-W. This process has historically been conducted with paper forms and traditional postal mail service. The following items were identified as recurring issues in the permit process:

- Long process times due to transit times associated with Postal Service and Interdepartmental mailing (aka "snail mail").
- Low quality documentation due to repeated scanning and copying of permit forms.
- Inefficient asset management due to the increased staff time requirements when using paper files rather than digital files.

Lean Six Sigma Process

Using Lean Six Sigma methodology, the project team described the current Trans 29 permit process and identified major causes of delays. Much of the process is outside of the control of the Section due to the railroad and region roles in reviewing and approving permits. However, there are aspects of the process over which the Section still has influence. The team identified specific areas where the Section can affect process time and identify resources needed to reduce the permit processing time. The use of paper forms was identified as the key factor in increased processing time. The most direct and effective solution to address the issues associated with paper permit forms was to eliminate the paper forms altogether and transition to a digital permit application process and asset management system.

Results

Service: While total permit processing time depends on factors outside of the Section's control, such as incomplete or nonconforming applications being submitted by applicants, and railroad review time, the new digital permit process will shorten review and approval time. Due to the LEAN Project, the average permit process time was reduced from 37 days to 25 days, a 12 day reduction in total number of days to process Trans 29 permits. This improvement aids in efficient customer service for permit applicants, and increases Section asset management capabilities by creating a searchable permit database.

Next Steps

The utility permit database is part of a larger digital asset management project in the Section. Transferring historical (pre-Trans29, pre-LEAN) utility permits is a large project that is currently being undertaken. Training Region and Railroad staff on the new process has begun, and a digital process refresher training session is being planned.