Wisconsin Department of Transportation Communication with Local Government: Focus Group Report

University of Wisconsin Survey Center

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16. Abstract

The University of Wisconsin Survey Center (UWSC) conducted four focus groups with local municipal officials in Wisconsin, on behalf of the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT). In the groups, officials were asked to report on their communication experiences with WisDOT, describe their capabilities and preferences for that communication, and evaluate certain WisDOT communication efforts. The goal of the project was to identify strategies WisDOT could use to improve the effectiveness of its communication with local governments.

Findings included:

Communication modes:
- Most municipalities had Internet access and saw e-mail as an effective way to communicate with WisDOT.
- Internet access and use were somewhat less likely for towns (especially small ones) and rural communities.
- WisDOT's Web site for Programs for Local Government was familiar to most cities and villages, but many towns that could have accessed the Web site had not used the site.
- Many municipalities received transportation-related communication through non-WisDOT sources, such as counties and municipal associations.

Evaluation of communication items:
- Electronic transportation e-mail newsletters like the Connector Express were seen as useful and accessible.
- Specialized topic newsletters were not as useful to these officials.
- Wisconsin Information System for Local Roads (WISLR) information was being submitted electronically by many of the communities, and both the paper and computer methods were generally working well.
- WisDOT's Web site was fairly easy to navigate and use for both previous and new users.
- WisDOT's Web site contains information useful to local governments.

Overall themes and suggestions
- Specific targeted communications for different types of municipalities are preferred – one size does not fit all.
- Municipalities are often frustrated by the timeliness of WisDOT responses and announcements.
- WisDOT contact information and updates should be easily available to local officials.
- New officials may need extra information to orient them to work well with WisDOT. Suggestions included holding workshops at municipal association conferences, or distributing WisDOT contact information to communities.
- Most communities are Internet-capable or appeared likely to be soon. Officials who reported no current Internet access were either trying to obtain it or were rather elderly, so in future years new access and new officials may make those municipalities more accessible via the Internet.
- E-mail and Web communications are effective for most municipalities, although certain types of towns may require more traditional methods.
- Existing networks of local officials, such as the Towns Association, League of Wisconsin Municipalities, or Counties Association, may be useful channels for distributing WisDOT information.
- Web communication effectiveness might be enhanced by demonstrating the site to local officials through municipal associations, or by adding site links that reach out to new and small-community users. New users of the site often said that information relevant to their communities' needs was hard to find on the pages presented. In order to help those officials make easier use of the site, it might be useful to add links to (a) a new user orientation page, and (b) links to new pages that emphasize selected topics for rural or small municipalities.

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University of Wisconsin Survey Center

August 2008

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Project Summary

The University of Wisconsin Survey Center (UWSC) conducted four focus groups with local municipal officials in Wisconsin, on behalf of the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT). In the groups, officials were asked to report on their communication experiences with WisDOT, describe their capabilities and preferences for that communication, and evaluate certain WisDOT communication efforts. The goal of this project was to identify strategies WisDOT could use to improve the effectiveness of its communication with local governments.

Process

UWSC recruited local officials (clerks, public works directors, engineers, chairs, etc.) from towns, villages, and cities in Wisconsin with populations less than 65,000. Groups of six to nine officials attended meetings in four different regions of southern and central Wisconsin, and were paid $50 for their participation. An experienced focus group moderator led each group, posing questions and probing the officials' responses. Respondents also performed hands-on evaluation of WisDOT publications and the WisDOT Web site titled Programs for Local Government. Discussions were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed.

Findings

Communication modes
- Most municipalities had Internet access and saw e-mail as an effective way to communicate with WisDOT.
- Internet access and use were somewhat less likely for towns (especially small ones) and rural communities.
- WisDOT's Web site for Programs for Local Government was familiar to most cities and villages, but many towns that could have accessed the Web site had not used the site.
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Overall themes and suggestions
- Specific targeted communications for different types of municipalities are preferred – one size does not fit all.
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- Existing networks of local officials, such as the Towns Association, League of Wisconsin Municipalities, or Counties Association, may be useful channels for distributing WisDOT information.
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1. INTRODUCTION

The University of Wisconsin Survey Center (UWSC) was contracted by the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) to conduct focus group interviews with municipal officials about their communication with WisDOT. The interviews took place in April and May of 2008. The UWSC project director and moderator was Robert Cradock.

The objectives of the research included:
- Identifying methods that are effective for communicating with local governments;
- Assessing local governments' communication capabilities and determine their preferred communication modes for learning about or receiving information from state agencies regarding programs and initiatives;
- Assessing existing WisDOT communications efforts directed at local governments;
- Gauging municipalities' familiarity with the WisDOT Programs for Local Government Web page and inquiring about ways the page could be enhanced to serve local governments better.

2. METHODS

Focus group methodology

Focus groups are sometimes called "conversations with a purpose." They consist of small groups of people sitting around a table discussing a topic under the direction of a trained moderator. The discussions typically last one to two hours. They are relaxed, informal and meant to be enjoyable for the respondents. The format allows respondents to relate their experiences and express their feelings and opinions. It gives people the opportunity to listen to one another, to compare experiences and ideas and to respond to one another. Focus groups are a more flexible format than surveys. With surveys, respondents are isolated from one another and are asked to provide closed-ended replies. Focus groups allow a moderator to ask follow-up questions tailored to a respondent's response, and to use one person's experience to draw out another's. A focus group setting also provides the opportunity to present items that respondents can perceive or manipulate, and to observe their non-verbal actions.

On the other hand, as a means of collecting information, focus groups have limits. They generate narrative rather than numerical data, insights rather than statistical generalizations. The results cannot be generalized to larger populations, and no claims of statistical significance are possible. Responses may be biased by the views of others in the room. No empirical measures are used. As qualitative work, they cannot provide quantitative answers. These are the standard cautions that must accompany any focus group report. However, prevalence of particular themes in a focus group discussion can be a useful indicator of their importance to the respondents in the "outside world."

UWSC worked with WisDOT to develop the research plan, including writing questions, preparing materials, and defining the populations from which respondents would be recruited. Adaptations of the plan continued as the project progressed.

UWSC gathered four groups of municipal officials from cities, villages, and towns in different regions of Wisconsin, according to the goals of the WisDOT clients. The group moderator asked each set of respondents to:

- Answer questions about their municipality's communication experience and capabilities;
- Evaluate certain WisDOT communications products; and
- Engage in hands-on use of the WisDOT Web site, particularly the part of the site geared toward local government.

Respondents were promised that their identities would remain confidential in the research, and that no information would be released that would connect any particular comments with a specific individual. At the end of each group, each respondent received $50 in appreciation of their time and travel to the group.

Group discussions were recorded using digital audio recorders and transcribed by a professional transcriptionist associated with UWSC. All respondents' names and locations were replaced with codes in the transcripts, and names of nearby towns or roads that might also identify individuals were truncated.

In the transcripts, and the excerpts included here, each respondent's name was replaced by a code indicating the group number, order in which they introduced themselves, and their type of municipality. Their community's name was replaced by a similar code. For example:

R11V was a respondent in group 1, position 1, from a village. Her village code was V11.
R24C was a respondent in group 2, position 4, from a city. His city code was C24.
R36T was a respondent in group 3, position 6, from a town. His town code was T36.

The full transcript represents respondents' speech as it occurred in the discussions. For clarity, however, excerpts presented in this report have been edited to remove non-relevant words and phrases.

3. SAMPLE

WisDOT provided UWSC with a database of municipal contact persons (in most cases clerks) for all municipalities in Wisconsin. Since WisDOT's aim was to focus on municipalities that were less likely to have good communications infrastructure, they decided to exclude cities with populations above 65,000. The municipality populations among those attending the groups ranged from under 200 residents to over 15,000 residents.

Focus group locations of Fitchburg (Group 1), Richland Center (Group 2), Wausau (Group 3), and Waukesha (Group 4) were chosen to achieve geographic diversity among the respondents. Approximately two weeks before each of Groups 1, 2, and 3, eligible municipalities in the meeting site county and surrounding counties were selected as the sample for recruitment. For Group 1, because of the focus on communities with less communication capability, municipalities neighboring Madison were excluded. Other group samples included all population-eligible communities.

UWSC phone staff called the listed municipal officials to invite them to the appropriate group. If the listed clerk was not available or indicated that someone else was more knowledgeable about WisDOT communications, the interviewer attempted to contact and invite that alternate official to the group. For Groups 1 and 2, all eligible municipalities were included in the recruiting sample at the same time. Due to the low numbers of cities in previous groups, WisDOT decided to target cities and villages for Group 3 recruitment, so those municipalities were fielded first for recruitment. When it became apparent that not enough officials from those cities and villages were agreeing to attend Group 3, its recruiting sample was expanded to include towns as well.

Group 4's recruitment proceeded somewhat differently. WisDOT decided after Group 3 to add the fourth group and concentrate its recruitment on cities. Since e-mail addresses were available for nearly all cities in Group 4's area (Waukesha and surrounding counties), UWSC staff e-mailed those city contacts to inform them about the project and offer a choice of two potential meeting dates. Once several city officials expressed a preference for one of the dates, another message was sent announcing that date for the meeting, and repeating the invitation. Because of low response from cities, another e-mail message was sent to villages in the eligible counties, inviting those officials to Group 4 as well.

Table 1 shows the distribution of eligible municipalities in the areas chosen for recruiting, and the number of municipalities represented by those attending the groups. UWSC attempted to have 8-10 people attend each group, but cancellations and no-shows resulted in groups smaller than anticipated.

Table 1. Municipalities Participating in Focus Groups

	Number Attending Focus Group Meetings		
Group	City	Town	Village
1	1	6	2
2	1	4	1
3	0	2	4
4	4	0	2
Total	6	12	9

The respondents had a wide variety of roles and experience. Their titles included clerk, administrator, engineering staff, public works staff, village president or trustee, town chair, city mayor, and water operator. Some had been serving for less than a year, and others for over 50 years.

4. DISCUSSION TOPICS

Specific questions asked at each point in the meetings varied from group to group, and are presented in the discussion scripts appended to the report.

Communication Experiences, Modes, and Recommendations

The discussion began with an invitation from the moderator for each respondent to state their name, municipal role, time in that position, and to describe a recent experience when they were communicating with WisDOT. The moderator asked follow-up questions to elicit information about the communication methods that each community had available and found effective, and about their satisfaction with the communication process.

In the next portion of the discussion, respondents were presented with a scenario describing one community's problem with banners that violated signage regulations. As part of efforts to promote tourism, downtown beautification, and local heritage, the community erected banners on streetlights. Because the banners included the names of local business sponsors - in violation of state and federal outdoor advertising regulations - WisDOT asked that the banners be removed. Focus group participants were asked to suggest ways to improve the flow of information about such requirements, in order to help avoid this kind of inconvenience and potential cost to local communities.

Evaluations of WisDOT Communication Products

The discussion moved on to presentations of different WisDOT communications efforts. Respondents evaluated the usefulness and accessibility of several materials prepared by WisDOT. WisDOT changed the selection of items presented from group to group, in an effort to find ones that would yield useful responses. These communication tools were distributed in the groups specified:

- WisDOT Connector Express newsletter (all groups)
  - This newsletter is e-mailed to transportation stakeholders around the state every two weeks and typically features short articles on timely transportation issues along with links to Web sites when appropriate.
- Safe Routes to Schools Reporter (group 1)
  - Safe Routes to Schools is a federal initiative to assist communities with improvements that encourage students to walk or bike to school. This newsletter helps communities understand the goals of the program, how to apply, and related information.
- Local Roads and Streets Council newsletter (groups 2 & 3)
  - Created in 1995, the Local Roads and Streets Council (LRSC) is an advisory body of local officials that provides WisDOT with input on state and federal policies impacting the local transportation network. Quarterly LRSC newsletters keep municipal officials and interested transportation stakeholders informed about council activities.

- Wisconsin Information System for Local Roads (WISLR) reporting system (groups 2, 3, & 4)
    - The Wisconsin Information System for Local Roads (WISLR) is an Internet-accessible database that contains detailed information on the local roadway network to help state and local officials make informed decisions and set priorities regarding improvements to the local roadway system. Local officials are asked to provide WisDOT with information about their local roadways such as length, age, condition, etc.

Web Site Evaluation and Navigation

Respondents were also shown a computer connected to the WisDOT Web site, including the home page (www.dot.wisconsin.gov) and the Programs for Local Government (www.dot.wisconsin.gov/localgov) page. They were asked about prior use of the sites, and invited to evaluate it (either as a first impression for those new to it, or from any previous experience). The Web site evaluation included both verbal descriptions of respondents' impressions, and actual keyboard and mouse navigation of the site by respondents during the group. The moderator occasionally narrated the on-screen actions taken by respondents, so that the recording would indicate what had happened.

General Communication Issues

The moderator closed each group by asking respondents to suggest one thing that they would like WisDOT to change or understand about its communication with their communities.

5. SPECIFIC FINDINGS

5.1 Modes and Accessibility

Internet Access

Internet access varied among the municipalities participating. All 6 of the cities and 9 of the villages had Internet access, although not all were using it for communication with WisDOT. The 5 smallest of the 12 towns (those with populations under 600) reported having no Internet capability. Two other towns said their dial-up access made communications slow. Lack of internet access was most prevalent in Group 2, where municipalities were more rural and long-serving elderly officials attended. A few respondents said that while they themselves did not have Internet access as part of their roles, other members of their staff did.

```
R43C   All of our dealings with the DOT, almost all of it is by e-mail or
       Web access.
MOD    Is that … effective …?
R43C   Yes, most of the time. It's gotten a lot better.

R34T   E-mail, we probably could. We're … the town itself right now is in
       the process of installing a computer and setting it up in our office
       right now. We just have a laptop that the clerk has and a temporary
       set-up there.

R21T   You can get on a computer … I'm no computer man, but telephone and
       you can write or fax them.

MOD    … have e-mail?
R17T   No, not in our town at all, no. It was not until last year we got a
       computer even.  We're way behind.
```

Communication Modes: Available and Effective

Cities tended to use and prefer e-mail and telephone communication, and all cities were using e-mail and the Web to some degree. Among villages, 6 of the 9 indicated that they used e-mail for WisDOT communication, and 6 said they did or could use the Web. Towns were less connected, with only 3 reporting use of e-mail and 1 currently using the Web.

Other communication modes suggested by municipalities were: mail, telephone, WisDOT paper publications, meetings, and newsletters. The meetings and newsletters were often mentioned as ways to get information through the statewide municipal associations. For some officials who were new to their jobs, seeking information from retired officials was seen as more effective than pursuing it through WisDOT. Towns were most likely to prefer postal mail and municipal association channels. Villages' answers about their preferred modes included in-person meetings with WisDOT or project staff, e-mail, telephone and postal mail.

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R42V   The villages and towns I think rely heavily on their clerks to share
       their information so a network amongst – maybe the regional
       communications person could have an e-mail group of all of the
       communities in their district.
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R35V   We get e-mails. I do use the Internet, the Web pages. I'm not …
       haven't really gotten into the DOT Web pages to determine how good
       the information is or how useful it is yet.

R26V   Communications would be through e-mail, phone, mail.  I've never
       tried the Web.  I haven't needed to. …I have a computer and access
       to the internet.

R45V   E-mailing is getting to be one of the best ways that I've seen for
       communication. Rather than leaving voicemails and whatnot, at least
       you can compose a complete statement that is visible to the other
       party and can respond accordingly. I find that it is very handy
       because everybody's got different schedules. That's one reason I
       perceive why telephone conversation has always been a hit and miss
       situation. With e-mailing, somebody may be on their laptop at 9:00
       at night catching up. You don't have to be there, but they
       understand it if you give them a good message.

R25T   It's either mail or phone.
MOD    When you need to contact somebody about DOT issues, how do you …
R25T   Well, we've never had to make any of those that I know of.  Anything
       on the roads or … we just got a TRIP program approval and that went
       through the county all the way to the chairman and the county
       commission, highway commissioner, took care of it all.  The highway
       commissioner comes out there to town board meetings and explains
       things to us and gets information that way.
```

Communicating with WisDOT and Intermediaries

Most of the municipalities who reported communicating with WisDOT did so through their regional office. County officials, especially highway commissioners, were also frequent choices for respondents to turn to for questions or updates. Engineering consultants were another source of information for a few municipalities, as were municipal associations. Two villages reported calling on their state legislator when communication with WisDOT was difficult.

```
R17T   I haven't had a lot of direct contact with the DOT other than
       through, let's say, workshops that I've gone to. And most of those
       have been like in joint with the towns association.

R16T   We really don't have a lot of contact with the DOT.  Usually we
       contact __ County Highway Department.  They've been exceptionally
       helpful.

R45V   We'd place our phone calls, not hear from the engineer assigned, …
       We actually got to the point where we rattled a cage in essence by
       getting our [state representative …) Once our rep got involved, all
       of a sudden there was apparently a priority put on communicating
       with us, but prior to that … I mean we literally sort of worked
       through the system and just could not get good enough communication.

R21T   But now the DOT has channeled a lot of it out to other engineering
       firms and cut their … it's a little harder.
```

General Problems with WisDOT Communication

When respondents described their experiences communicating with WisDOT, the moderator attempted to guide them to talk mainly about the process of the communication, rather than their satisfaction with the answers or rulings they received. Many of the stories recounted moved back and forth between those topics, but probes by the moderator were usually successful in obtaining answers about the "how" of the communication as opposed to the "what" aspects. Certain themes did turn up frequently in the accounts that were not strictly focused on the communications process or technology intended for the discussion, but addressed respondents' satisfaction with WisDOT communication in general. These included:

- Phone calls not being returned;
- WisDOT staff not being knowledgeable enough in general, or about specific topics or locations (turnover among WisDOT staff was mentioned as related to this issue);
- Having a hard time finding information that was current;
- Consultants responding more quickly than WisDOT did; and
- Difficulty reaching the right person at WisDOT.

```
R21T   …They used to have one man … to take care of the bridges or roads and
       he was at that area and pretty much what he said … it was going to go,
       it went. I mean, now you get the runaround and you never really get an
       answer.

R26V    …So my understanding is that the DOT has an area for each one of us, a
       person…. How do we know who that person is? I sure don't. Do you? … The
       DOT needs to get a directory out to the clerks so we do know.

R41C    … Talking with our DPW supervisor that is bad with the Highway 3 ....
       project 2002 through now. He said basically the same thing as you said,
       that there's been such a high turnover in DOT from 2002 to 2008 that in
       this project you never talk to the same people from year in to year out
       and they just don't have the experience.

R46C   You can really tell the difference when the DOT is engineering a
       project or when a consultant is engineering the project. … You know,
       the consultants are responding, giving things out, it seems a lot more
       quicker.

R41C   There's been such a high turnover in DOT from 2002 to 2008 that in this
       project you never talk to the same people from year in to year out and
       they just don't have the experience.
R44C   Because they all got pulled to the --- project, all of the experienced
       people.
```

5.2 Banner Problem Scenario

Respondents were told of a situation in which a community had promotional banners displayed along state highways in their downtown areas. WisDOT asked that the banners be removed because they included the names of local business sponsors in violation of state and federal outdoor advertising regulations. Several of the respondents had heard of this problem occurring, either mentioning it in their own initial comments or recalling it after the scenario was presented. The groups came up with a number of suggestions for avoiding future occurrences. In roughly decreasing order of prevalence, they were:

- Newsletters (either mailed or e-mailed) to inform officials about regulations;
- Workshops for municipalities;
- Posting information on the Web;
- Presentations at municipality associations' meetings;
- Sending the information to counties for redistribution;
- Getting information to informal groups or e-mail discussion lists of municipalities transportation officials, who would disseminate it to others; and
- Providing an e-mail address that municipalities can use to ask about regulations.

The respondents who said they had encountered similar situations in the past cited conversations with engineers or county-level staff as the way they had sought or learned information about this topic. One official (whose community had had to take down banners just as the scenario described) said that he had received a call from a regional WisDOT staffer in advance of a letter notifying him of the takedown order.

```
MOD    … Where should they start looking?
R21T   Either the county or your zoning, county zoning … Or your highway
       commissioner.

R31V   And they work with that stuff every day, it's kind of hard for a
       small group trying to figure out where you go on the Internet or
       anywhere else, but you talk with the engineers that work with those
       people every day, it's kind of second nature for them.

R35V   … Well, the letter did come and unfortunately the letter did not
       have as much information as we had hoped. All it said was we were in
       violation of numerous federal and state regulations, so while the
       phone call heads up was… a good idea and it kind of helped… make it
       so that we weren't blindsided, the information that actually came
       out was a bit disappointing.

R44C   I call one of my fellow engineers, that's what I usually do. I get
       more from them than I do from the DOT. We've got a pretty good
       network of people… somebody's already e-mailed them, … somebody's
       ran through it before.
```

5.3 Evaluation of Communication Items

Connector Express

The Connector Express newsletter was presented to all groups. The moderator asked them to consider its possible usefulness to their communities and how they would be able to access it. None of the officials had seen it before, but many of them felt it would be useful to them or to their staffs and communities.

When asked about ways to access it, two respondents said they preferred to read it as a hard copy, either due to no Internet access or because they found reading on a computer to be difficult. (The moderator did explain that the newsletter was only being distributed electronically, but suggestions for hard copies still occurred.) Among those who said they could receive it by e-mail, two commented on the file format: one person said he preferred to receive it as an Acrobat document, and one said either Acrobat or Word format would work.

The Connector Express seemed useful to many of the respondents. Being able to store and search the files on their computer was appealing, as was the ability to forward it to other officials or post it on municipal Web sites. Having the clickable links with each news item was well received, as some respondents preferred to have this kind of brief, skimmable presentation of topics into which they could dig deeper according to their interest and schedule.

```
R17T  Well, I think it's useful, … just glancing at it from the standpoint
      that it looks like they've kind of encapsulated the issue and then
      if you want more information, they've got the site to go to to get
      it if you need it.

R26V  Well, I don't like to waste paper and try to keep it in the computer
      and I like the link, I really like the fact that you just click any
      … when you put it in your I-cards on the computer, you can still
      open it up and get to the links?
MOD   Yes.
R26V  I like that, but people who like hard copies don't have that choice.
      I think you should do both.

R22T  … I like the looks of this. It's got… the different categories. You
      can skim to see which one actually pertains to you or which one you
      can go back and look for later. Then they have the Web sites…
```

Suggestions for improving the Connector Express mainly focused on providing an index of published topics on the Web, and using it to open discussion with municipalities about topics. Two respondents suggested making specific editions for different regions.

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R16T  I'm just wondering if you had a comment on some of this stuff that
      they do have in here, if you could send it back and they can use
      that information maybe in a later article or something in these e-
      mails.

R24C  … It would be kind of nice if your township would get these monthly
      and every so often have an index that would go with it, if the pages
      were numbered and … Once a year have an index of pages …
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```
R45V   … If there was communication ahead of time that would say this is
       something that is being thought about, is there any contrary input
       that would maybe create us to put an amendment … or something to
       that extent rather than, it becomes black and white, okay? You do it
       this way or no way and then you're stuck. … there's no process of
       dialogue prior to making it the end-all statement.
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Safe Routes to School Reporter

The Safe Routes to School Reporter was presented to Group 1 only. Respondents were asked to evaluate its usefulness and accessibility. No respondents had seen this publication before, and few had any comments about it. Opinions on its usefulness for municipal officials of the type attending this were negative.

```
R17T   I think this one is much harder to, at a quick glance, figure out
       whether there's information in here that really pertains to you or
       that you need to know about.

R16T   … The DOT does … look for projects that improve safety around
       schools, but my own opinion would be that the police department or
       school boards would benefit from this.
```

Local Roads and Streets Council Newsletter

The Local Roads and Streets Council (LRSC) consists of municipal officials who provide WisDOT with input on policies and needs impacting the local roadway system. A quarterly newsletter helps transportation stakeholders remain up-to-date on council activities. The LRSC newsletter was presented to Groups 2 and 3, and they were asked about its perceived usefulness. As with the Safe Routes document, no respondents had seen it before and few expressed opinions about it. What comments they did give were mixed as to its usefulness and their ability to access it.

```
R23T   At first glance, it looks very long. … I think it's nice to have a
       lot of information, workshops and contact people and stuff.

R32V   As someone who's experienced in getting this information through the
       local units, I would say that this would be very helpful to new
       people because they don't know about this yet and I know that
       because I've served on the Highway Department committee for a couple
       of years. I was familiar with the things that you could apply for …
```

Wisconsin Information System for Local Roads (WISLR)

The Wisconsin Information System for Local Roads (WISLR) is an Internet-accessible database that helps state and local officials make informed decisions about local roadway needs. Communities are asked to submit local roadway information to WisDOT to create the database. Group 1 was not asked specifically about the WISLR program, although three town respondents in that group volunteered that they did submit reports. Two of those three were not using the computer version because of its perceived complexity or their slow Internet connection, while the other WISLR user in that group was doing it via computer.

Groups 2, 3, and 4 were asked whether they submitted information to WISLR, what method they used, and how well it worked for them. Among those respondents who were asked about their WISLR process, all the cities reported sending the reports electronically and that it was working well.

```
R24C   … I think it works pretty well. … years ago it used to be that
       everything was in tenths of miles or something. It was kind of kind
       of handy and now you can convert it to feet or whatever so I think
       it works fine.

R44C   Online is the best way to do it.
```

Of village and town officials who received the WISLR questions at a focus group meeting, four said they had experience using WISLR and three respondents reported that someone else on their staff handled the process, so they did not know how it worked but did not know of any problems. One village and one town indicated that they wanted to submit electronically, but slow Internet connections were an obstacle, and one town respondent thought the computer instructions were too complex. Only two respondents indicated that they had to contact the help line for WISLR, but those contacts were successful in making it usable.

```
MOD    … So they're doing it just on the computer?
R25T   Yes. Then they mail one in.

MOD    Do you know if they have a hard time with the process of it at all?
       Is it something that is easy for them to manage?
R21T   No, I don't think so. … everything is spelled out there, it's just
       that you've got some changes and you've got to grade them.

R33V   It's not too bad. The only problem I've had is you have a number of
       instances I haven't been able to access the site. I don't know what
       the problem's been, but it's been the last three years probably, at
       least three or four times, and then I had to go through their office
       down there and change a password and so forth when they had a little
       glitch that I've really run into.

R16T   On paper.  I try.  I was going to do it on a computer, looked at it,
       and I thought, this is going to take more time than … that's
       something they can simplify.
MOD    Was it something with your computer system …
R16T   Just trying to figure out what they wanted.  They were very helpful.
       I called and asked if they … or send an e-mail … asked the
       individual who was in charge of it if they could e-mail me the roads
       in the township … and they were very helpful with that.
MOD    That e-mail request you sent, you got back that information?
```

```
R16T   Yes.  They sent the information attached to it, so that was quite
       helpful.
MOD    … that choice of sending the road information on paper versus on
       computer, would there be anything that would sway you toward being
       able to do it on a computer?
R16T   Simplify the process.  I would rather do it on computer.

R15V   I tried to do it and the Web site was down, that's as far as I got.
```

WisDOT Web Site

Two Web pages were presented to all the groups: the main WisDOT page
(www.dot.wisconsin.gov/, referred to here as "WisDOT-main") and the Programs for Local
Government page (www.dot.wisconsin.gov/localgov/, abbreviated here as "PFLG"). In
Groups 1, 3, and 4, the moderator connected directly to those pages via the meeting facility's
Internet access. During Group 2, however, Internet access was intermittent, so locally cached
copies of the site were used.

Web site usage

When asked, about half of the respondents said they had used the WisDOT Web site at some
time. Cities and villages were more likely to have used it than were towns. Of the seven
towns with Internet access, it was the smaller ones who were not using the Web site.
Responses to the prior usage question were as follows:

> Cities: 4 yes, 2 no
> Towns: 3 yes, 4 no (5 others without internet access)
> Villages: 6 yes, 2 no, 1 believed other staff use it.

For most of those who had not used the site, the reasons were technological: no computer, no
Internet access, or slow dial-up access. One town clerk stated that she had never tried the site
because she "never really had the need." One respondent who had not used it personally (but
who said his clerk probably did) imagined that dealing with passwords for the site would be
inconvenient, although he became more interested in using it after seeing that passwords
were not needed for most of the areas.

Current users

Those who had used the site previously described a range of ways it had been useful. Some
mentioned learning about funding, either as historical data or for future applications. Others
talked about ways to enhance their compliance or understanding with regard to WisDOT
projects or regulations.

```
R26V   I think it would be useful because when you want to figure out how
       much you've gotten over the years budget-wise, … I think it's a
       useful tool.

MOD     … What kind of things are you doing when you use the GTA web site?
R35V   Well, I use it a little bit just going through … I came on at the
       beginning of November and obviously my first task was to very
       quickly put together the … village budgets, so in turn I also had to
```

```
        learn all about the various funding mechanisms, be it transportation
        or all of the state aids that come from various sources, … so I used
        the Web site here as well as Department of Revenue and so forth or
        learn about that information very quickly.  … you know, keep track
        of what's going on, what the requirements are in getting
        transportation aid.  What kind of reporting requirements they were
        and so on and so forth, so that's kind of what I'm going through
        right now.
```

```
R33V    There are a lot of them on here that I know I would use it … the
        signing issue you talked about before.  I've done some research on
        there.  You get down a little bit … permits or anything.  We're
        trying to put up some highway signs like you talked about on the two
        state highways coming into our community, … looking up what the
        rules are and statutes from that and from there talk to the DOT rep
        and write a letter about it and we had some issues trying to get
        signs up.
MOD     So researching information before you have the phone conversation or
        the meeting there with them.
R33V    Yes.

R43C    Where I use it now is updating our computer software so we're using
        the same details, the same sheets as the DOT.
```

When the previous users were given the opportunity to navigate with a keyboard and mouse, and to describe how they typically dealt with the site, three main patterns of use emerged.

1. Some users simply relied on the search box feature on WisDOT-main or PFLG to find information or forms that were relevant to their needs. They did not tend to move around on the site otherwise.

```
R12T    If I couldn't see it right handy at a glance, then I look for the
        search box and then put it in the search box, and then I'd look
        through and see if there was something there that maybe was
        pertinent to whatever came in the mail and is sitting on my desk.
```

2. Several users explored the site by clicking on links as they encountered topics that might interest them.

```
R43C    It's just trial and error. … And then once I do find it, it's
        backing out so I know how I got there or once I do find something, I
        actually bookmark the page so I'm not in their home page all of the
        time.
```

3. Other users who were more experienced with the site had a few specific areas that they would go to, or were sent by others to visit.

```
R26V    I think it would be useful because when you want to figure out how
        much you've gotten over the years budget-wise, … I think it's a
        useful tool.

R42V    This, actually the few times that I've been on the site, it's been
        linked to me from someone who's been looking at the grant program,
        but I didn't have to go through the search on the Web site. It was
        already … right to their page.
```

Suggestions from the existing site users included keeping the information on the site more current, or making it easier to tell how old it is.

R44C   One of the problems is they don't keep it up to date enough on a lot
       of the other areas. There's information for local communities on
       there that, … as I said we were waiting for 13 months … you'd think
       over the 13 months they'd put one article on there about why is it
       delayed…

R45V   … One of the easiest things that I can see that is not being done is
       when you have information or articles that have a rev date [note:
       revision date] on it … if you see a rev date that's two years old, …
       personally I would find how to contact them and ask them 'is this
       still a pertinent article?' … As years are going by, I'm seeing more
       and more junk left on sites because … it could be because of
       financially tight times that they haven't got the people to maintain
       it accurately, well then it becomes literally a useless tool because
       if 98% of it is accurate, but you hit upon the 2% that isn't, in
       your mind it's a useless informational method to find anything.

Another suggestion was for a way to submit complaints to WisDOT via the Web.

R26V   … You go to the DOT and call them up and you get runarounds… it
       would be nice to have 'Contact Us' and you'd just say 'we feel this
       is a safety hazard.'… Even if they don't contact you back, at least
       they've gotten the message of … we have some concerns out there in
       that area.

Another theme in these respondents' suggestions was to make it easier to see certain topics or to keep track of where they were.

R42V   It just seems that you get lost in the programs as you try to find
       your way through.

New users

Those respondents who were seeing the WisDOT Web site for the first time had a range of ideas on how the site could be useful to them. Several mentioned finding information on funding sources. Others thought it would be a good resource for questions about regulations.

R16T   … If you aren't exactly sure how much time you have left on your
       funding to use it, you go onto this Web site and find out when it
       does expire.

R15V   Traffic signing and marking enhancement. … When this comes up, I'm
       hoping it shows a picture.

Beyond the usefulness of particular topics, some new users commented on the nature of the information available on the site.

R31V   Compared to hard copy, this would be faster with the road
       construction changes, … which would be good.

New users were more reluctant to try navigating the site themselves than were existing users. Of those who did, two used the search box on the WisDOT-main page, and one clicked on PFLG links to see what he could find.

Suggestions about the Web site from new users were mainly focused on the differing information needs of smaller municipalities versus larger cities, and finding topics relevant to them in the overall lists of links.

```
R17T   … I think there are a lot of things on there that don't really apply
       to a rural town, … but there's no way they can make various Web
       sites for various towns.

R36T   … It'd be nice to get something that pertains more to local rural
       areas, what you're eligible for, what their needs are. Some of
       these, like elder transportation … that's county issues and I look
       through here and there's many city, urban …
```

Miscellaneous suggestions

At the end of each group, the moderator asked each respondent to make one suggestion about something they would like WisDOT to change or understand about communicating with their community. Responses displayed several themes:
- Improve the timeliness of communication, with quicker responses and advance notice of changes;
- Distribute informative materials like the Connector Express which provide summaries of and access to more detailed topics that local officials can choose to pursue;
- Reach out to new municipal officials (who will need to start interacting with WisDOT) with information about programs and contact persons;
- Keep communities up to date on who their WisDOT contacts are;
- Have the DOT staff who deal with local officials be more knowledgeable and authorized to give definitive answers;
- Target information to certain types of communities that have specific needs: rural vs. urban, towns vs. villages vs. cities;
- Provide education for local governing officials who indirectly affect their communities' WisDOT dealings.

```
R46C   I think being a little more proactive, getting information out. Why
       should we be having to go out and search out things? I like this
       Connector Express type of thing and rural water sends out something
       every week and it's just a couple of quick lines as to what happened
       in this community or legislation that had taken place and then you
       have a link to more information and you can even just look through
       and say there's nothing of interest and delete or you could say,
       hey, I want to go on and find out about this or you can send it on
       to someone else.

R18T   At the DOT … if they contacted … because the towns association
       always has workshops for newly elected people, so if they had
       'here's key information that these new people should get' and not
       overwhelm them with whatever, but the main things that you need to
       know as you're starting down the road.
```

MOD   What would be the best channel for doing that, to those new people? Would it be meetings? Would it be mailing? Would it be something that comes out on e-mail?

R18T I think like at a meeting, because a lot of the newly elected people go to these first meetings.

R22T Don't assume that we know, if they're going to send out forms or something that we have to send back, put an explanation sheet in there because, they don't know when a new clerk or new treasurer comes in and changes.

R43C I'd go back to when the DOT does change personnel that they actually contact their clients. So that we know there's somebody else that we need to talk to.

R36T So, it'd be nice to get something that pertains more to local rural areas, what you're eligible for, what their needs are.

R33V Some type of a newsletter would be a real good approach for them and the idea of making it regional and also target it to the type of entity it's going to, whether it's a township or village or city or whatever and have different types of newsletters with pertinent information in there that's pertinent to these particular entities and use that as a way of reminding them about signs or whatever, just have the contact information in there so that if somebody has a question about something, they can look in there and see what contact and then have some regular thing, not once a year, twice a year, or something like that, like monthly or something, a regular, continuous contact that has that information out there is really important….I would expect that e-mail would be best.

R15V DOT could improve … informing (especially in the smaller towns where the village boards like to take a real tight control of what goes on, they don't really understand what we go through with a lot of this stuff) to let them [note: boards] know that any help or input that they can give us. Basically educate the trustees even though they don't want to be … that's the hardest thing that we have to do is to try to get it through their heads. I tried for I think three years to get it through their heads that we need to have a capital improvement plan.

6. OVERALL THEMES

Focus group research of this type is qualitative in nature. The small numbers of participants, their limited geographical distribution, and their self-selection into the project mean that it is not possible to draw conclusions that have statistical significance for municipalities in general. However, frequently occurring themes and patterns of responses can be illustrative of the kinds of issues faced by communities like these statewide, and may suggest possible ways to address those.

Internet access is available to all of the cities and villages, and most of the towns who participated in these groups. Barriers to electronic communication seemed to fall into two categories: technological, where officials intend to use computers but have not been able to yet, or where access exists but is slow; and attitudinal, where older officials serving for several decades prefer to do things the old-fashioned way through personal connections. Those towns whose Internet access is currently lacking seem likely to become internet capable in the near future, as they upgrade slow or temporary connections, and as elderly officials retire. The fact that the lowest-population towns were the ones with no Internet access is not a true statistical correlation (as stated above) but does suggest that non-electronic communications remain important for reaching small communities.

E-mail is seen favorably as a communication tool for its speed, flexible scheduling, and record-keeping advantages. Most communities were using it in WisDOT communications, or could. Even for those officials who themselves preferred to look at hard copies, most acknowledged the utility of sending information by e-mail to someone on staff who could pass it along to others.

The WisDOT Web site was also well-received by respondents, both the half who had prior experience with it and others who were seeing it for the first time. Most respondents who tried to use the Web site in the group were able to navigate to some topics they found useful without difficulty and describe how they would (or they do) use them in their roles. Any criticism of the site seemed to focus on having to sift through too many inapplicable items, particularly urban transportation programs. Direct access to the topics contained on the Web site was an advantage for respondents who wanted to find out information specifically relevant to their communities, in their own time and without it being filtered through intermediaries. Towns split on Web site usage between larger and smaller ones, although again, the situation does not allow any strong conclusions.

Two potential usability improvements to the Web site (not mentioned by any specific respondent, but synthesized from their collected impressions) could be: provide a prominent "new user" link that would introduce the PFLG features and layout; or offer a secondary page that grouped links into categories applicable to rural or small town users. Those might allow skeptical officials to ease into using an easily comprehended subset of information on the site, and then to move to using the standard page once they were comfortable. Demonstration of the site and its use at existing municipal association meetings may also be an effective way of publicizing it and lowering perceived barriers to its use.

The particular combination of e-mail and Web information provided by the Connector Express seemed useful to many respondents, and there were suggestions for expanding the

use of that format for other kinds of information. E-mailed newsletters with links to detailed information may be one way to encourage traffic to WisDOT's Web presence. Opinions of the newsletters for LRSC and Safe Routes to School were less favorable, with the narrower scope of those publications making them less useful to the officials in these groups.

Electronic communication was also common for WISLR users. Those who used the Internet version were satisfied with it, and some of those who were submitting their information on paper viewed the computer method as an option that would be good to use. Aside from two respondents' temporary technical difficulties, and one who wanted the computer instructions simplified, no one reported problems with the WISLR system.

Traditional communications methods were still popular, though. Postal mail, in-person meetings, municipal association newsletters, and telephone calls were all methods that respondents reported as important in their communication with WisDOT. In general, smaller and more rural communities with older officials tended to be the ones preferring or choosing these traditional methods over internet ones.

Peer-to-peer networks of local officials were mentioned by a few respondents as useful existing information resources (SWAPS e-mail list, nearby engineers). Establishing a connection between those and WisDOT may be an efficient way to distribute information and receive comments.

One concern that arose frequently was that WisDOT should avoid a one-size-fits-all approach to communicating with municipalities. Respondents requested that different kinds of information be targeted at rural and urban communities, and that the needs of towns, villages, and cities differed in ways that WisDOT's communications should respect. This seemed to be a reason why respondents found the municipal associations useful, as they could distill knowledge to what would be helpful for different types of communities.

Turnover and its effect on communication effectiveness was a concern in two ways. First, officials complained about turnover of WisDOT staff making it difficult for them to get well-informed or timely answers. Second, turnover in local officials led to problems when the new local staff did not know who to contact or how to understand WisDOT's requirements. This is especially relevant when a long-serving official retires.   Help for those new officials could be provided via distribution of contact information, more explanatory material included with required forms, and by orientation through municipal association channels.

Timeliness of communication was a concern expressed by several respondents. This usually took the form of complaints about unreturned calls or delays in responding to documents submitted to WisDOT. Some respondents also asked that WisDOT give more advance notice of changes to policies or plans, expressing satisfaction about situations where that had occurred in the past.

Many of the smaller towns and villages were receiving transportation information through intermediaries (counties, consultants, municipal associations) rather than directly from WisDOT. Many respondents found those alternative sources more useful, convenient, or responsive than WisDOT itself. It may be helpful to steer WisDOT information (or tips on

how to access WisDOT information) through those to the local governments, since municipalities are already used to seeking information there.

APPENDIX

A. Focus Group Recruiting Materials
B. Focus Group Discussion Scripts
C. Focus Group Handouts-Contact WisDOT Office of Public Affairs for copy
D. Focus Group Transcripts-Contact WisDOT Office of Public Affairs for copy

APPENDIX A
FOCUS GROUP
RECRUITING MATERIALS

Telephone Recruiting Script for Groups 1, 2, & 3

Text in ALL CAPS is not read.

```
>intro1<

     Hello, I'm calling from the University of Wisconsin.

  (INTERVIEWER: R IS [FILL TITLE] of the [FILL TYPE] of [FILL MUNICIP])

  (INTERVIEWER: IF R HAS BEEN REPLACED, IT'S OK TO SPEAK WITH NEW CLERK)

  May I please speak to [FILL FNAM] [FILL LNAM]?


>expl<

     The Wisconsin Department of Transportation is trying to improve
  its communication with local officials. We're holding some
  discussion groups to gather opinions on how they can do that.

  We'll pay you for attending if you're eligible.

  Are you the person in the [FILL TYPE] of [FILL MUNICIP] who usually
  deals with Department of Transportation communication?

  <1>     YES, CONTINUE [goto q3]
  <2>     NO, SOMEONE ELSE HANDLES DOT COMMUNICATION [goto expl2]
  <3>     NO, NEITHER R NOR OTHER PERSON QUALIFIES


>expl2<

     Is that person available now?

  <1>     ALTERNATE R IS AVAILABLE NOW [goto newad]
  <2>     CALLBACK REQUIRED FOR ALTERNATE R [goto newad]
  <3>     NO ONE ELSE AVAILABLE


>q3<

     Our group will be meeting on [FILL QDATE] in [FILL QCITY].
  It will be at [FILL QLOC], from [FILL QTIME1] to [FILL QTIME2].

  If you attend the group, we'll pay you fifty dollars for your time.
  Would you be able to attend on [FILL QDATE]?

  <1>     YES [goto q5]
  <2>     NO
```

```
>q4<
   Thank you very much anyway.
```

```
>q5<
```

    Great. I just need to get your name and address so we can send you
    a map and directions.

    What is your name and address?

```
>q8<
```

    Okay, we'll look forward to seeing you at [FILL QTIME1]
    on [FILL QDATE] at [FILL QLOC] in [FILL QCITY].

    We'll send you a letter with directions and a map, and try to give
    you a reminder call the day before. Thank you very much.

Email Recruiting Messages for Group 4.

Group 4. Email Recruiting Message #1 to Cities.

Subject: The Wisconsin Department of Transportation needs your opinions.
Date: May 13, 2008

Dear [FILL SALUT] [FILL LN],

The Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) and the University
of Wisconsin Survey Center are gathering opinions from local officials
about how WisDOT can improve its communication with municipalities. We
need your help to represent [FILL CITY]'s experiences and needs.

We have been holding a series of discussion groups across Wisconsin with
clerks, public works directors, and other officials on this issue. Our
next meeting will be in Waukesha in a few weeks. I would like to invite
you (or someone on your city staff who deals with WisDOT information) to
attend the upcoming group. In consideration of your time, participants
will be paid $50 at the end of the 90 minute meeting.

People who have participated in our previous groups have said they
enjoyed the experience of both learning more about WisDOT's information
resources and contributing their own ideas on how WisDOT can help
communities like theirs.

Our aim is to include officials who deal with WisDOT information as part
of their duties. We are contacting you and other city clerks, since we
have often found clerks to be involved with WisDOT communication to some
degree. If someone in your organization other than you has more
involvement with WisDOT, feel free to forward this message to that
person. Only one person from each city may attend the group, and we
will be limiting the group to 12 people.

We have not yet finalized the date for the meeting, but we are
suggesting two possible evenings: Wednesday May 28, or Monday June 9. We
will select one of those dates based on which one is more convenient for
officials who are willing to attend. The meeting will take place from
7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. in Waukesha.

We would very much appreciate it if you could reply to this message, and indicate below which (if any) of the dates you would be willing to attend. (If you cannot attend, but another eligible official might be able to, you are welcome to forward this message to that person.) Even if you cannot make either date, an answer of "not able to attend" is helpful to us in planning the group. Once I have heard from enough people to select a date, I will notify everyone of the scheduling choice.

__ I would be willing to attend on either date (May 28 or June 9).

__ I would be willing to attend Wednesday May 28, only.

__ I would be willing to attend Monday June 9, only.

__ I will not be able to attend on either date.

Please reply by May 20. If you have any questions about the project, I will be happy to discuss it with you. You can reach me by email (cradock@ssc.wisc.edu) or phone (608-265-9885). Thank you very much for your time and consideration. I hope we can include your experiences and opinions, and improve WisDOT's service to cities like yours.

Sincerely,

Bob Cradock

Group 4. Email Recruiting Message #2 to Cities.

Subject: WisDOT Focus Group spaces available for May 28.
Date: May 22, 2008

The WisDOT focus group we mentioned in last week's email has been scheduled for next Wednesday evening, May 28, in Waukesha. Most of the people who've replied preferred that date.

We still have a few spaces available in the group. If you would like to attend, please let me know. Information about the group is included below, and you can contact me (cradock@ssc.wisc.edu, 608-265-9885) if you have any questions.

Thank you very much.

Bob Cradock

- - -

The Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) and the University of Wisconsin Survey Center are gathering opinions from local officials about how WisDOT can improve its communication with municipalities. We need your help to represent your village's experiences and needs.

We have been holding a series of discussion groups across Wisconsin with clerks, public works directors, and other officials on this issue. Our next meeting will be in Waukesha next week, on Wednesday May 28, from 7:00-8:30 p.m.

I would like to invite you (or someone on your city staff who deals with WisDOT information) to attend the upcoming group. In consideration of your time, participants will be paid $50 at the end of the 90 minute meeting.

People who have participated in our previous groups have said they enjoyed the experience of both learning more about WisDOT's information resources and contributing their own ideas on how WisDOT can help communities like theirs.

Our aim is to include officials who deal with WisDOT information as part of their duties. We are contacting you and other clerks, since we have often found clerks to be involved with WisDOT communication to some degree. If someone in your organization other than you has more involvement with WisDOT, feel free to forward this message to that person. Only one person from each municipality may attend the group, and we will be limiting the group to 12 people.

Group 4. Email Recruiting Message to Villages.

Subject: The Wisconsin Department of Transportation needs your opinions.
Date: May 22, 2008

The Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) and the University of Wisconsin Survey Center are gathering opinions from local officials about how WisDOT can improve its communication with municipalities. We need your help to represent your village's experiences and needs.

We have been holding a series of discussion groups across Wisconsin with clerks, public works directors, and other officials on this issue. Our next meeting will be in Waukesha next week, on Wednesday May 28, from 7:00-8:30 p.m.

I would like to invite you (or someone on your village staff who deals with WisDOT information) to attend the upcoming group. In consideration of your time, participants will be paid $50 at the end of the 90 minute meeting.

People who have participated in our previous groups have said they enjoyed the experience of both learning more about WisDOT's information resources and contributing their own ideas on how WisDOT can help communities like theirs.

Our aim is to include officials who deal with WisDOT information as part of their duties. We are contacting you and other clerks, since we have often found clerks to be involved with WisDOT communication to some degree. If someone in your organization other than you has more involvement with WisDOT, feel free to forward this message to that person. Only one person from each municipality may attend the group, and we will be limiting the group to 12 people.

We would very much appreciate it if you could reply to this message, and indicate below whether you would be willing to attend. (If you cannot attend, but another eligible official might be able to, you are welcome to forward this message to that person.) Even if you cannot participate, an answer of "not able to attend" is helpful to us in planning the group.

__ I would be willing to attend on Wednesday May 28.

__ I will not be able to attend.

If you have any questions about the project, I will be happy to discuss it with you. You can reach me by email (cradock@ssc.wisc.edu) or phone (608-265-9885). Thank you very much for your time and consideration. I hope we can include your experiences and opinions, and improve WisDOT's service to villages like yours.

Sincerely,

Bob Cradock

Confirmation letter to recruited respondents.

[FILL DATE]

Dear [FILL FN],

Thank you for agreeing to meet with us for our focus group on [FILL MEETING DATE], from [FILL MEETING TIMES].

The group will meet at [FILL LOCATION]. Please see the enclosed map for directions.

We will be meeting in [FILL ROOM].

The meeting will last approximately an hour and half. Please arrive about five minutes early so we can sign you in.

As consideration for your time, we will pay you $50 at the end of the meeting. Only pre-registered group members will be admitted to the meeting. Please bring this letter with you.

Everything you say in the discussion will remain confidential. We consider your commitment firm, so if you have any problems or questions, please contact me at 608-265-9885 before noon on [FILL MEETING DATE].

Thank you again, and we look forward to meeting with you.

Sincerely,

Bob Cradock
Forum moderator

Appendix B
Focus Groups
Discussion Scripts

DOT Local Government Communication Focus Groups.
Group 1 Discussion script 2008-04-07

[[ALL CAPS indicate activity reminders]]

1) Preliminaries [[START RECORDER]]
   a) Welcome
      i) Who we are
      ii) Why we're here:
         (1) DOT works w/ govts of all sizes to complete projects and oversee policies that promote safe and efficient transport.
         (2) Looking for your opinions & experiences regarding the way that DOT communicates with your municipality.
            (a) What are the ways that's occurring now?
            (b) How well is it working?
            (c) Are there improvements you'd like to see?
         (3) DOT wants to know what communications capabilities are currently available to you, and what are effective, as they develop new communication strategies.
   b) Format of discussion
      i) Ask about your experiences.
      ii) Present specific situations & ask for your comments on them.
      iii) Ask you to evaluate some existing DOT communication tools.
   c) Scope of discussion
      i) Speak as officials, not individual DOT consumers.
      ii) Focus on the <u>way</u> the communication occurs, not the actual content of that communication: "How" not "What".
         (1) Communication technology is changing, and DOT wants to find the best methods for exchanging info with you.
         (2) Example. Regulations: put aside whether regulations are good/bad/too many, focus on how DOT can communicate with you <u>about</u> them.
         (3) Example. DOT decisions: whether or not you agree with them, we want to know how you see the communication <u>process</u> by which you obtain them.
         (4) It's fine to mention what the issues were for your particular DOT experiences that you'll be telling us about, but don't be offended if I steer things toward the "how" aspect.
      iii) After group, we'll have contact info if you want to talk with someone at DOT about these other issues.
   d) Ground rules
      i) Sometimes we'll ask you to speak in turn, other times we'll have a more free-form discussion. I may have to ask you to hold your thought for a moment, but please remind me if I forget to get back to you.

      ii) Different opinions are welcome, even if everybody else seems to be thinking differently from you. We're not trying to convince anybody of anything or decide anything.

  e) Other basics
      i) Cell phones silenced.
      ii) Recording discussion, speak up.
      iii) Confidentiality.
      iv) Finish about (8 pm).
      v) Paid at end.

2) Introduction & Open Topics
  a) Go around table:
      i) Your name, town, position, how long you've been in your role.
      ii) Tell us briefly about a recent experience communicating with DOT.
        (1) What were you trying to do?
        (2) When was this?
        (3) What part of DOT were you dealing with?
        (4) Was that initiated by you or by DOT?
        (5) Were you satisfied with how that went?
        (6) Did you receive the information that you needed?

3) Scenario & Communication Modes
  a) Present sponsored-banner story. [[PASS OUT COPIES]]
      i) How can communication between DOT & Local Govts help prevent this type of problem?
      ii) What ways do you receive info from DOT on these topics?
      iii) What channels are available to you? (capability for: email, web, fax, etc.)
        (1) Are you able to receive email from DOT? Emailed newsletters?
        (2) Are you able to access web information from DOT?
      iv) What methods are effective? What improvements would you suggest?
        (1) If you were advising a new clerk on how to get info from DOT, what would you suggest?
  b) Indirect communication with DOT.
      i) Do you receive information passed on from DOT through municipal associations?
        (1) Which associations?
        (2) Would you prefer important DOT information to go through municipal associations, or to you directly? Why?
      ii) How much do you communicate with regional DOT offices vs. central office in Madison?
        (1) How accessible or effective are your communications with those offices?
  c) Communication from municipalities to DOT.
      i) How do you communicate to DOT?
        (1) Email, postal mail, telephone?
        (2) Other options?
      ii) How well does that work? Suggestions for improvement?

4) Existing Communication Tools
    a) Tool A - WisDOT Connector Express electronic newsletter [[PASS OUT COPIES]]
        i) Who has had experience with this?
            (1) How do you receive it? Respond to it?
            (2) When you deal with it, what happens?
            (3) How do you use this?
            (4) What aspects of this are useful to you?
            (5) What problems do you have with it?
            (6) How accessible is this to you? What would make it easier?
            (7) How valuable is this?
            (8) How well does DOT understand what you need (re: communication)?
            (9) Suggestions for improvement?
        ii) Who is seeing this for the first time, or is only a little familiar with it?
            (1) How useful does it seem to you?
            (2) Are you able to receive/access this?
            (3) What would make it easier for you to access it?
        iii) If it's not directly useful to you, is this something that would be useful to someone else in your staff?
            (1) Would you forward it to other people?
            (2) What would be the most effective mode to receive/access it, in that case?
        iv) Would you like to be on the distribution list?
            (1) At end of group, we'll hand out Rob's contact info for requests.
    b) Tool B - Safe Routes to Schools Reporter [[PASS OUT COPIES]]
        i) [Repeat above questions]
    c) Tool C - WISLR table of roads & mileage [[PASS OUT COPIES]]
        i) [Repeat above questions]
    d) During the time you've been dealing with the DOT, have there been changes in the communication that you've felt were positive? Negative?

5) Web Site Evaluation
   a) [[SHOW SITE ON SCREEN; PASS OUT PAPER COPIES OF DOT & PFLG HOME PAGES.]]
      i) Start with dot.wisconsin.gov, then click to PFLG page.
   b) Some of you may be familiar with it, others may be new to it.
   c) All opinions are welcome.
   d) Who has used it?
      i) For what? How often?
      ii) Walk us through a use you make of the site.
      iii) [[Moderator or participant clicks on site links, describing what's being done, for the audio recording.]]

      iv) What do you look for? How easy is it to find?
      v) Good/bad features?
      vi) Suggestions for improvement?
   e) Who has not used the site?
      i) Do you have internet access?
      ii) Are there other reasons you have not used the site?
      iii) Is there a kind of information you want from DOT that we can try looking for now?
      iv) [[Moderator or participant clicks on site links, describing activity, for audio recording.]]
      v) Any suggestions for making this useful/accessible to new users?
   f) Hypothetical searches
      i) Search: Contact info for Safe Routes to School application?
      ii) Search: How many certified miles are in my municipality?
      iii) Search: What federal aid is available for (bridge)?
   g) [[Invite multiple participants to try site, as time permits.]]

6) Closing
   a) Thanks.
   b) Pass out Rob's contact information, for questions and subscription requests.
   c) Pay participants.
   d) Drive home safely (since it's the DOT).

DOT Local Government Communication Focus Groups.
Group 2 & 3 Discussion script 2008-04-11

[[SET UP PROJECTOR: Intro slide]]

7) Preliminaries [[START RECORDER]]
   a) Welcome
      i) Who we are
      ii) Why we're here:
         (1) DOT works w/ govts of all sizes to complete projects and oversee policies that promote safe and efficient transport.
         (2) Looking for your opinions & experiences regarding the way that DOT communicates with your municipality. [[GOAL SLIDE]]
            (a) What are the ways that's occurring now?
            (b) How well is it working?
            (c) Are there improvements you'd like to see?
         (3) DOT wants to know what communications capabilities are currently available to you, and what are effective, as they develop new communication strategies.
   b) Format of discussion
      i) Ask about your experiences.
      ii) Present specific situations & ask for your comments on them.
      iii) Ask you to evaluate some existing DOT communication tools.
   c) Ground rules
      i) Sometimes we'll ask you to speak in turn, other times we'll have a more free-form discussion. I may have to ask you to hold your thought for a moment, but please remind me if I forget to get back to you.
      ii) Different opinions are welcome, even if everybody else seems to be thinking differently from you. We're not trying to convince anybody of anything or decide anything.
   d) Other basics
      i) Cell phones silenced.
      ii) Recording discussion, speak up.
      iii) Confidentiality.
      iv) Finish about (8 pm).
      v) Paid at end.
   e) Scope of discussion
      i) Speak as officials, not individual DOT consumers. [[HOW vs WHAT SLIDE]]
      ii) Focus on the <u>way</u> the communication occurs, not the actual content of that communication: "How" not "What".
         (1) Communication technology is changing, and DOT wants to find the best methods for exchanging info with you.
         (2) Examples. Regulations, DOT decisions. Not whether you like them but how you and DOT communicate about them.
         (3) It's fine to mention what the issues were for your particular DOT experiences that you'll be telling us about, but don't be offended if I steer things toward the "how" aspect.
      iii) After group, we'll have contact info if you want to talk with someone at DOT about these other issues.

8) Introduction & Open Topics
   a) Go around table:
      i) Your name, town, position, how long you've been in your role.
      ii) Tell us briefly about a recent experience communicating with DOT.
         (1) What were you trying to do?
         (2) When was this?
         (3) What part of DOT were you dealing with?
         (4) Was that initiated by you or by DOT?
         (5) Were you satisfied with how that went?
         (6) Did you receive the information that you needed?
   b) Indirect communication with DOT.
      i) Do you receive information passed on from DOT through municipal associations?
         (1) Which associations?
         (2) Would you prefer important DOT information to go through municipal associations, or to you directly? Why?
      ii) How much do you communicate with regional DOT offices vs. central office in Madison?
         (1) How accessible or effective are your communications with those offices?

9) Scenario & Communication Modes
   a) Present sponsored-banner story. [[PASS OUT COPIES]]
      i) How can communication between DOT & Local Govts help prevent this type of problem?
      ii) What ways do you receive info from DOT on these topics?
      iii) What channels are available to you? (capability for: email, web, fax, etc.)
         (1) Are you able to receive email from DOT? Emailed newsletters? PDF? Word?
         (2) Are you able to access web information from DOT?
      iv) What methods are effective? What improvements would you suggest?
         (1) If you were advising a new clerk on how to get info from DOT, what would you suggest?
   b) Next we have an example of one kind of communication tool that DOT tries to use for distributing this kind of info.

10) Existing Communication Tools
    a) Tool A - WisDOT Connector Express electronic newsletter [[PRESENT ON SCREEN & PASS OUT COPIES]]
        i) Format
            (1) This is sent out as an email message.
            (2) Info is in text of message and in ___ attachment.
            (3) Downloadable from DOT web site as PDF.
        ii) Who has had experience with this?
            (1) How do you receive it? Respond to it?
            (2) When you deal with it, what happens?
            (3) How do you use this?
            (4) What aspects of this are useful to you?
            (5) What problems do you have with it?
            (6) How accessible is this to you? What would make it easier?
            (7) How valuable is this?
            (8) Pros/cons of Paper vs Electronic copies?
            (9) Suggestions for improvement?
        iii) Who is seeing this for the first time, or is only a little familiar with it?
            (1) How useful does it seem to you?
            (2) Are you able to receive/access this?
            (3) What would make it easier for you to access it?
        iv) If it's not directly useful to you, is this something that would be useful to someone else in your staff?
            (1) Would you forward it to other people?
            (2) What would be the most effective mode to receive/access it, in that case?
        v) Would you like to be on the distribution list?
        vi) Demo clickable links.
    b) Tool B - Local Roads & Streets Council Newsletter [[PRESENT ON SCREEN and PASS OUT COPIES]]
        i) Format: previously sent as paper copy,
            (1) Now just sent as PDF via email.
            (2) Downloadable from DOT site.
        ii) [Repeat above questions]
    c) Tool C - WISLR table of roads & mileage [[PASS OUT COPIES]]
        i) [Repeat above questions]
    d) ((MAYBE CUT)) How well does DOT understand what you need (re: communication)?

11) Web Site Evaluation
    a) [[SHOW SITE ON SCREEN; PASS OUT PAPER COPIES OF DOT & PFLG HOME PAGES.]]
        i)   Start with dot.wisconsin.gov, then click to PFLG page.
    b) Some of you may be familiar with it, others may be new to it.
    c) All opinions are welcome.
    d) Who has used it?
        i)   For what? How often? Where to do you start?
        ii) Walk us through a use you make of the site.
        iii) [[Moderator or participant clicks on site links, describing what's being done, for the audio recording.]]
        iv) What do you look for? How easy is it to find?
        v) Good/bad features?
        vi) Suggestions for improvement?
    e) Who has not used the site?
        i)   Do you have internet access?
        ii) Are there other reasons you have not used the site?
        iii) Is there a kind of information you want from DOT that we can try looking for now?
        iv) [[Moderator or participant clicks on site links, describing activity, for audio recording.]]
        v) Any suggestions for making this useful/accessible to new users?
    f) Conversation starters
        i)   General Transportation Aids link & page
        ii) Local Roads Improvement Program link & page
        iii) Anything here that looks useful? Interesting?
    g) [[Invite multiple participants to try site, as time permits.]]

12) Closing
    a) Thanks.
    b) Offer out Rob's business cards, for questions and subscription requests.
    c) Pay participants.
    d) Drive home safely (since it's the DOT).

DOT Local Government Communication Focus Groups.
Group 4 Discussion script 2008-05-28

[[SET UP PROJECTOR: Intro slide]]

13) Preliminaries [[START RECORDER]]
   a) Welcome
      i)   Who we are
      ii) Why we're here:
          (1) DOT works w/ govts of all sizes to complete projects and oversee policies that promote safe and efficient transport.
          (2) Looking for your opinions & experiences regarding the way that DOT communicates with your municipality. [[GOAL SLIDE]]
             (a) What are the ways that's occurring now?
             (b) How well is it working?
             (c) Are there improvements you'd like to see?
          (3) DOT wants to know what communications capabilities are currently available to you, and what are effective, as they develop new communication strategies.
   b) Format of discussion
      i)   Ask about your experiences.
      ii) Present specific situations & ask for your comments on them.
      iii) Ask you to evaluate some existing DOT communication tools.
   c) Ground rules
      i)   Sometimes we'll ask you to speak in turn, other times we'll have a more free-form discussion. I may have to ask you to hold your thought for a moment, but please remind me if I forget to get back to you.
      ii) Different opinions are welcome, even if everybody else seems to be thinking differently from you. We're not trying to convince anybody of anything or decide anything.
   d) Other basics
      i)   Cell phones silenced.
      ii) Recording discussion, speak up.
      iii) Confidentiality.
      iv) Finish about (8 pm).
      v) Paid at end.
   e) Scope of discussion
      i)   Speak as officials, not individual DOT consumers. [[HOW vs WHAT SLIDE]]
      ii) Focus on the <u>way</u> the communication occurs, not the actual content of that communication: "How" not "What".
          (1) Communication technology is changing, and DOT wants to find the best methods for exchanging info with you.
          (2) Examples. Regulations, DOT decisions. Not whether you like them but how you and DOT communicate about them.
          (3) It's fine to mention what the issues were for your particular DOT experiences that you'll be telling us about, but don't be offended if I steer things toward the "how" aspect.
      iii) After group, we'll have contact info if you want to talk with someone at DOT about these other issues.

14) Introduction & Open Topics
   a) Go around table:
      i) Your name, town, position, how long you've been in your role.
      ii) Tell us briefly about a recent experience communicating with DOT.
         (1) What were you trying to do?
         (2) When was this?
         (3) What part of DOT were you dealing with?
         (4) Was that initiated by you or by DOT?
         (5) Were you satisfied with how that went?
         (6) Did you receive the information that you needed?
   b) Indirect communication with DOT.
      i) Do you receive information passed on from DOT through municipal associations?
         (1) Which associations?
         (2) Would you prefer important DOT information to go through municipal associations, or to you directly? Why?
      ii) How much do you communicate with regional DOT offices vs. central office in Madison?
         (1) How accessible or effective are your communications with those offices?
      iii) If county Hwy commissioners come up, probe for actual DOT contacts above them.

15) Scenario & Communication Modes
   a) Present sponsored-banner story. [[PASS OUT COPIES]]
      i) How can communication between DOT & Local Govts help prevent this type of problem?
      ii) What ways do you receive info from DOT on these topics?
      iii) What channels are available to you? (capability for: email, web, fax, etc.)
         (1) Are you able to receive email from DOT? Emailed newsletters? PDF? Word?
         (2) Are you able to access web information from DOT?
      iv) What methods are effective? What improvements would you suggest?
         (1) If you were advising a new clerk on how to get info from DOT, what would you suggest?
   b) Next we have an example of one kind of communication tool that DOT tries to use for distributing this kind of info.
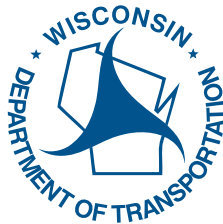
16) Existing Communication Tools
    a) Tool A - WisDOT Connector Express electronic newsletter [[PRESENT ON SCREEN & PASS OUT COPIES]]
        i) Format
            (1) This is sent out as an email message.
            (2) Info is in text of message and in ___ attachment.
            (3) Downloadable from DOT web site as PDF.
        ii) Who has had experience with this?
            (1) How do you receive it? Respond to it?
            (2) When you deal with it, what happens?
            (3) How do you use this?
            (4) What aspects of this are useful to you?
            (5) What problems do you have with it?
            (6) How accessible is this to you? What would make it easier?
            (7) How valuable is this?
            (8) Pros/cons of Paper vs Electronic copies?
            (9) Suggestions for improvement?
        iii) Who is seeing this for the first time, or is only a little familiar with it?
            (1) How useful does it seem to you?
            (2) Are you able to receive/access this?
            (3) What would make it easier for you to access it?
        iv) If it's not directly useful to you, is this something that would be useful to someone else in your staff?
            (1) Would you forward it to other people?
            (2) What would be the most effective mode to receive/access it, in that case?
        v) Would you like to be on the distribution list?
        vi) Demo clickable links.
    b) Tool C - WISLR table of roads & mileage [[PASS OUT COPIES]]
        i) [Repeat above questions]
    c) ((MAYBE CUT)) How well does DOT understand what you need (re: communication)?

17) Web Site Evaluation
  a) [[SHOW SITE ON SCREEN; PASS OUT PAPER COPIES OF DOT & PFLG HOME PAGES.]]
    i) Start with dot.wisconsin.gov, then click to PFLG page.
  b) Some of you may be familiar with it, others may be new to it.
  c) All opinions are welcome.
  d) Who has used it?
    i) For what? How often? Where to do you start? ---------------------- [TRANSIT?]
    ii) Walk us through a use you make of the site.
    iii) [[Moderator or participant clicks on site links, describing what's being done, for the audio recording.]]
    iv) What do you look for? How easy is it to find?
    v) Good/bad features?
    vi) Suggestions for improvement?
  e) Who has not used the site?
    i) Do you have internet access?
    ii) Are there other reasons you have not used the site?
    iii) Is there a kind of information you want from DOT that we can try looking for now?
    iv) [[Moderator or participant clicks on site links, describing activity, for audio recording.]]
    v) Any suggestions for making this useful/accessible to new users?
  f) Conversation starters
    i) General Transportation Aids link & page
    ii) Local Roads Improvement Program link & page
    iii) Anything here that looks useful? Interesting?
  g) [[Invite multiple participants to try site, as time permits.]]

18) Closing
  a) Thanks.
  b) Offer out Rob's business cards, for questions and subscription requests.
  c) Pay participants.
  d) Drive home safely (since it's the DOT).