

# KUTC Newsletter

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A Local Technical Assistance Program (LTAP) of The University of Kansas Transportation Center  
In cooperation with Kansas Department of Transportation and Federal Highway Administration

An issue dedicated to good communication

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## “Going Public”

Public meetings helped Riley County pass a sales tax for road and bridge improvements.

[Riley, County, Kansas, recently passed a half-cent sales tax to pay for road and bridge improvements. This tax was passed during difficult financial times in the state, and would not have been possible without a concerted effort to educate the public. Here is Riley County's story.]



... by Dan Harden, P.E., Riley County Engineer . . . . .

About five years ago the Riley County Board of County Commissioners appointed 32 Riley Countians to serve on a Road and Bridge Advisory Committee. The Committee was charged with reviewing the construction and maintenance of road and bridges in Riley County, and with making recommendations to the County Commissioners about the future of the county highway system.

### The problem

Property taxes are the County's primary source for road and bridge maintenance funds. The Board of County Commissioners had stabilized the county property tax levy over the previous 12 years, during a time when the public's demand for services and

the level of unfunded state and federal mandates were both increasing. To pay for the increased demand for public services and the unfunded mandates—while not increasing the property tax levy—required the road and bridge department to reduce some expenditures. Following this strategy for more than a decade led to a significant and noticeable deterioration in the quality of the county highway system.

### The solution

After much public discussion of the problem, the Advisory Committee recommended that the Board of County Commissioners continue to stabilize the county property tax levy and also increase spending for maintaining and reconstructing the county highway system. Their recommended source of funding for the increased spending was a half-cent local retail sales tax dedicated to maintaining and reconstructing the county highway system.

To follow the Committee's recommendation the County Commissioners were required by Kansas law to take the matter of imposing this half-cent sales tax to the voters of Riley County. They decided to do so in the 2002 Fall general election.

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## Riley County sales tax,

*continued from page 1*

Riley County currently has a half-cent sales tax in effect which is financing the cost of constructing the Riley County Law Enforcement Center. This sales tax is scheduled to sunset in 2004. The proposal put to the voters was in essence a seamless continuation of this half-cent sales tax. The Law Enforcement Center half-cent sales tax would sunset in 2004 and the road and bridge sales tax would then immediately start. This strategy would not increase the sales tax in Riley County.

The Road and Bridge Advisory Committee also recommended its 32 members be replaced with a smaller, seven-member standing committee to assist the County Commissioners in carrying out the Committee's recommendations. The new standing committee was formed and called the Road and Bridge Advisory Board.

The Road and Bridge Advisory Board selected 21 projects that were part of a specific construction package to be funded with the half-cent sales tax. This project list included new construction, bridge replacements, culvert replacements, and asphalt overlays.

In the Spring of 2002 the Board of County Commissioners and the Road and Bridge Advisory Board developed an educational program that could be presented to the public. The educational program described the work of the Committee and clearly identified the 21 projects slated for improvement. The Board of County Commissioners, county staff, and the Road and Bridge Advisory Board presented the educational program to approximately 4,500 of their fellow Riley Countians during the Summer and Fall of 2002.

Last November 13,492 Riley County citizens went to the polls and voted on the half-cent sales tax for road and bridge improvements. Of

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Public meetings were a key factor in getting the sales tax measure passed in Riley County. Fifty-four presentations were given to Riley Countians over an eight-month period.

Each presentation started with a 10-minute Power Point presentation with photographs showing the deteriorating state of the county's road and bridges. This was followed by discussion about the sales tax proposal and whatever transportation related topics the attendees wanted to discuss.

Public meetings were intentionally kept small and intimate to facilitate conversation. Most had a dozen people or so. "You actually had conversations with people rather than holding forth, and I think we had some pretty good ones," Harden said. "It's just like anything in life when you put good effort into it." Attendees were asked what they expected from the County's transportation system. Occasionally people would get to arguing among themselves, Harden said, but generally the discussions were positive.

Staff prepared a weekly list of meeting times and locations and publicized it through the media. Meetings ranged from 50 or so citizens gathering at the county offices to "a bunch of people drinking coffee in a restaurant in Randolph." Venues included senior centers, churches, restaurants, service clubs, social clubs and even schools. "Kids are certainly interested in driving, and besides, they talk with their parents," Harden explained.

Public meetings were held in March through the end of October. Most meetings were in the evenings. A few were on weekends. A typical schedule for Harden and other presenters would be to get off work at 5:30 p.m., eat dinner, do a presentation at 7:00, and get home between 8:30 to 10:00, depending on the amount of discussion at the meeting. "There were weeks when every night I'd be going to some group someplace about the road and bridge recommendations," Harden said.

How did he fit all that in with his regular job? "Other things just didn't happen, like the personal life," he laughed. "And I took a comp day here and there, when I could."

Harden commends County Commissioners Bob Newson, Al Johnson and Russ Frey, and Assistant Director of Public Works Rod Meredith, for their hard work on the presentations. "One or two county commissioners were there at almost every one of those meetings," he said. "Citizens expect their elected officials to talk with them."

Was all that hard work worth it? Was it really necessary?

"Absolutely," said Harden. "This sales tax would not have passed without the public meetings. I think we helped boost the rate of voter participation, too."

The voting process was discussed at every meeting. Attendees were encouraged to vote, and the presenters provided information about the voter registration process. Harden said about one-quarter of Riley County citizens vote in a typical election, and they were trying to increase the level of participation.

"We didn't tell them which way to vote, though," said Harden. "We ended each presentation by saying 'If you think this is something we ought to do, vote for it, if you think it's something we shouldn't do, vote against it. The main thing is, vote.'"

If you'd like to see Riley County's Power Point presentation, you can download a copy from the KUTC web site at [www.kutc.ku.edu](http://www.kutc.ku.edu). Click on "Resources" to find the link. Take note: it's a big file.

# Putting a positive spin on improvements: The public involvement process



[This is a compilation of two articles describing a general philosophy and strategies for involving the public in transportation improvement projects. It is adapted from information provided by Gil Janes, Vice President of consulting firm Howard R. Green Company, and reprinted with permission of the Iowa Local Technical Assistance Program.]

Every transportation improvement is as much a people project as an engineering project. Street and intersection construction is especially notorious for generating public attention. Issues such as property acquisition, long-term traffic patterns, public safety, changes in access, disruptions and inconveniences to businesses, and the character of the affected project area naturally generate public reaction.

Effective communication between your agency and the public can help make this reaction positive rather than negative. Effective communication will emphasize a project's long-term, positive effects on the community and/or economy. Phrases like "improved access," "less congestion," and "improved traffic safety" will be

used when citizens and visitors describe the project.

## Listening is key

Listening may be the most important part of communication. Key players in a transportation improvement project (business owners, neighborhood residents, community leaders, public officials, special interest groups, and others) need their concerns heard. They need to feel they are part of the design solution. To make sure your relationship with key players in a pro-

**"Every transportation improvement is as much a people project as an engineering project."**

ject gets off to a good start, be sure to involve them early in the planning process—and focus on listening.

## Create a charette

A charette is a structured problem-solving process that can be used early in the improvement planning phase to begin dialogue and develop ownership of the project among the key players. This process was widely used in early French architecture schools.

To adopt this process for a trans-

portation improvement project, prepare a structured outline of meetings with project players, then act as facilitator at the meetings. Together, players review the project's background, develop project goals, and contribute information and suggestions.

The design team, working at a location within the community, develops alternative project scenarios and presents them to charette participants to decide on a preliminary project direction and consensus.

Such a process creates opportunity for early dialogue among key players. It also permits opportunities for players to react to possible alternatives early in the planning phase. Such dialogue and early project input generally develop and strengthen ownership in the project by all diverse groups involved.

## Systematic development of informed consent

A husband and wife team, Hans and Anne Marie Bleiker, have spent the last 20 years studying public projects—those that got implemented and those

that did not. Based on their research, they have described a philosophy they call "*systematic development of informed consent*" (SDIC) that was common to successfully implemented projects.

SDIC is founded on the belief that an organization must be both 100 percent responsible to a project's mission and 100 percent responsive to affected parties' needs. Informed consent is engineered by making sure that potentially affected parties understand

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### **Positive spin,** *continued from page 3*

the following:

- A serious problem or significant opportunity exists that must be addressed.
- You are the appropriate entity to address the problem or opportunity; in fact, it would be irresponsible for you not to do so.
- Your approach to the situation is reasonable, sensible, and responsible.
- You do listen and you do care. If you are proposing something that is going to adversely affect someone, it is not because you do not care.

Involving the public early and routinely throughout a project will result in improved awareness, better understanding, and stronger advocacy for and acceptance of the project.

### **Individual and neighborhood meetings**

Many times it is important to have public information/involvement meetings for communicating with and engaging the community and to create opportunities for property owners and stakeholders to be heard independently. It might be helpful to conduct individual surveys with affected parties to clearly understand their concerns and expectations regarding a project.

Make a reasonable effort to incorporate feasible ideas from these meetings and interviews into the design process. Be prepared to explain why some expectations are not in line with the project concept. Use these opportunities to clear up misconceptions before they become issues.

### **Public engagement skills**

Successfully engaging the public at meetings involves employing good

communications skills and presentation techniques. Communicating effectively means setting an agenda, listening carefully to concerns, and responding clearly to input. Successful presentation techniques include comfortably setting the stage, employing a professional posture, speaking

**No matter how good your project design, unless it is presented in a manner to gain public acceptance and approval, it will not succeed.**

clearly and directly to your audience, using eye contact and gestures where appropriate, and being attentive to your audience. (For ideas on how to acquire these skills, see our article on page 12.)

### **Public relations and public education**

No matter how good your project design, unless it is presented in a manner to gain public acceptance and approval, it will not succeed. Using proven public relations tools and techniques when presenting your project to the public will be important to its overall success. A public information campaign includes many facets:

- News releases, service club presentations, special events promotions, and even purchased advertising are all possible communications channels that might be used by the project committee, city or county staff, and the project engineer. Project announcements and press releases demonstrate to everyone affected—including residents, commuters, and school officials—that you want to keep them informed.
- For major projects, brochures and/or flyers can advertise the project's goals and mission statement. Such materials can tell the public why the improvement is needed and how

service will be improved. Other promotional materials may include a project logo, artistic renderings of the project, postcards, place mats, plastic hard hats, buttons, and t-shirts.

- Tools for an effective public presentation may include temporary signage to

direct motorists to their destinations; professional visual aids, such as layered, color CAD graphics and project renderings; and promotional materials.

### **Finally**

Because of the number and variety of players that may be affected by public improvements, a generous supply of “glue” is needed to get all of them working together. Good communications can provide that glue.

Each transportation improvement project is unique. An appropriate communications plan should be developed for each project, depending on the circumstances. Whether you or your consulting engineer develop and implement that plan, make sure it happens. Putting a positive spin on improvements through active communications will strengthen relationships, promote public cooperation, reduce stress, and result in a successful project.

From *Technology News*, October-December 1999 and January-February 2002, Iowa LTAP. ■

# How Other Communities Are Building Positive Public Relations



*One community hosts a “newcomers” breakfast for newly-arrived families and presents an overview of municipal services.*

... by Kenneth W. Ward, Sr.,  
Loss Prevention Representative, New  
Hampshire Municipal Association  
Property Liability Trust . . . . .

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Hampshire LTAP.

**A**t a seminar of Public Works Professionals from around the country, creative ways were discussed to improve public relations. This article is to share a few ideas useful to municipalities.

### Tips from Greeley, Colorado

A contest is held in Greeley, CO, each October. Elementary, middle and high school students paint the mold-board of a snow plow with various subject topics. The plow is left at the school with instructions about where they may paint and cannot paint. Prizes of \$50, \$20 and \$10 are given to the best paintings. Awards are made from the city budget.

Prior to the snow season, the Greeley Public Works Department also prints the municipal snow plow policy on doorknob hanger sheets.

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### Ideas from Kansas

*City of Hutchinson.* Dennis Clennan, Director of Public Works and Engineering, says his department provides equipment and staff for a half-day showcase at a mall parking lot, hosted by a local civic organization. Hutchinson has held open houses in the past, tied in with the annual city fest, but the new downtown festival location doesn't have enough space to display equipment. Clennan said some of their best PR comes from their “Reserve a Truck” program—a free service to the community. “Every Friday afternoon we send out seven dump trucks in which to dispose of waste material. At each site we park the truck on the requester’s private property (with the tailgate up), and they have the weekend to fill it up. On Monday we send an operator to drive the truck to the landfill. The requester just has to come in to sign a form to reserve the truck, and they also learn what they can and can’t discard,” Clennan said.

*City of Newton.* Public Works Director Suzanne Loomis, says “We hold a lot of public meetings prior to a major capital improvement. We also distribute door hangers, and speak to a variety of civic groups. For National Public Works Week, Loomis says she works with the local newspaper which runs a story and “pictures of our people doing their jobs.” Newton uses its web site to list capital improvement projects under way, and updates the list every two weeks, just before each city commission meeting. The list includes data on which phase is what percent complete and how each project is funded.

*McPherson County.* Leon Hobson, County Engineer, says his county is planning to hold an employee family day at a sand pit so family members can operate equipment with a driver and maybe try surveying equipment. They also want to hold a career day at the local high school. These events are pending obtaining event insurance. One of Hobson’s goals is to “get younger people interested in what we do.”

*City of Wichita.* Steve Lackey, Director of Public Works, says Wichita hosts public open houses with equipment on display and people can get inside the cabs. They also hold a special open house for the media prior to the snow and ice control season. Lackey said providing information to citizens businesses, and the media about road work is a big priority. They print flyers, hold public and neighborhood meetings, and require contractors to distribute door hangers showing the project schedule. Monthly or quarterly newsletters are sent to businesses. “If there’s one thing we’re doing differently now than 20-25 years ago, it’s getting information out to the public,” Lackey said. “It answers a lot of questions on the front end that could result in phone calls to staff or city council members. And citizens know who to contact, so if they do have a question they don’t have to make a lot of unnecessary calls to reach the right person.”

**Other communities,**  
*continued from page 5*

The purpose is to share the parts of the policy that most directly affect the citizens, and provide phone numbers for whom to contact with questions.

Greeley also conducts a Snow Operations Open House. They distribute a snow removal booklet that details the different vehicles and their ages, their different snow removal routes, information about salting, and why it is required for safety.

Greeley also offers a “show and tell” program that brings various pieces of heavy equipment to schools for educational and safety purposes. All grades are welcome.

**Tips from across the country**  
*Customer Service.*

- Once road work is completed, leave a questionnaire with the affected residents. Ask citizens to comment on the work, how well was it done, were they notified in advance, what went well and not so well, and were noise levels excessive?
- Produce quarterly newsletters to inform citizens of work completed, work planned for the near future, etc... Meet with various committees, social groups, etc... describe the work being done, work planned for the near future, and to solicit suggestions and comments.
- Conduct a local government day. Invite local schools to visit all municipal departments to see and better understand what municipal government does.
- Host a “newcomers” breakfast for newly arrived families. Have all municipal departments attend and present a brief overview of the services they perform for the municipality.
- Follow up complaints with a one-on-one visit to the person issuing the complaint.
- Replace telephone “on hold” music with information about public works services or projects.

# Ottawa Uses a “Roundabout Way” to Enhance Public Image

**Citizens gave thumbs down to a proposed roundabout but thumbs up for being asked to comment.**

... by Lisa Harris . . . . .

**T**he City of Ottawa, Kansas, decided to enlist the help of the public to determine whether to install a series of roundabouts for traffic control on a busy residential street.

Andy Haney, Public Works Director, knew that roundabouts have been used effectively in similar situations. But there was a lot of local opposition to the idea. Haney decided to listen to public input, from citizens who had first-hand experience driving through a roundabout.

Because Ottawa does not have a roundabout, city workers created a mock-up at a busy intersection near the high school. City staff observed the intersection at peak times of day and observed whether traffic moved more smoothly with the roundabout than with just stop signs. It did.

But what did the public think? “Despite the fact that traffic was less congested and moved more smoothly, more people were opposed than in favor,” said Haney. “Based on their

comments we decided not to proceed with the project.” Haney also said he had some reservations about the size of the roundabout that could be built at the proposed location.

This might seem like a lot of work to get back to square one, but Haney said his department has benefited a great deal in terms of building rapport with the general public.

“People really like to be asked,” Haney said. “They appreciated this effort, and it made us look good.”

Besides building rapport and credibility with the public, Haney received one more benefit—one that drew oos and ahs when he described it at a recent APWA roundtable discussion. His local newspaper editor, who had previously written editorials opposing roundabouts, admitted she was wrong. She drove the roundabout and could see the benefits.

“She didn’t say she was wrong in print, but she did tell me that,” Haney said. “That’s gold.”

For more information on Ottawa’s test roundabout, call Andy Haney at (785) 229-3630.

- In larger municipalities, hire or designate a media officer. When working with a reporter, repeat what you just told them to ensure they understood your message.
- Take heavy equipment to local hangouts (malls, the landfill, and stores) for the public to view. Be prepared to answer questions.

*Websites*

- Your website should request citizens to e-mail suggestions, compliments,

complaints, and comments. Offer defensive driving tips and information about driving near around snow removal equipment and work zones.

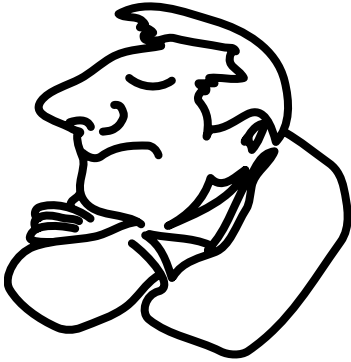
*Winter Policies*

- Once a year, publish the municipal snow removal policy in the local newspaper.
- Stock loaner mailboxes for use when a snow plow damages one.
- Stencil plow route signs with tele-

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# How Good Are Your Listening Skills?

... by Jim L. Hennen, South Dakota  
LTAP Western Satellite Coordinator



**D**o you know what your problem is? You don't LISTEN!" Chances are you have either said this to someone—supervisor, subordinate, co-worker, child, spouse—or you have been told this by some, or all, of the above. Our relationships in all aspects of our lives depend on communicating with one another in some way.

In our daily life we know that communication depends more on the spoken word than it does on the written word. The effectiveness of the spoken word hinges not so much on how people talk as on how they listen. Developing good listening skills requires that we understand why we are poor listeners in spite of our best intentions to grasp one hundred percent of what we are told.

People in general do not know how to listen. We have ears to hear every word being spoken but have failed to acquire the skills to listen effectively. Tests performed at the University of Minnesota on thousands of students and professional people led to an amazing discovery. The study found that immediately after the average person had listened to someone talk, s/he remembered only about half of what was heard. This was true no matter how carefully they thought they were listening.

## Five Tips for Better Listening

**H**ere are five tips for better listening that, if exercised faithfully, will make for fewer miscommunications and greatly improve your listening skills:

### Intend to listen.

- Do not try to listen while engaged in another activity. Both the listening and the other activity will be diminished.
- Maintain comfortable eye contact.
- Do not interrupt.

### Concentrate.

- Paraphrase. Restate, giving the same meaning in a different form.
- Try to anticipate where the next thought is coming from and what conclusion this is all leading to. (Do this carefully.)

### Control emotions.

- Remember that as emotions heat up, listening all but disappears.

### Check for understanding.

- Example: "To make sure I have this right I'm to be in Room 110 at 7:30 a.m. tomorrow with the safety videotape and 12 copies of the hand-outs."

### Use memory aids.

- Take brief notes of key points.
- Avoid trying to write too much.
- Remember the danger of trying to do two things at the same time.

The problem lies in the fact that the average rate of speech is about 125 words per minute. The brain, and consequently our thought process, operates at warp speed compared to the slow rate of speech. This large differential between the rates of speaking and thinking leaves a tremendous amount of spare time for thinking while the speaker is plugging along at a mere 125 words per minute. It's how we use this spare thinking time that holds the answer to how well we can concentrate on the spoken word. It is in the nature of people to allow, and sometimes welcome, outside thoughts to fill in the space between the slowly-

arriving words of the speaker.

How many times have you realized, while supposedly listening to someone who thinks he or she has your undivided attention, that you have become lost in one of these "sandwiched" thoughts and had to ask forgiveness and "Would you repeat that, please?" While continuing to listen to the speaker, this mental side-tracking can result in longer and longer lapses in reception and more and more of the message is missed. So now the speaker is finished and the listener has comprehended less than half of what was spoken.

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# Tips for Improving Your Relations with Elected Officials

**W**e frequently hear of the benefits of good communication. One important benefit for road managers is to improve relationships with elected officials.

These six strategies will help keep lines of communication open between the road manager and other officials:

*Keep elected officials informed.* This is the first step to improve relationships with commissions. Sheldon Morgan, Public Works Director in Gilford, NH, and Master Road Scholar, said, “I keep [elected officials] apprised of Public Works operations through attending their meetings and by supplying them with monthly progress reports on various projects. Keeping them informed is the best tactic.”

James Wheeler of Berlin, NH, reinforced this idea; “It’s our job to properly educate elected officials so that they can make informed decisions. With that as the primary objective, we need to communicate facts with honesty, integrity, etc. Communication is key. You may not always be able to tell them what they want to hear. However, as long as it is honest and is backed up with facts, they will respect you. Respect is what you want. An elected official can respect you and still not like you. That situation is much better than the reverse.”

*Act As a team.* The road manager and their elected officials are a team, working together to improve their community. As with any good team, compromise is essential. Team members must often negotiate to a mutually agreeable outcome. When road managers and elected officials make joint decisions, they should stand together as a team

when the decision is announced. They should determine together what the message should be. Road managers should allow the commissioners to pass on good news to the citizens.

*Help elected officials look competent.* This is critical to the road manager’s success. Road managers can help their elected officials look competent by keeping commissioners informed and by being available to answer questions. Elected officials will be more supportive if they understand what the road department is doing. Informed commission members will be more apt to vote with the road department.

Elected officials dislike surprises, particularly when they find out about road department actions from the public. They appear foolish and often blame the road supervisor, county engineer or public works director.

Road managers should not play favorites. Road department managers look competent when they support all of their commissioners in doing their jobs effectively. If there is a disagreement, disagree in private.

When an elected official turns over a citizen’s complaint to the road department, the road manager must treat it as important. When the complaint is resolved, the road manager should let the referring official take the credit. If it cannot be resolved to the citizen’s satisfaction, the road manager should provide a thorough explanation.

*Stay out of political campaigns.* Whether appointed or elected, road managers are municipal employees and public



*Invite elected officials to functions where they can associate with managers and crews “as people”—outside of their workplace roles.*

servants. Traditionally, government officials remain neutral in elections. Besides, if the road manager’s favored candidate loses, he or she may end up working for the opponent.

*Be friendly with commissioners.* This helps to break down stereotypes of highway employees. Mike Bobinsky, former Director of Community Services in Dover, NH, said he invites city officials to special events such as Public Works Week events, lunches, retirement parties, etc. “The Council needs to see public works employees and officials in the same light as they would view a police or fire operation,” he said.

Department heads should invite elected officials to functions where

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# KDOT Korner

## Could I Have That in English?

[If you haven't heard this news yet, we thought you'd like to hear it from Secretary Miller herself. This is reprinted with permission from the March 2003 issue of *Translines*, a newsletter for KDOT staff. -Ed.]

... by Deb Miller, Kansas Secretary of Transportation . . . . .

After careful consultation with KDOT staff, I have decided that KDOT will no longer require that all plans be submitted in the International System of Measurement (SI) commonly referred to as the metric system. We will return to the English system of measurement (inch/pound).

Why the change? This decision was not easy and was based on a number of factors. Prime among these is that Kansas is one of only eight states in the nation still requiring that plans be done solely using metric measurements. Except for Kansas and Montana, those states are in the Northeast (Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and New York) or on the West Coast (California and Oregon), making us a metric "island" in the Midwest. Another major consideration was that in no other area of our lives do we use metric (okay, leave aside liter-sized pop bottles for a moment) and our customers and stakeholders are not accustomed to metric units.

Why did we go metric in the first place? In 1995 Congress passed the National Highway System Designation Act which contained language requiring states to convert to the metric system for all Federal-aid highway projects by September 30, 2000. However, in 1998 congress removed that target date when it

passed the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21), which is the current federal transportation funding legislation. This action left it up to the state DOTs to decide what system to use. Now we've made our decision to use the inch/pound system.

Exactly how we'll make the switch back is still being worked out, but I am happy to announce that Ben Neaderhiser, CPMS Administrator in KDOT's Office of Engineering Support, has accepted the task of

## Kansas Adopts Millennium Edition of MUTCD

The last time we wrote about the *Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices*, Tom Mulinazzi stated that Kansas was still using the 1988 edition. But he said to get ready, because the state would be adopting the new, Millennium edition of the MUTCD soon.

That time has come. The state officially adopted the new version on December 5, 2002. Now all highway agencies need to comply with the revised regulations.

For more information, see Tom's article in the Summer 2002 issue of the *KUTC Newsletter* and visit the national MUTCD web site at: <http://mutcd.fhwa.dot.gov>. ■

coordinating the conversion. He has his work cut out for him and will need all the assistance and encouragement you can provide.

To help smooth the transition both internally and externally we have decided that if a project was started in metric it will be completed in metric. All projects not yet begun will be done using the English system of measurement.

I know that this change will create some momentary headaches and require many of you to change the way you've been thinking. But I strongly believe this is the right thing to do and will benefit both KDOT and its partners in the long run. I thank you in advance for your help in making this transition. ■

## Riley County sales tax, continued from page 2

that number 6,786 voted yes and 6,706 voted no.

The ballot question was written so the half-cent sales tax would sunset in 10 years. If all 21 projects are not funded in that time, or there are other projects in which the public is interested, the half cent sales tax for road and bridge improvements will be revisited by the Riley County voters in the 2012 election.

Project planning and development work is just now beginning for the first projects that will be funded by the half-cent sales tax. Construction will commence when sufficient funding is in place to fund the first projects selected by the County Commissioners.

For more information, call Dan Harden at Riley County, (785) 537-6330. ■

# Are They Getting It?

If not, maybe it's you...



... by Geneva Jacobs . . . . .

Engineers and technical professionals tend use technical jargon when communicating on the job. Here's an example of a quote: "An official from AHFW recently told us that the CMTU has been updated so OSL 9 includes...."

Are you thinking "Huhhhh???" Well, the general public and your commissioners will likely respond the same way, even when the same sentence is rearranged as follows: "An official from FHWA recently told us that the MUTCD has been updated so LOS 9 includes a discussion of average vehicle delay."

You might understand it, but if your audience doesn't know these terms, they won't understand you.

Mastering technical terms is important in your job and for communicating with peers, but you need to "unlearn" some of them when talking with the public. Your strength as a communicator lies in your ability to convey the meaning of those terms.

People tend to tune out when they are introduced to terminology that is not easy for them to grasp. When this happens, an audience may

incorrectly think an engineer who is not an effective communicator is clueless or arrogant because they perceive the engineer's word usage baffling or incoherent.

This doesn't mean that you should never use engineering terminology. However, you are responsible for estimating the amount of jargon you think your audience will understand. Be careful using acronyms such as FHWA, MUTCD and TEA-21; these terms may shorten your speech or text, but they might obscure your message.

If giving a presentation, an easy way to begin is to simply ask your audience if they are familiar with your topic. Once you determine their general comprehension level, eliminate some of the lingo that your audience would find unfamiliar—without insulting their intelligence. For example, most Kansans know what KDOT is.

Opportunities abound for those who would like to improve their communication skills. Toastmasters

International, which has clubs in every state, is devoted to developing effective verbal communication among its members. The mission of the club is to create an environment where each member has the opportunity to enhance both personal communication and leadership abilities. Interpersonal skills such as speaking, listening and thinking can be improved as a part of this program. Currently, there are 55 Toastmaster clubs in Kansas. To learn more about Toastmasters, visit their web site: [www.toastmasters.org/indexbk.htm](http://www.toastmasters.org/indexbk.htm).

There are other simple steps to take besides joining a group such as Toastmasters. For example, when you have finished preparing an article or a speech, ask someone outside your field to review it and provide feedback. This person will probably be glad to let you know which parts they do not understand. Revise until your message is clear. If you decide that you must use unfamiliar terminology in a written report, include the definitions of these words or acronyms in a nomenclature section or as footnotes.

Another useful and easy technique is to read your work out loud. If it sounds odd, stilted, or unclear, change what you have written. A final idea is to buy a book on effective

Did you know that Microsoft Word offers a readability index that will check your document for understandability? If this option does not automatically appear when you do a spelling and grammar check, follow this method for your PC to access it. Under the Tools menu, select Options and check the "Spelling & Grammar" tab. Then select both "Check grammar with spelling" and "Show readability statistics." Now you are ready to have your written work analyzed. Just go back to the Tools menu and click Spelling & Grammar. When Microsoft Word is done with the grammar check, you'll see data about your document and two types of scores.

The Flesch Reading Ease score is based on a 100-point scale. A higher score designates a document that is easier to read. For a typical document, you should aim for a score of 60 to 70.

The Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level score shows what grade level would be able to understand your document. For standard documents, aim for a score of 7.0 to 8.0. This means that a 7th or 8th grader would be able to understand your document.

## Tips for using jargon

Technical jargon has its place among peers but take care when using it with the public.

Assess your audience's level of comprehension of technical terms and do one of the following:

a) change the term to something easier to understand. For example change "ADT" to "average daily traffic" or "average vehicles per day." The word "warrant" is another example. The MUTCD is no longer using this word because it confused the general public.

b) use the jargon, but take the time to carefully explain what the word means and what it means to your agency. An example is *MUTCD*. Using this acronym is good because it replaces a mouthful, *Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices*, but be sure to tell your audience who publishes the *MUTCD* and how your agency uses it.

technical communication and teach yourself some of the skills presented.

Engineering is a complicated profession, and it is impossible for engineers to completely avoid using technical terms when communicating with the public. Successful engineers know how to effectively communicate technical knowledge. An engineer who has mastered the art of communication holds greater power to get things done.

### Sources

<http://cc.ysu.edu/~nbuffer/baker.htm>;  
"Communication and Leadership Program," Toastmasters International, Mission Viejo, CA, 1992;

[www.tcnj.edu/~rgraham/rhetoric/](http://www.tcnj.edu/~rgraham/rhetoric/).

*Geneva Jacobs is a student writer for the KUTC and a senior in chemical engineering at the University of Kansas.*

### Elected officials,

*continued from page 8*

they can associate with managers and crews as people. Functions with family members are especially effective. Even if officials cannot attend, or stay for a very short period of time, they will appreciate the gesture.

#### *Define department responsibilities.*

Clear department policies effectively define responsibilities. When policies are established and followed, the commissioners and public know what to expect from the highway department. If there is ever a question as to why something was done in a particular way, everyone, from a commissioner to a part-time seasonal employee, can point at a policy as a standard of operation.

Policy development can itself improve relations with elected officials and the public. As a decision-making tool, policy creation allows the focus to be on an issue rather than on a particular incident or person.

Established job descriptions provide the same benefits as having written policies. The commissioners and employee know what is expected of them without any gray areas.

### Other practical advice

If a road manager is having difficulties with his or her commission, the above steps can help change the situation. Clear two-way communication fixes many problems. Road managers should also talk to their peers in surrounding communities. They can often offer pointers to make life easier. The following are examples.

Before bringing a proposal before a commission, the road manager should consider the likelihood of it passing. If slim, he or she should use the time to lay the groundwork. For example, take commissioners into the field to see problems. If this isn't possible, take slides or a video to show the commission. Pictures can help to make a case. Invite "experts" to speak in

favor of the proposal. A concerned citizen or salesperson can be a strong ally.

Highway managers should be aware of the public perception of the highway department. Richard Lee, Road Agent in New London, NH, and an elected official himself, suggests that equipment be kept clean and employees look busy. He said, "citizens like it when you care for your equipment...it doesn't look good to allow employees to lean on shovels." Also to maintain a good relationship with New London's elected officials, he keeps them informed of happenings in the highway department. He keeps paperwork up-to-date so he can answer questions as they arise.

Chum Cleverly, a Master Road Scholar and the Director of Public Works in Bow, NH, said, "Don't take anything [an elected official] says personally. Try to look at things from their point of view whether you agree or not. Try to have all your ducks in a row, and keep [your commissioners] informed."

Cleverly writes a lot of memos to his elected officials. Then, when a citizen has a question or complaint, the elected officials are informed. This makes them look good, and they appreciate it. Cleverly also suggests being specific when explaining needs of the highway department. Explain the costs of repairs and how doing something will benefit the citizens. Also, he suggests that road managers write and maintain good records.

### Sources

*Improving Your Public Relations Special Bulletin*, South Dakota LTAP, 1996.

"How to run a road department," by Hans Muntz, *Better Roads*, October 1994.

"The Best Public Works Department," by John Wiggins, *R2T2*, Fall 1997.

Adapted with permission from *Road Business*, New Hampshire Technology Transfer Center, Fall 1999. ■

## A Leg Up

# Driver Communication, Sri Lankan Style

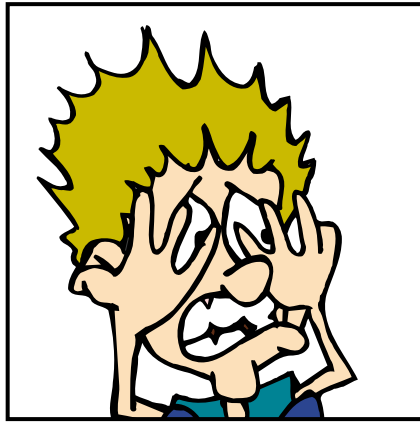
... by Ira Allen .....

I recently took an unofficial road “scanning” tour of Sri Lanka (a more or less Third World country off the southeast coast of India). I was both impressed by the difficulty of driving the chaotic roads and surprised at the extent of communication I saw between drivers.

On their web site, the U.S. State Department has this to say about transportation in Sri Lanka: “Narrow, two-lane highways, dangerously driven buses, overloaded trucks and the variety of vehicles on the road, ranging from ox carts, elephants and bicycles to new four-wheel drive jeeps, make driving a challenge and dangerous.” Nevertheless, there are lessons we in the affluent West can learn from the sense of community among Sri Lankan drivers. Picture this:

From the middle seat of a van, bumping and jolting along a darkened roadway, I watched the road. My eyes shifted to follow overloaded buses whizzing by our van, with passengers hanging out the door and the thick white smoke that indicates a complete lack of emissions protection spewing from behind. We zoomed past one of the local cargo trucks. I had a second to admire the hand-carved wooden panels of the truck’s trailer before my eyes were drawn to an oncoming motorbike. Our driver sped up and the bike swerved nearly off the road to avoid us before we slid back into our lane ahead of the truck. A sleeping dog woke in the nick of time to jump out of the way. Everybody honked his or her horn.

We were only going about 35 miles per hour, but on the winding,



*Initial fear of an impending crash gave way to marveling at the finely-tuned communication on Sri Lanka’s chaotic multi-modal roads.*

rutted roads, with the congested traffic, it felt much faster. Pedestrians, bicyclists and motorized vehicles all use the road, because there are no sidewalks for the most part. Glancing up to the front, I was glad we had hired a driver. Driving here looked like real work, and I felt a sudden flush of gratitude for the straight and spacious highways of Kansas.

Our speed varied between 20 and 35 mph during the five or so hours it took to drive from Colombo (Sri Lanka’s capital) to Dambulla (about 112 miles northeast). The roads we took were some of the best in Sri Lanka. On the map, the journey looked about two and a half hours long or so, but after going only about 12 miles in the first half hour, that estimate looked less realistic. One of my traveling companions asked Jude,

our driver, “So, we’ll start making better time once we get onto the highway—the bigger roads, right?” Jude’s response was instructive.

“There are no bigger roads,” he said. “This is the highway, but maybe we go faster once we get out of this part.” And we did go faster, but never more than 35 mph or so.

As day wore on into night, the scenery faded into a dull grayish green blur. As when riding a roller coaster, I didn’t doubt that we would arrive at our destination safely (although I might have, had I read the State Department warning before I left the United States!). At the same time, driving in Sri Lanka brought to mind the thrill of closely averted catastrophe that comes every time the roller coaster whips around a bend. Pedestrians and bicyclists popped out of the darkness, the local tuk-tuks (small, three-wheeled, semi-covered taxis) swerved in and out of traffic on the two-lane road, vehicles of all descriptions edged around us, miraculously avoiding collisions as they passed on tight bends in the road, and we too passed countless other vehicles.

I noticed a couple of strange things. First, drivers honked after they passed us, and Jude did the same after passing other drivers. Second, everyone seemed to use turn signals indiscriminately, randomly. We would roll up over a big hill and get stuck behind a truck, who would then sometimes turn on his left blinker and sometimes his right. Sooner or later, we would pass him. Whoever was in front of us next would do the same. Everyone used their turning signals, but no one actually turned.

In the trancelike state brought on

by watching a darkened road for miles on end, the answer became clear. Turning signal usage was far from random; rather, it meant something different from what I was used to. Since you drive on the left side of the road there, Sri Lankan drivers use their left, or “away,” blinkers to indicate that it’s safe to pass them on the right. The right, or “roadside,” blinker means, “Don’t pass; there’s somebody coming.” Once I realized this, I soon discovered the answer to the honking question. It’s a way of saying, “Thank you.”

Understanding the system, I was much more comfortable on the roadway. Far from being random and chaotic, as I originally thought, traffic on the Sri Lankan highways is like a living organism. Almost every piece works in synch with the others. The truck in front of you uses his blinker to let you know about the bicyclist coming up, whom you can’t see in the dark, and you in turn signal to the driver behind you that it’s not safe to pass, and so on. Then, with the bicyclist past and the road safe to pass on, the truck driver signals with his left blinker and you zoom by, into the night.

Between the narrowness of the roads, the absence of streetlights, the weak beams of many vehicles’ headlights, the sheer number of pedestrians and bicyclists on even the nighttime roads, and the near-constant process of passing and being passed by other drivers, it is easy to imagine the necessity of such a system. Surely hundreds of lives are saved every year by this informal, countrywide system.

In Kansas, we don’t face all the same problems as Sri Lankan drivers. Some individual problems, however, such as weak-beamed vehicles, unlit rural roads, and frequent passing situations, do apply. And while it may be a bit premature to write code into the Kansas legal statutes requiring drivers to honk “Thank you” after passing one another, we can certainly do more

to foster communicative and cooperative driving, rather than relying only on defensive driving.

The lesson I took away from Sri Lanka was one of community. Facing far more dangerous and difficult road situations than we in Kansas typically see, Sri Lankan drivers are responding both cooperatively and defensively. One thing that sets Sri Lankan drivers apart from many Kansans is their willingness to go with the flow, traffic-wise, and their lower expectations about zooming from point A to point B in a set amount of time. Our streamlined highway system increases driver expectations on timeliness, but unexpected situations sometimes slow us down: the farm equipment lumbering along in front of you on a two-lane highway, the fender-bender that blocks traffic for half a mile, school kids skittering across pedestrian crossings just when you’re late for work. Allowing a few extra minutes to get to your destination can give you a cushion to deal with the unexpected in a courteous and cooperative way.

Many Kansas drivers are already friendly—think, for instance, of the habit of greeting oncoming drivers on country roads by lifting an index finger off the wheel. That’s not a bad start, but we need to be asking ourselves—with the Sri Lankan example in mind—what else can we do to encourage cooperation and communication on our roads?

### Sources

United States Department of State ([http://travel.state.gov/sri\\_lanka.html](http://travel.state.gov/sri_lanka.html)) web page on Sri Lanka;

Margamithuro (Non-governmental organization for road safety in Sri Lanka, <http://margamithuro.wow.lk/>)

*Ira Allen is a student writer for the KUTC Newsletter and a senior in English at the University of Kansas.* ■

### Listening skills,

*continued from page 7*

What can be done to help us listen more effectively? There are four components of effective listening. The first, and most obvious, is that we must *hear* what is being said. Second, we must make sure that we clearly *understand* the message. The third component is that we must *evaluate* the facts or directions as we understand them. Finally, we can now proceed to *act* on what we have been told. Most people go from hearing to acting without going through the critical intermediate steps of understanding and evaluating what has been conveyed.

Source: *The Power of Effective Listening in Management*, by Frank DiSilvestro, Indiana University.

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### Other communities,

*continued from page 6*

phone numbers for to call for winter information.

- At the beginning of every winter storm, contact the media to note your general strategy for snow and ice removal for this storm and any particulars, as they become apparent.
- Use a plow ride-along program to educate the public better about plowing, including long hours, poor vision from the cab, and so on. Many New Hampshire communities do this.

Many of these ideas can be implemented with little or no cost. The benefit that the public works department may see from these suggestions will be significant.

From “Improving Communications With the Public,” New Hampshire Technology Transfer Center, 2000. ■

## Reviews

... by Lisa Harris . . . . .

### Roundabouts: An Informational Guide

284 pages, produced by FHWA, 2000. This substantial book is a terrific resource for anyone interested in learning detailed information about roundabout design and function. It contains illustrations and photographs of several types of roundabouts and compares them with other types of circular intersections. Principles for effective design are presented in depth, with results of research on the topic.

Policy and planning considerations are discussed, including seeking public input.

If you are considering installing a roundabout in your community, you will definitely want to have this guide at your fingertips.

We have 50 copies of this publi-

cation to give away on a first come first served basis. See page 15.

### Basic Principles for Proper Installation of Corrugated Steel Drainage Structures

20 minute videotape, produced by the National Corrugated Steel Pipe Association and the American Iron and Steel Institute. This video serves as a practical field guide for pipe installation, covering excavation, site preparation, pipe handling and assembly, and backfilling.

### Superpave Mixture Design Guide

18 pages, produced by the Federal Highway Administration, 2001. This publication is intended as a companion to the National Asphalt Pavement Association's *Superpave Construction Guidelines*. It is a guide for the hot-

mix asphalt designer to get the most out of Superpave while avoiding potential problems. It addresses problems encountered with Superpave test sections at the WesTrack national testing facility in Nevada, and what was learned from those tests.

### Channel Lining—Procedures for Planning, Design, and Installation

12 minute videotape, produced by North American Green. This somewhat promotional video recommends procedures used by North American Green for channel lining design and installation. ■

## Calendar

See our web site for even more calendar listings. Go to [www.kutc.ku.edu](http://www.kutc.ku.edu) and click on "Training."

... 2003 . . . . .

May 20-21  
Transportation Safety  
Conference  
in Wichita  
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Education  
at 877/404-5823

\*\*May 22  
Click, Listen and Learn:  
Managing the Public  
Response

May 23—Emporia  
May 29—Hutchinson  
Developing Skills in  
Service Excellence in  
County Government  
Call the Kansas  
Association of Counties  
at 316/634-2400

\*June 17—Salina  
\*June 24—Topeka  
Risk Management for  
Road and Street Crews  
and Supervisory Staff

\*\*June 18  
Click, Listen and Learn:  
Where Does Public  
Works First into Smart  
Growth Planning?

June 19  
APWA Roundtable  
Discussion  
in Fort Scott  
Call Tony DeCicco at  
316/268-4087

\*August 11-15  
KDOT Traffic  
Engineering: Design  
in Lawrence

August 24-27  
American Public Works  
Association Annual  
Congress  
in San Diego, CA  
Register on-line at  
[www.apwa.net](http://www.apwa.net)

August 24-27  
Institute of Traffic  
Engineers (ITE) Annual  
Meeting and Exhibit  
in Seattle, WA  
Register on-line at  
[www.ite.org](http://www.ite.org)

\*October 1—Wichita  
\*October 2—Lawrence  
Environmental Justice:  
Implementation and  
Application

November 13  
APWA Roundtable  
Discussion  
in Dodge City  
Call Tony DeCicco at  
316/268-4087

For information on calendar items indicated with a \* or to suggest a topic for a future LTAP workshop, contact:

Rose Lichtenberg, LTAP Training Coordinator  
785/864-2594  
[rosemary@ku.edu](mailto:rosemary@ku.edu)

\*\*To register for the APWA/LTAP "Click Listen and Learn" workshops, call Ashley Gann at (816) 472-6100 ext. 3511. Cost is \$150 per site.

# Free Resources

Check off your selections, fill in the bottom portion, and return this form to:

KUTC Materials Request, 1530 W. 15th St., Room 2011, Lawrence, Kansas 66045  
or fax to 785/864-3199

## Videos .....

One video per lending request. Two week lending period.

**Channel Lining—Procedures for Planning, Design and Installation**

by North American Green. 12 minutes.

**Basic Principles for Installation of Corrugated Steel Drainage Structures**

by the National Corrugated Steel Pipe Association and the American Iron and Steel Institute. 20 minutes.

## Publications .....

You are free to keep these unless otherwise noted.

**Roundabouts: An Informational Guide**

Published by FHWA, 2000.

**Superpave Mixture Design Guide**

Published by FHWA, 2001.

## Equipment .....

Available free—for loan to local highway agencies. Call us at (785) 864-5658 to arrange time period needed for loan. There could be a waiting list for these items.

**Jamar Technologies, Inc. (DB-400) Turning Movement Counter Board**

A basic model for recording turning movements at intersections. The board is is lightweight and comes with its own case.

**Jamar Technologies, Inc. (TDC-8) Turning Movement Counter Board**

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