

# **Summary Report**

## **Evaluation of 2004 Triennial Strategic Plans**

Technical Activities Division  
Operations & Maintenance Group  
Operations Section (AHB00)

**Response to Committee AHB20 — Freeway Operations**

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## **1) Introduction**

During this summer and fall of 2004, all twelve committees of the Operations Section of the Technical Activities Division of the Transportation Research Board prepared Triennial Strategic Plans (TSPs). The content and format were based on the *TRB Operating Guide* as supplemented by the Section chair. The purpose was to encourage committees to compile and review their accomplishments, to conduct self assessments, and to chart their courses for future activities. The TSPs are a refinement of the Triennial Strategic Evaluation (TSE) process initiated by TRB in 2000.

The TSPs were reviewed by a task force from the Operations and Maintenance Group composed of Jeff Lindley (past committee chair), Dan Turner (past committee chair and current Section chair), and John Zegeer (past committee chair). The following report represents the consensus of the reviewers, and is presented in four parts: (1) introduction, (2) an overview of the Section, (3) review comments for each committee, and (4) TSPs prepared by each committee.

The review task force noted with a degree of pride that all 12 committees participated in the TSP experience. This was no small accomplishment, because the plans were prepared as a professional service by very busy volunteers. The plans are wonderful examples of dedicated volunteers who were diligent in examining the scopes of their committees in light of continuing changes in transportation research, in identifying the past activities of their committees, in quantifying these achievements, and in using this information to address the strengths and weakness of their committees. This is exactly the intended purpose of strategic planning – to allow committee members to recall and enjoy their past achievements, to see how their activities fit into the overall picture of TRB achievements, and to carry those feelings into the future as targeted activities. The reviewers extend their heartfelt appreciation to all who participated in this activity including committee chairs, committee members, committee friends, and TRB staff members.

## **2) Overview of Operations Section**

The Operations Section picture is quite positive when all twelve committees are viewed as a whole. There are trends of increased activity in conducting conference and paper sessions, sponsoring symposia and workshops, linking with other committees, and addressing critical cross cutting issues. At least one-third of the Section committees were high achievers and role models during the evaluation period. At least three committees have prepared or supervised preparation of documents that are considered to be the “handbooks” for their professional fields.

The Section includes some of the strongest and most active committees within TRB. In response to the ever changing nature of transportation operations research, two relatively new committees are in the process of establishing their senses of direction and their programs for action. These new committees are encouraged to use the comments of the TSP review task force as guidance in developing programs that shadow the accomplishments of the mature and more active committees in the Section.

On average, Operations Section committees were very productive. They received more paper submissions and reviewed more papers than the TRB average. In fact, this Section was the TRB leader in paper review activity. The committees also conducted a high volume of paper sessions and conference sessions. These are basic activities that successful committees must conduct well so that the Annual Meeting attracts an audience of individuals who came to learn the state of practice in transportation.

Most of the committees conducted good mid-year meetings, often in conjunction with sister committees within TRB or from associated organizations. The number of such meetings appears to have increased since the 2000 TSEs were prepared – this is another good sign. There are also more extended midyear meetings in conjunction with TRB conferences and symposia sponsored by the committees. This is now a common practice for many of the Section committees. The stronger committees do this both domestically and internationally and have large international followings. This is taken as a sign of high achievement, in defining or helping to define the world state of practice within a designated specialty area. This is the essence of TRB activities – determining the state of practice and disseminating it widely, and extending it into the future in the form of research needs.

Most committees regularly spend time probing the future to identify important research topics. Several of these have seen their efforts rewarded at a high level, with their research problem statements picked up by AASHTO in the form of NCHRP projects. A good example is the Freeway Operations Committee. One of their problem statements was designated as a “contingent project” for FY 2004 (not funded due to lack of sufficient NCHRP funds), and two of the committee’s problem statements have been funded as NCHRP projects 03-81 and 03-83 for FY 2005. But, if there was a reoccurring negative theme throughout the review, it was failure to document research needs in a way that could be addressed by the profession, i.e., preparation of research problem statements and publishing them in circulars or other suitable mechanisms. Other constructive criticisms that applied to multiple committees involved preparation or update of committee Millennium Papers, committee internal structure (lack of subcommittees, etc.), and effectiveness of committee web pages as a communication and information management tool.

The rotation of committee members appears to be good, and most committee chairs appear to be thoughtful in their rotation appointments. Chairs seem to be honoring the TRB Executive Committee’s expressed desire to increase the number of international, young, woman, and emeritus committee members. In 2004, the average Section committee had 2.3 international members, 1.0 young member, 2.9 women members, and 1.2 emeritus members. So these committees have made progress, but there is still room for improvement in the diversity of committee appointments.

The appropriateness of committee scopes was addressed in depth by the review task force. Virtually all of the committees were operating within their existing scopes, and those scopes appeared to be

appropriate. In several instances the review group recommended changes to a committee's scope statement to make it easier for committee members to read and understand. Typically this involved reducing the scope to a more succinct statement, followed a narrative/rationale that explained the scope, or by a listing of goal statements that supported the scope. In one instance the review task committee recommended consideration of a name change for one committee, to better reflect the types of activities that the committee was conducting.

Of special interest to the review task force was the degree to which committees overlapped with other committees and organizations, and whether there were gaps between committees. Although the interaction between committees has increased in the past four years, there were no identified significant duplications of effort between committees. Most of the overlaps appeared to be interaction to build synergy on new topics or to pass information between committees.

In closing, the review task force expresses its firm belief in the overall health of the Operations Section and its committees. Taken as a whole, they are very productive and their committee chairs, sub-committee chairs, secretaries, other committee officers, committee members, committee friends, and TRB staff members are to be encouraged and congratulated for their achievements.

### **3) Review Comments for Each Operations Section Committee**

AHB10 — Regional Transportation Systems Management and Operations

AHB15 — Intelligent Transportation Systems

**AHB20 — Freeway Operations**

AHB25 — Traffic Signal Systems

AHB30 — Vehicle-Highway Automation

AHB35 — High-Occupancy Vehicle Systems

AHB40 — Highway Capacity and Quality of Service

AHB45 — Traffic Flow Theory and Characteristics

AHB50 — Traffic Control Devices

AHB55 — Work Zone Traffic Control

AHB60 — Highway/Rail Grade Crossings

AHB65 — Operational Effects of Geometrics

Committee Name & Number: AHB20 Freeway Operations

**The review task force addressed the following general questions:**

- 1. Did the Committee do a reasonable job of completing its TSP within the guidelines provided? Were all pertinent topics covered?**

Yes, the committee did a good job of addressing the guidelines and assessing its accomplishments. There are good indications that the committee used the TSP preparation progress to self assess and to reorganize. For most issues, it identified its future course of action. The committee has noted a few issues, like whether to continue to post project status reports, for which a course of action has not yet been determined. The only element of the TSP process that did not appear to have been addressed was TRB critical cross cutting issues.

- 2. Does the current Scope statement accurately reflect the Committee's activities (any recommended changes)? Is the Committee charge appropriate?**

The Committee scope is succinct and clear, and it accurately reflects the activities of the Committee. Furthermore, it is supported by a well thought out Mission Statement and Goals.

- 3. Is the subject area covered by the Committee of current, significant importance to the transportation community in general, and to TRB sponsors? Is this Committee addressing the crucial, cross cutting issues that have been identified as priorities by the TRB Executive Committee?**

With travel growth continuing to outstrip roadway capacity, the role of this Committee is more important than ever in helping to provide mobility for Americans and American industry. This is reflected by the fact that two recent research problem statements prepared by the committee have been funded as NCHRP projects 03-81 and 03-83. Although the TSP does not address the cross cutting priorities directly, many of the Committee's activities address them (for example, see the 11 goal statements).

- 4. Are the needs of the subject area still meaningfully addressed through typical functions of TRB standing committees?**

Yes, especially its technology transfer activities, and its role in assessing emerging methodologies and new technologies.

- 5. Does this Committee serve a role that is not generally available through other organizations?**

Yes, it is the focal point for its field and interacts with many agencies and committees.

- 6. Is there apparent overlap with other TRB Committees that indicate a need for improved coordination or possible realignment of scopes or Committee structure? Likewise, is there a gap between this committee and others (i.e., an important topic that no committee is addressing)?**

Although there are many overlaps, there is no significant duplication of major thrust topics.

- 7. Offer suggestions for strengthening committee performance or effectiveness --continue as is, change scope, restructure, merge, be eliminated, etc.**

The committee has done a good job of identifying its strengths, and is encouraged to emphasize them. Likewise, it has identified topics that can be improved, and is encouraged to address them. The update of the Millennium paper should occur in 2005 so that it will be ready for 2006.

**8. Other comments:**

The committee has an excellent web page, which improves communications and adds to the stature of both the committee and TRB. There is additional capacity to add international, young, women and emeritus members to this committee.