

New organization emerging at WisDOT

You won't find folks at WisDOT's Highway Engineering Bureau doing business as usual these days. And that's the way they want it, according to Bureau Director Dan Pritchard.

"We're revising the way we do business so we can become more flexible, efficient, and effective," says Pritchard. The Bureau, part of the Division of Highways, is itself relatively new, created in 1991 in the merger of the former bureaus of Operations and Development. Since then the Bureau and the Division have been involved in reevaluating their mission and planning their reorganization.

Demographics and program growth are pushing the effort. So are changes in technology, development processes and emphasis. The experienced people who helped build the Interstate system have mostly retired. At the same time the program has roughly tripled. Some changes have been mandated by ISTEA; others have evolved through introduction of new technologies and from new demands such as impact analysis requirements.

"We've reviewed and redefined all the activities that we should be doing," says Pritchard, "and we've rewritten every one of the Bureau's 290 position descriptions." While no employees lost their jobs, activities have been eliminated, consolidated, updated, and moved. All employees were asked to review the new position descriptions and accept the revised one for their job or apply for a different one.

"Twenty-five percent of our people are doing jobs that didn't exist before, or that are new to them," says Pritchard. "One hundred percent have had the opportunity to choose the job they want to be in." He is excited about the enthusiasm and opportunities the reorganization is beginning to generate.

A directory of Bureau employees by name and responsibility has just been completed and is being distributed. Copies are available from District offices.

Adding value, saving money

Adding value is a guiding principle for the reorganization. Some processes, many of them "policing" activities, were changed because they added nothing of value. Right-of-way plats, for example, no longer go to Madison from the District office for approval, saving two to six weeks' time. Approving construction change orders and final payment documents has also been delegated to the districts, saving weeks of processing time and many hours of work.

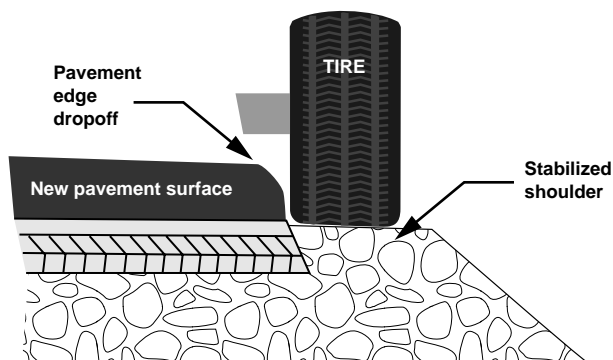
"We've gotten out of the business of policing," says Pritchard. "Our job is to make sure that we have clear policies in place, that the people who implement them know what they are trying to do, and to check that the policies are being implemented consistently statewide. This is a fundamental change from playing 'I got you.'"

Cutting costs is one of the Bureau's primary measures of success. They expect to reduce their contribution to project delivery costs by 10 percent. The Bureau charges Districts directly and indirectly for such things as project reviews, construction and design consulting, and appearing at public meetings. These charges add to total project costs.

Other improvement measures include cutting in half the average time it takes to complete an approval process and reducing total operating costs in 1995 five percent below 1993 levels. They also expect to improve bridge design productivity by 10 percent, cutting the cost per bridge.

Deadly pavement edge dropoffs are preventable

When gravel shoulders are not immediately pulled up after a road is paved, the result is vertical edges and dangerous dropoffs. These can cause serious vehicle crashes and leave a municipality legally liable.



Vertical pavement edge dropoffs of more than four inches can cause serious vehicle crashes.

"We do have some Wisconsin municipalities that contract for paving and exclude shoulder work," says Bill Bremer of the Federal Highway Administration's Wisconsin Office. Workload, scheduling and financial problems can delay pulling up the shoulders for days to weeks after the pavement is finished, creating a hazard.

The best approach? Do the shoulders right away. That is WisDOT's policy, according to Bill Bauer, manager of construction operations. "We require that when there is an edge dropoff of more than two inches, the shoulders must be pulled up before the road is opened to through traffic," he says.

A national study by the University of Tennessee Transportation Center agrees: "The most effective way of solving the problems associated with pavement edge dropoffs is to simply eliminate the issuance of contracts where shoulder work is excluded or not included in the resurfacing contract."

Districts also doing reviews

"The Districts are charged with doing their work on time, in budget, at a reasonable cost, and with customer satisfaction," says Lee Crook, director of the Bureau of Districts in the Division of Highways. "They are also expected to increase their productivity by five percent this year." All districts are doing reviews; District 2 in Waukesha has implemented a complete reorganization.

District 2 has set up geographically based teams which will provide "one-stop shopping" for projects, says Ralph Beiermeister, the District's deputy director. Before, responsibility would shift from person to person as the project progressed. A local municipality might work with six or seven different people or groups: planners, designers, real estate people, utility people, construction people, traffic people, et cetera. Now they will deal with a team which is responsible for everything in its section of the district.

"The reorganization was developed by District employees," says Beiermeister. "I think in the process they have developed a strong feeling of ownership, pride, and empowerment. That will help improve efficiency." District measures of success include cutting their operating budget and increasing productivity by 10 percent. Since they contract for \$120 to \$160 million of work a year, the savings can be considerable!

These are just a few of the changes at WisDOT. Others are in progress. And if you are waiting for things to "settle down" at WisDOT, you'll have quite a wait. The Department is committed to reviewing processes and improving quality as a lifelong mission. ●

If communities do let no-shoulder paving contracts, they should treat the condition as a hazard and use proper traffic controls. "Low shoulder" and other appropriate signs will warn drivers of the conditions and may help protect the community from liability should a crash occur.

Another approach is requiring the contractor to add a 45 degree fillet along the pavement edge when paving. The lay down and material costs for adding this fillet are minimal — one to two percent of the typical resurfacing contract, according to the University of Tennessee study which was funded by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety.

The fillet increases safety during construction and also later when shoulder material is worn or eroded away. It can also give drainage protection for the road's base and sub-base. However, installing a paved fillet may make it more difficult to keep gravel shoulders in place along the road's edge.

For a copy of the study, *The Elimination or Mitigation of Hazards Associated with Pavement Edge Dropoffs During Roadway Resurfacing*, contact the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, 1440 New York Ave., NW, Suite 201, Washington, DC 20005. Phone: 202/638-5944, FAX: 202/638-5943.

Use "Double fines" law to wake up drivers

By the 1995 construction season, the last of more than 100 signs will be in place around the state. The signs remind drivers that moving violations in work zones carry double fines.

"If there are workers there, the law applies to any work zone — highway reconstruction or maintenance, utility work, even crack sealing and patching — from the first work zone sign to the last," says Chuck Spang, of the WisDOT Traffic Section. "Double fine signs don't have to be set up at specific work zones for the law to apply," he says.

You can also use the new law to educate drivers about work zone safety. "Motorists need to realize what it's like to be a construction zone flagger or a worker bending over with cars whizzing by at 55 miles an hour," says Spang. "It's hard on your heart!"

Plan now for publicity efforts during the construction season. WisDOT has materials to help you with producing press releases, radio and TV public information announcements (PSAs), and print advertisements to make motorists aware of the problem and the consequences.

"We have media kits for local officials to help them educate drivers," says Dorothy Kapke of WisDOT's Public Affairs Office. Along with written materials that you can personalize to your own area, the kit has camera-ready ads in three sizes and printed brochures for motorists.

To get your media kit contact Dorothy Kapke, WisDOT Office of Public Affairs, P.O. Box 7910, Rm. 103B, Madison, WI 53707, Phone: 608/266-2405, FAX: 608/266-7186.

