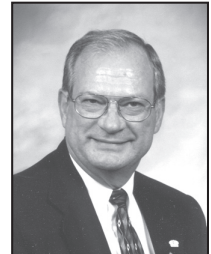


Message from the Conference Chair

C. Leroy Irwin, *Mulkey Engineers & Consultants, Inc.*

We were delighted to visit the eclectic Southern city of Little Rock, Arkansas, for the 2007 International Conference on Ecology and Transportation!

The largest metropolitan area in the Natural State, Little Rock is situated along the Arkansas River and, among other cultural and recreational attractions, is home to the Big Dam Bridge—the world’s longest pedestrian and bicycle bridge, built and designed specifically for that purpose. Located over Murray Lock and Dam, the bridge extends 3,463 feet across the Arkansas River, and currently ties together 17 miles of scenic river trails in Little Rock and North Little Rock. The Big Dam Bridge is one of the many unique projects in Little Rock that have been planned and built through innovative partnerships for the purpose of fostering enhanced transportation, environmental conservation, and community quality of life. Little Rock is also home to the Clinton Presidential Library and the Heifer International Headquarters, an excellent example of green construction. These sites are within walking distance or a short trolley ride from the conference hotel.



The conference theme, “Bridging the Gaps, Naturally,” was generated by the host agency, the Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department (AHTD) and speaks clearly to the state’s ongoing efforts to build interagency relationships and to forge well-designed partnerships that offer the best possible solutions for the state’s transportation and ecology challenges, particularly in the fast-growing Little Rock region. In fact, using partnerships as well as integrative planning to help “bridge the gaps” is a premise that underscores numerous elements of the conference program.

Each ICOET brings exciting new elements to the program thanks to the organizations that participate, and this year was no exception. Below is a list of the special events conducted at ICOET 2007, some of which are described further in the “Special Sessions” section of this proceedings.

- Arkansas Governor Mike Beebe provided the official conference welcome, along with Dan Flowers, director of the Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department. Their remarks are available for view on the conference Web site (www.icoet.net). We thank them for their inspiring words and generous support of the conference objectives.
- ICOET hosted for the first time the 2007 FHWA Environmental Excellence Awards program ceremony. The award winners from 12 environmental categories were recognized at the Tuesday, May 22, conference luncheon. This event offered an opportunity to showcase the people, projects, and programs in the United States that excel in meeting growing transportation needs while protecting and enhancing the environment.
- In conjunction with Tuesday’s Environmental Excellence awards luncheon, Little Rock Mayor Mark Stodola was presented the “Preserve America” Presidential Award. An initiative of the White House and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, the annual awards program recognizes exemplary accomplishments in the sustainable use and preservation of cultural or natural heritage assets; demonstrated commitment to the protection and interpretation of America’s cultural or natural heritage assets; and the integration of these assets into contemporary community life, and combination of innovative, creative, and responsible approaches to showcasing historic resources in communities.
- ICOET partnered with the Society for Conservation Biology, a special conference co-sponsor in 2007. SCB conducted its North American Section meeting in conjunction with ICOET and led a concurrent session on “Reconciling Conservation Planning and Transportation Planning on a Regional Scale.”
- A special plenary session on “Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) in Transportation: Environmental Considerations” was conducted on Friday, May 25. Many organizations are now considering PPPs as the solution to meeting increased transportation needs with limited resources, although this business model is not without challenges. This session identified some recent experiences with using PPPs and explored how to best utilize PPPs, given various economic, environmental, and management concerns.

In addition to these events, ICOET 2007 featured more than 150 technical presentations, posters, and exhibits from governmental, non-governmental, university, and private sector organizations. These organizations represented the United States, Canada, Australia, France, Hungary, India, Portugal, South Korea, Spain, Switzerland, Taiwan, and The Netherlands. I wish to thank personally the members of the ICOET 2007 steering committee and all the subcommittees who worked tirelessly with these groups to generate an outstanding program. And I hope that you will use the information captured at ICOET 2007 to continue to advance your efforts to protect and enhance our environment when planning and implementing transportation programs.

It is not too early to begin planning for the next ICOET. The 2009 conference will be hosted by the Minnesota Department of Transportation. We hope to see you there!