

.....Chairman's Message



As I reflected on what to say in this message I reminisced back several years ago to the beginnings of this conference. We, in Florida, were struggling with the issues of maintaining connectivity for wildlife habitat in a rapidly urbanizing state. As we began to search for information on the subject, we did not find much available. We learned that some activity was happening in Europe. As a result, in 1996 the first International Conference on Wildlife Ecology and Transportation (ICOWET) was held in Florida with international participation. About the same time, the Washington State Department of Transportation and the Center for Transportation and the Environment began a similar national conference on Transportation, Wetlands, and the Natural Environment (Connections '96). These two conferences joined together in 2001 in Keystone, Colorado, as the International Conference on Ecology and Transportation (ICOET).

Shortly after the 2001 ICOET meeting, AASHTO and FHWA sponsored an International Technology Scanning Tour on Wildlife Mortality. Representatives of state DOTs, FHWA, federal resource agencies, and non-governmental organizations toured five countries in Europe to see first hand what was being accomplished to address wildlife mortality and the re-connecting of habitats there. A brief summary of the tour is featured in this proceedings.

On August 24, 2003, we opened the second ICOET in Lake Placid, New York. The theme for ICOET 2003 was "Making Connections." I have no doubt that objective will be achieved in countless ways by the conference participants who will impart the new knowledge gained from this event to their colleagues and agency partners as they continue to work together to enhance the vital links between ecosystems and transportation systems.

This conference demonstrates that the visions of the early conference leaders are being realized. It is comforting to know that we had far more requests for presentations for this conference than could be accommodated in the agenda. I thank the planning committee for their hard work in selecting the best papers. It was not an easy task. I also thank the sponsors – governmental, non-profit, and private – for without their support, this conference could not take place. Through their participation in the sessions, the exhibits and poster presentations, and the field trips, and especially through this conference proceedings, it is evident that many environmental agencies, public interest groups, and the transportation industry have shared a tremendous body of technical expertise. It is hoped that by this cross-functional sharing of information a better understanding of the ecological and social relationships will result.

The ICOET 2003 host agency, New York State Department of Transportation, organized two spectacular field trips demonstrating their work with the Adirondack Park Agency and others to provide safe and efficient mobility in the Adirondacks region without compromising its natural land areas, water areas, and wildlife. Like many progressive transportation departments, NYSDOT has emerged as a leader in proactively addressing the environmental effects of its surface transportation system. The department's award-winning environmental program was one of the reasons why ICOET 2003 came to New York State. I thank NYSDOT, and particularly the Environmental Analysis Bureau, for its hospitality and for sharing the department's impressive programs and projects with ICOET participants.

As chairman of the conference I would also like to express my appreciation to Center for Transportation and the Environment for their assistance in organizing the conference and to the Western Transportation Institute for their funding support of the conference proceedings.

As we review the many success stories featured in this proceedings, let us remember that we have come far, but we still have much to learn and to do. I hope all of you continue to learn much, remain inspired to champion new efforts, and commit to sharing your future successes at every opportunity. We look forward to seeing you in California in 2005!

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