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I. Information Sessions

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INFORMATION SESSION #1:
ICOET 2001 SPONSOR UPDATES

Panelists

George Gerstle, Planning Branch Manager, Colorado Department of Transportation (moderator)

Gary Evink, Consultant and ICOET 2001 Conference Chair

Fred Bank, Ecologist, Federal Highway Administration Headquarters

Susan Hagood, Wildlife Issues Specialist, Humane Society of the United States

Katie McDermott, Technology Transfer Director, Center for Transportation and the Environment

Summary

George Gerstle, planning branch manager at the Colorado Department of Transportation introduced the first panel and briefly reviewed two CDOT projects, a programmatic agreement for “no effect” and “not likely to adversely affect” projects with the Canada lynx, a wide-ranging species at high elevations in the Rocky Mountains, and CDOT’s shortgrass prairie initiative, addressing current and future impacts for three listed and over 20 declining species in the eastern third of Colorado.

Gary Evink welcomed his ICOET colleagues and introduced Leroy Irwin, environmental manager at Florida DOT, representing AASHTO’s Standing Committee on the Environment; Tom Linkous of Ohio DOT, representing TRB’s Natural Resources and Environmental Stewardship Subcommittee; Fred Bank and Paul Garrett of FHWA Headquarters Natural Resources Team; Katie McDermott and James Martin of the Center for Transportation and the Environment (CTE), and Don Peterson, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service liaison for transportation. Ann Roche is the transportation liaison at EPA. Bill Ruediger, an initial ICOET organizer and representative of the USDA Forest Service was also introduced, along with Susan Hagood with Defenders of Wildlife; David Ziegler, conference coordinator for all the ICOET conferences; and project sponsors.

This conference is a combination of two previously separate conferences focusing on wetlands and wildlife. The theme of the conference is “a time for action;” we’ve learned a lot over the past five years, and Mr. Evink stated that now is the time to put lessons learned into practice and examine what is being done. Mr. Evink is in the process of compiling a synthesis for the National Academy of Sciences. In addition, the NCHRP panel examining stormwater is going out this year with a series of workshops around the country. The “Watch Out for Wildlife” program will be developing a video.

Fred Bank introduced the FHWA/AASHTO Scanning Tour on Wildlife Mortality, which reviewed technology and research around the country and internationally. Past scan tours have focused on pavement, bridges, and structures. This year one will be conducted on wildlife mortality in western Europe. Western European transport ministries have been doing a great deal to connect habitats and reduce wildlife mortality. They are proactively taking measures to assist species in declining and to address safety issues. In some areas over 50 percent of the vehicle accidents are due to collisions with wildlife.

Stops on the tour will include Slovenia, where the team will look at connectivity and modeling efforts for the brown bear. In Switzerland the team will look at underpasses and overpasses in relation to highways and rail, in particular. In Germany the team will focus on the east, where more new highway construction is occurring. Ecoducts currently in place in Germany range from 10 m to 870 m in width. Germany is looking at macroinvertebrates as well as well as mammal crossing needs. France has 400 existing overpasses and underpasses. France also has ecoducts up to 800 m in width; they often use underpasses for local farm roads and install vegetated strips on either side. France has been examining fragmentation and risk to species, as has the Netherlands, which has a national habitat fragmentation plan. This plan is a model on the continent,

and the nation has developed over 500 badger tunnels in response. More underpasses are being planned as well as some large overpasses.

The scanning team consists of four representatives from FHWA, three >from state DOTs, six from other federal agencies and private organizations. The team will visit these countries between October 5-21 and issue a final report in spring 2002.

Susan Hagood of Defenders of Wildlife introduced the "Give Wildlife a Brake" program, which produces two brochures, one for spring and one for fall, and an 11-minute video. At its core, the program is an educational one. Defenders conducted a survey of 600 licensed drivers nationally and discovered that two out of three have seen wildlife hit by a vehicle and more than half have hit wildlife already. Most feel they already take precautions while in areas where wildlife may be present, primarily slowing down. This corresponds to a person's history of contact with wildlife. Most agree that it is the responsibility of drivers to take precautions. Two out of three said they would change their behavior if they were aware that they needed to. Those surveyed suggested both targeted and general public educational campaigns. Nearly all respondents felt that wildlife should be protected, with 97 percent support for protecting mammals, 87 percent support for turtles, and 83 percent for birds. The Defenders will supply brochures if DOTs have outlets for distribution.

Katie McDermott introduced the Wildlife, Fisheries, and Transportation Web Gateway, a new project of the Center for Transportation and the Environment. CTE is a USDOT university transportation center, the only one with an environmental theme that is national scope. CTE is also supported by North Carolina DOT. The Center supports research, education, and technology transfer that seek to mitigate the impacts of surface transportation on the environment. CTE's overall objective is to improve DOTs' access to information and provide a forum for discussion on transportation and environmental issues.

The purpose of the WFT Gateway website is to provide transportation agencies and their partners with a gateway to current information on the topic. The gateway, or website, emerged from a small meeting held last year at CTE comprising representatives from USDA Forest Service, FHWA, state transportation and environmental agencies, and universities. This group examined problems with access to information about the numerous research and technical assistance activities related to wildlife mortality reduction and encouraged CTE to provide a "gateway" to current information for the purpose of improving information sharing and reducing duplicative efforts. The site will have seven different sections, including access to wildlife-related listservs, research and training information, best practices, calendar information, and related links. The site also provides access to CTE's Environmental Research in Progress (EnvRIP) database, which is keyword searchable and was launched in August 2000. It currently covers over 14 research areas. The site is being updated in preparation for the March 2002 TRB Environmental Research Needs Conference. CTE's Wildlife Ecology and Transportation database contains more than 500 records, which include completed, published research and websites. Next CTE plans to organize an advisory group to continue to develop the website and decide whether a listserv is warranted. Katie can be reached at 919-515-8034 or kpm@unity.ncsu.edu. The web address for the gateway is www.itre.ncsu.edu/cte/gateway/home.html.

INFORMATION SESSION #2: ICOET 2001 SPONSOR UPDATES

Panelists

Bill Ruediger, Highway Program Director, USDA Forest Service (moderator)
Kevin McAleese, Sand County Foundation
Sandy Jacobson, District Wildlife Biologist, USDA Forest Service
Patricia White, Transportation Associate, Defenders of Wildlife
Jennifer McMurtray, Defenders of Wildlife

Summary

Bill Ruediger was the moderator for the second information session of the morning. Bill introduced Kevin McAleese of Sand County Foundation, Sandy Jacobson of USDA Forest Service, and Tricia White and Jennifer McMurtray of the Defenders of Wildlife.

Kevin McAleese introduced the creation of a deer-vehicle crash (DVC) information clearinghouse. This project is the result of a partnership formed between the Wisconsin Department of Transportation, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, and the Sand County Foundation. Conflicts between deer and vehicles in the Upper Midwest and the United States continue to increase. The creation of this information clearinghouse will allow the compilation of research projects about deer-vehicle crashes, improve communication of the results of these projects, and identify additional research that may be needed. The creation of DVC information clearinghouse is ongoing at the time of the conference.

Sandy Jacobson demonstrated the searchable Internet-based database, titled the Wildlife Crossing Structures Toolkit. This database will include existing methods to increase wildlife permeability and decrease wildlife mortality on highways. The toolkit will include an extensive database of species and project attributes, decision guidance and engineering specifics based on case histories, and a biological/engineering glossary. The toolkit can be found at <http://www.crossingstructures.org>.

Tricia White discussed the re-authorization of TEA-21, the federal transportation legislation that expires on October 1, 2003. The presentation covered the military beginnings of the interstate highway system to the post-interstate era and the development of TEA-21 with a new emphasis on safety, communities, and the environment. It has been proven that vehicle travel has environmental consequences, such as degradation of air quality, emission of green house gases, impairment of water quality, alteration of natural hydrology, and increased noise. Re-authorization of TEA-21 has potential stakeholders advocating their positions for the allocation of an estimated \$300 billion. Interested groups include American Road and Transportation Builders Association (ARTBA), American Association of State and Highway Transportation Officials (AASHTO), American Highway Users Alliance (AHUA), alternative transportation non-government organizations (NGOs), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and environmental groups, such as the Defenders of Wildlife. Ultimately, the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee and the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee will shape TEA-21. The final message is to get involved by contacting TEA-21 and Congressional representatives throughout the re-authorization process.

Finally, Jennifer McMurtray presented a case study in Florida on a *Citizen's Guide to the Transportation Planning Process*. The citizen activist can greatly benefit wildlife and habitat by participating in the transportation development process at the planning and very early implementation stages. Wildlife advocates need not oppose every new road or road expansion project, but might focus on keeping highways away from their state's public lands and most sensitive natural areas, and push to make existing roads more compatible with wildlife. Citizens have a vested interest in promoting ecologically sensitive transportation projects, as they have to live with the outcome. Citizen participation can result in better government decisions.

INFORMATION SESSION #3: INTERNATIONAL UPDATES

Panelists

Bill Ruediger, Highway Program Director, USDA Forest Service (moderator)
Hans Bekker, Habitat Defragmentation Program Manager, Ministry of Transport (Netherlands)
Agnes Simonyi, Chief Environmental Coordinator, National Motorway Company (Hungary)

Summary

The International Information session introduced environmental transportation policy in Europe including the Infra Eco Network Europe (IENE). Bill Ruediger introduced Hans Bekker, program manager for Habitat Defragmentation in the Ministry of Transport in the Netherlands, and Agnes Simonyi, chief environmental coordinator at National Motorway Company in Budapest, Hungary.

Hans Bekker presented the European solution to a decrease in biodiversity and an increase in habitat fragmentation due to linear infrastructure. IENE, which now has over 20 European countries as members, is leading the exchange of knowledge and development of policy to address habitat fragmentation. Good planning, environmental impact assessments, compensation, mitigation measures, and reparation of existing bottlenecks can help reduce impacts of fragmentation. IENE brings together environment and infrastructure with ministries of environment, ministries of transport, universities, environmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, and private companies. Some of the objectives of IENE are to improve cooperation and exchange of knowledge at the national and European level, to stimulate political and public awareness, and to promote international and multidisciplinary research.

COST 341 (European Cooperation in the field of Scientific and Technical Research) was developed to address the objective of enhancing the exchange of knowledge and experiences. COST 341 is an action of the Directorate General for Energy and Transport of the European Union. The main objective of COST-action 341 is to promote a safe and sustainable pan-European transport infrastructure through recommending planning procedures and measures with the aim of conserving biodiversity and reducing vehicular accidents and fauna casualties. The underlying objectives are the same as the earlier mentioned objectives of IENE.

Tools for dissemination of products of COST 341 are via reports, workshops, seminars and web sites. But the most important tool for dissemination is the IENE-members. IENE will continue as network where COST 341 has a limited duration.

Actions, discussions, and field trips by IENE and the results of COST 341 are undoubtedly of great importance to counteract European habitat fragmentation due to linear infrastructure. Not all the goals of the two initiatives are already reached. It is a relatively new item in which models can help partly to overcome time-consuming knowledge building. Awareness, political willingness, and tools differ from country to country.

Agnes Simonyi presented a case study on the establishment of a Pan European road network in Hungary using European standards. Five of the Pan European transport corridors cross Hungary, and their development is top priority. The M3 project exemplifies the Hungarian goals to build a motorway according to European standards, especially highlighting the aspects of environmental protection.

The National Motorway Company is responsible for the development of the motorway network in Hungary and has addressed environmental concerns such as sensitive habitat of protected species and alignment near natural parks.

Using experimental results that the Hungarian road designers have collected from IENE and COST 341, Hungary will try to save sensitive areas and avoid habitat fragmentation as a result of the new road network. Practices to reduce habitat fragmentation and protection of native vegetation include digging out plants and replanting after construction, collecting seeds, building bridges over sensitive habitat, installing storm water treatment systems, fencing for wild animals, and installing amphibian and small mammal tunnels.