Pennsylvania Data Sharing Forum

October 30th, 2007

Location: Harrisburg, PA

Background

In June of 2007, the Pennsylvania Division of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) asked the Institute to help with ongoing data sharing issues among the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) and natural resource agencies in Pennsylvania. PennDOT uses a variety of natural resource data in its planning and project development processes. The Pennsylvania resource agencies collect and manage natural resource data and consult with PennDOT to avoid or mitigate environmental impacts from transportation projects. PennDOT wanted to explore the option of a centralized state-wide database that could help all agencies achieve their goals. PennDOT also wanted better access to data on "sensitive species" to enhance transportation planning. The resource agencies were concerned that providing information on the type and location of sensitive species could increase the risks to them. The Institute worked with FHWA to convene a Data Sharing Forum that brought PennDOT and the resource agencies together to find ways to increase information sharing while accounting for these concerns.

Highlights/Follow Up

Action items identified in the Forum Report included PennDOT providing more funded positions in certain resource agencies and funding for development of a more advanced technology tool that PennDOT could use to screen projects for endangered or threatened species. Other actions included improving the current data computer system, increased communication about interagency meetings, and more up-front communication at the beginning of projects. Since the report was issued, implementation of the action items has been slow. The Institute will continue to follow the group's progress and provide additional assistance as requested by FHWA or the other agencies.

The Forum report is located at:
http://www.ecr.gov/pdf/PADataSumm.pdf

Results and Accomplishments

A steering committee of agency managers was formed to help plan the Forum. The Institute conducted interviews with key personnel to better understand the issues. The Forum included presentations from the different agencies on their respective missions and data needs and followed by discussions of how to address the issue of better access to species data. The participants engaged in a productive dialogue, clarifying issues and generating ideas for solutions for overcoming data sharing barriers. Together, the group created an action plan to implement agreed upon solutions and to improve interagency collaboration.

Credits

This project was managed and facilitated by:

Dale Keyes
Senior Program Manager
Phone: (520) 901-8554; FAX: (520) 901-8555
Email: keyes@ecr.gov Website: www.ecr.gov

Kimberly Caringer
Program Assistant
Phone: (520) 901-8534 FAX: (520) 901-8535
Email: caringer@ecr.gov Website: www.ecr.gov

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