



Mn/DOT Library Overview: We've Come a Long Way

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The two words that leap to mind when I think about the MN/DOT Library are "growth" and "change." It all began in 1957, when our agency was the Minnesota Department of Highways, and a librarian was hired to organize and provide reading materials for employees. Now, we are a multimodal transportation department, the Minnesota Department of Transportation, and the library provides information in many formats on all transportation modes as well as on other topics that relate to MN/DOT's work. We participate in local, national and international partnerships and consortia, and serve the entire transportation community.

When I joined the library staff in 1985, it consisted of two librarians, one clerk, one paraprofessional and a part-time student worker. We were squeezed into a tiny area with no user space, and the books were packed so tightly onto the shelves that we risked having a shelf-full tumble down whenever one was removed. We had just started cataloging on OCLC, but still filed cards in the card catalog. Now, we have six librarians, two library technicians, and two clerks. We are in a space large enough to accommodate four public computer terminals, a large reading table, and several study carrels as well as adequate shelving, a circulation desk, a technical processing area and a reference office. Our online catalog is available on the World Wide Web, our collection is bar-coded for online circulation, and a number of subscription databases are available to employees on the library Intranet.

This growth has been gradual enough that we still think of it as a long, hard struggle to get where we are today. Indeed, I imagine there were times when our library director felt a bit like Sisyphus endlessly rolling a boulder uphill. But from today's vantage point, the progress is dramatic enough to indicate that our library is fortunate in being valued and supported by the organization and its management.

Our current spot on the MN/DOT organization chart is in the Office of Research and Strategic Services. That office was formed by the merger of the former Office of Research Administration, the Library (which was previously part of the Office of Communications) and the former Office of Strategic Initiatives. The new office reports to the Commissioner through his Chief of Staff, and our Office Director is a member of the Commissioner's Executive Team.

Moreover, when the Executive Team developed the department's four strategic objectives this year, one of them was Information (the others are Interregional Corridors, Multimodalism and Program Delivery.) MN/DOT wants to be a trusted source of transportation information. That gives the library a perfect opportunity to play a critical role in supporting the strategic objectives of the department. Of course, it also raises the level of what is expected of us, but we are confident that we are up to the challenge.

REFERENCE SERVICES

As our staff has grown, so have our services. We still provide traditional reference service, answering questions and doing literature searches. But we have also expanded the range of information sources that are available on employees' desktops, and have tried to make it easier for employees to contact us in a variety of ways. Our internal email system includes "Library Information" as an address so that people can direct questions to the library via email without having to remember an individual's name. We also have an "Ask the Librarian" box on our Intranet and Web pages, which allows customers to fill in a question or comment, identify themselves, and click to send. The message is automatically sent to one of the librarians' incoming email.

The Intranet page is organized into four main sections, "In the Library," "In Databases and Subscriptions," "On the Web," and "About the Library." "In the Library" includes links to our online catalog, our videotape catalog, our periodical list, our Recent Acquisitions list, and "Ask the Librarian." "In Databases and Subscriptions" is the section where we make a

number of indexes and databases available directly to employees. Some of them are web-based, and some are CD-ROMs that are mounted on our network server. They include *Transport* for transportation literature; *Computer Select* for computer information; business and general magazine indexes that are available through a state consortium; *Kiplinger Special Service* for financial information; *Reference USA* business directory; and several others.

"On the Web" has links to selected web sites that we believe to be useful to the organization, in the categories of Transportation; Standards and Specifications; Statistical Information; Geographic Resources; Laws, Regulations & Statutes; Associations; and of course, Other Good Stuff for those hard-to-categorize but helpful sites. "About the Library" includes a map of our location with directions for getting here, a floor plan of the library, a staff listing, and a summary of our services and collection.

The external Internet site is arranged similarly, but omits access to the subscription databases that are only available internally. The Internet site can be viewed at <http://www.dot.state.mn.us/library/>.

Another way that we have expanded our reference services is through a value-added service called IRIS ♦ In-depth Research and Information Synthesis. The librarian who takes on an IRIS project works for an extended period of time with an individual or group doing extensive research on a topic, and writing a synthesis paper that will be published as a Mn/DOT report. IRIS projects are well suited to topics that are new to the department or to the group studying them, or when there is a need to get a handle on a large topic and put it into an organized summary form. The first four IRIS reports to be completed were, *Community Reaction in Other States to Placing a Wireless Infrastructure in the Right-of-Way*; *Access Management ♦ Documenting Practices External to Minnesota*; *Fuel Cells in Transportation*; and *Bicycle Commuting in Three North American Cities: Madison, Boulder, Toronto*.

OUTREACH

As we have expanded our reference services through IRIS and Intranet desktop access, we have increased our outreach and education activities, too, in an effort to make more employees aware of what the library can do for them. These efforts have included tours, lunchtime seminars, and presentations at employee meetings and at our annual Transportation Conference. Our Outreach Librarian, Shirlee Sherkow, is currently making a systematic effort to reach employees by scheduling special meeting times with sections or offices to talk with them about their information needs and our services. The department's New Employee Orientation has just been redesigned, and will include information on, and visits to, the Library. And we are hosting an Open House for International Special Librarians Day on April 13.

DEPARTMENT-WIDE PRESENCE

Librarians have begun to have a greater presence on department-wide committees and work groups in recent years, too. We have wanted for a long time to have more librarian participation on department groups, and our efforts are paying off. Our director, Jerry Baldwin, is a member of the Technology Transfer Coordinating Committee, the International Knowledge Transfer Group, the Web Advisory Committee, and the Knowledge Management Core Group. He also is a member of a group that oversees our formal partnership with the Center for Transportation Studies at the University of Minnesota, called the CTS/ORSS Partnership Group.

Our Systems Librarian, Jim Byerly, coordinates with the Information Resources staff in other parts of MN/DOT, and belongs to the LAN Administrators group. Our Technology Transfer Librarian, Anne Mackereth, is the library liaison to the Research Coordinators group and serves on the subcommittee that plans programs for the Research Coordinators ♦ quarterly meetings. In addition, Anne is part of the team that is working on Information Resource Project 143, "Workflow and Document Management Research and Standards." She is also a member of the Graphic and Editorial Standards work group, a short-term group that is putting together standards for all MN/DOT print and online documents as part of our new Communications Plan.

My own involvement in department-wide groups includes the Knowledge Management Core Group and two short-term working groups. One is a Customer Value work group that is putting together a model for evaluating programs based on their value to the customer. The other is part of the Communications Plan and is called the Information Clearinghouse work group. One task of this group is to develop guidelines for submission of all department publications and newsletters to the Library and placing links on our Intranet page to electronic newsletters in the department. MN/DOT is large and

decentralized, and there are a lot of publications coming out of different offices that never get sent to the Library. Having a department-wide policy for depositing this material with the Library is one of those things that make us sigh, "At last!" I think the new Communications Plan has the potential for many positive impacts.

PARTNERSHIPS

The MN/DOT Library has benefited from partnerships with two organizations in particular: Minnesota's Local Road Research Board (LRRB) and the University of Minnesota's Center for Transportation Studies (CTS.) LRRB is composed of four county engineers, two city engineers, three representatives from MN/DOT and one representative from CTS. It oversees a portion of county and city state aid funds that are set aside to support research needed at the local level. The Library has always provided services to the state's city and county engineers, and LRRB has often reciprocated with financial support for library services.

CTS was created in the late 1980s to encourage and coordinate transportation-related research at the University of Minnesota. The center's staff recognized that this would require library services. They also realized that the transportation materials and services needed were already available at the MN/DOT Library and that it made little sense to duplicate them at CTS. A partnership was set up, the Minnesota Transportation Libraries (MTL) program, consisting of the MN/DOT Library and the CTS Library. The CTS Library has a librarian, access to electronic resources, and a small physical collection (they use the MN/DOT Library collection heavily, and we have interoffice courier service between the two locations.) In this way, MTL can provide services to staff and customers of both organizations from either of the two facilities. LRRB also joined the collaboration by providing funding to cover the cost of equipping and staffing a computer network to provide on-line access to CD-ROM databases.

PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

MN/DOT Library staff have a tradition of being active in the library world as well as in the transportation world. We are part of a consortium of Minnesota state government libraries and information centers called the Capitol Area Library Consortium, or CALCO. CALCO members work together to improve library and information services in state government.

One of CALCO's most notable achievements was getting legislative funding to automate the CALCO libraries as a group, enabling us to join the online library system (MnSCU/PALS) that includes the entire Minnesota State College and Universities system along with a number of other academic, public and special libraries. The Web version of the catalog, WebPALS, makes access to information in state government libraries widely and easily available to citizens.

For many years now, at least one of the MN/DOT librarians has served as a CALCO officer or committee chair in any given year. We have also worked on CALCO-sponsored presentations for Minnesota Library Association conferences. Anne Mackereth participates in the Minnesota Library Association as a member of their Web Team as well.

A statewide initiative called MN/LINK provided another opportunity for service to the library community. The 1997 Minnesota Legislature funded an initiative to form a statewide online library system that would include, among others, members of the two largest existing systems, MnSCU/PALS and the University of Minnesota's LUMINA system. An RFP was put together for a new statewide system, a vendor was selected, and contract negotiations were begun. A Technical Committee was formed to articulate specific technical needs of the members of the large and varied group of MN/LINK libraries and to evaluate the vendor's ability to meet those needs. Sheila Hatchell, then our Catalog Librarian, was a member of the Technical Committee. It turned out to be a major commitment for the better part of a year. In the end, it was determined that the selected vendor would not be able to meet our needs, and contract negotiations were canceled. MN/LINK has now issued a new RFP and formed a new Vendor Evaluation Team. The work that was done by the Technical Committee will no doubt be used again in the next round of negotiations.

The Special Libraries Association is another area where MN/DOT Librarians have been active. Library Director Jerry Baldwin has held offices in the Minnesota Chapter and in SLA Divisions. I have been on Division committees. When the SLA Annual Conference was held in Minneapolis in June 1999, it provided an opportunity for MN/DOT to host a meeting of transportation librarians. The Government Transportation Research Information Committee (GTRIC) meeting is usually

a ticketed event, but was funded by MN/DOT this time. Attendees were brought by bus from the Minneapolis Convention Center to the Transportation Building in St. Paul for the meeting.

It was a good opportunity to showcase our new library facility and our management support. Our Office Director and two other office members who lead research administration and technology transfer attended the meeting and gave presentations. The near disaster of the day involved arrangements for breakfast and lunch, when the caterer suddenly and inexplicably canceled out the night before the meeting. Library "miracle workers" Barb Hogan and Sheila Hatchell scrambled to make last-minute alternate arrangements, picked up food from three different suppliers, and had everything in place for a wonderful continental breakfast and box lunch. The thirty-four other people who attended the meeting would never have known what a close call it was had we not shared the story with them.

THE FUTURE

Our emphasis for the near future is on expanding our outreach efforts and on supporting MN/DOT's strategic objective to be a trusted source of information for better decision making. Transportation has been an unusually visible topic in this year's legislative session, due to the Governor's high interest level and to the controversial nature of issues like light rail transit, highway ramp meters, and funding. Further into the future, the only thing that one can safely predict is that things will be different yet. When the first librarian was hired in 1957, the big topic was construction of the new interstate system. Many of today's tools and topics were not even part of our vocabulary yet, and the role of the library was much more limited than it is today. Give us a few more years, and who knows how much further our role may expand? Our challenge is to take an active role in shaping that future.

N.B.: Jerry Baldwin, Mn/DOT Library Directory, 1972-2007