



Transportation Libraries And Information Services Of State Governments: A Survey

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Over the last several years, state departments of transportation (DOT) librarians have been running into each other at various conferences and meetings. Out of the shop talk at these sessions it became evident that neither the needs nor the resources of state DOT libraries were being taken into consideration in attempts to develop a national transportation information system.

We felt that a network of strong state DOT libraries would be essential to the success of a national system, both as a means of resource identification and sharing, and as a convenient means of access for the researcher. We also felt that in order to develop such a network, we would need the support of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO), the Transportation Research Board (TRB), the U.S. Department of Transportation (U.S.DOT), and our own organizations. In order to get this support, we would need to make them aware of the potential benefits of such a network, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of existing state DOT libraries.

As a vehicle to achieve all this, we decided to form the Committee on Transportation Library and Information Services in State Government. At the 1977 Annual Meeting of the Transportation Division, we set two tasks for ourselves: to publicize the existence of the committee, and to conduct a survey of the current status of state DOT libraries.

The first task was accomplished by placing short articles explaining the purpose of the committee in TRB News and the AASHTO Quarterly. The response to these articles was rather amazing, and pointed up the need for organizing a comprehensive transportation information system. As Chairman of the committee, I received a number of letters from people requesting more information on both our committee and the Transportation Division. The letters came from as far as Belgium and New Zealand, and one actually asked for advice on setting up a state DOT library.

Our second task, the survey, was begun last fall when we sent letters to the directing authority of each state DOT. Barbara Russo of the Washington State DOT Library, Josephine Said of Iowa, Kathy Fait of Wisconsin, and John Thurman of Tennessee sent the letters and collected the responses of the authorities in the states in each of the four regional associations of state highway and transportation officials.

The letters asked whether or not the state DOT had a library, and if so, the name and address of the person in charge of the library. Eventually, we got responses from all fifty states. Thirty-four of them claimed to have something called a "library". (Incidentally, Ann Sweeney of the TRB Library identified at least one "library" within each of the fifty state DOTs through the use of several mailing lists.

Our survey, nevertheless, covered only the thirty-four identified by the directing authorities. This was probably just as well since it was hard enough getting information when we had the names of the individuals supposedly in charge of the libraries, let alone dealing with blind mail addresses.

Once the thirty-four names were received, we sent questionnaires to each, asking for the standard information on staff, budget, collections, etc. The first responses we got back were from two of the contacts saying they really didn't have a library, just a collection of reports and magazines for the use of their staff. (This at least displayed a more profound understanding of the word "library" than was shown by many who answered the questionnaire). This left thirty-two states to deal with. Eventually, responses were received from, or dragged out of, all thirty-two.

Basically, what we found is that only a little more than one-third of the states claiming to have a library had professional librarians in charge. Ten states have libraries headed by individuals with an MLS; and, an additional two or three head librarians had what seemed to be the equivalent in education and experience. Of the remaining twenty-two individuals in charge of the libraries, twelve had no college or technical education, and the rest had various non-library college degrees.

The word "library" was used very loosely by this group of non-professionals. In one case the main purpose of the so-called library was the sale of maps and specification manuals; and in another, the distribution of road plans. The use of the title "Librarian" was equally lax. In some states, it was used by an individual with only a high school diploma and a job classed in clerical civil service series.

There are some interesting differences in the libraries headed by professionals and those headed by individuals without credentials. All of the professionally staffed libraries provide circulation, interlibrary loan and photocopying services, while only two-thirds of those headed by nonprofessionals do. Half of the professionally staffed libraries have TRIS-On-Line available in the library, as opposed to only three of the nineteen or twenty libraries headed by nonprofessionals. Three of the professionally staffed libraries have the capability of searching other commercial data bases; none of the remainder do.

In addition, the libraries headed by professionals are better funded than are the others. All of the professionally staffed libraries have some budget for material, with the median amount being \$10,000.00 of the remaining libraries fourteen have no materials budget, and the median for those that do is only \$1,000.00. Of the thirty-two state DOT libraries, only ten are not open to the public. Of this ten only one is headed by a professional. Lest it be thought that the libraries headed by professionals have no problems, I should add that six of them operate with no clerical support.

The organizational placement of libraries in Dots varies as widely as in other institutions. However, the majority of those surveyed, nineteen, are in the administrative division of their department. The next largest group, five, are in the planning division, and the remainder are scattered in other divisions.

To sum up, what we learned is that the state DOT libraries are a mixed bag and the contents of the bag keep changing. During the time our survey was in progress, two DOT libraries folded, and a new one started. Staffing in the libraries varies from six full time employees, of whom two are professionals, to one half-time, temporary clerical employee. Materials budgets range from nothing to a little more than \$27,000. Collections range from a couple hundred books and twelve periodicals to 45,000 reports and 45 periodicals.

Probably the most important task for our committee is the next one; educating the holders of the purse strings. It is obvious from our survey that there are a large number of states whose officials believe they have in-house library service, but, in fact, are supporting file rooms. The authorities in these states, along with those in states which do not have DOT libraries, need to be shown the economies and efficiencies that can be gained from adequate library services.

If we are successful in these efforts, it will be a major step toward achieving the primary goal of our committee. That is, providing all state transportation officials and researchers convenient access to the full range of transportation information.