Pooling Our Research: Increasing the Accessibility of Transportation Research

Why a Pooled Fund Study?
Mn/DOT and transportation agencies across the nation produce a vast amount of valuable research. Their performance depends in turn on the reliable and timely access to this research provided by transportation libraries, which collect and organize it for future use.

However, a large amount of the information needed by transportation practitioners often cannot be identified and retrieved when needed. Unlike many other disciplines the transportation industry has been hampered by a lack of investment in library and knowledge management infrastructure. It also has lacked a systematic approach to managing information and coordinating the efforts of regional libraries at a national level.

To address the challenges of sharing transportation information resources, in 2000 staff at Mn/DOT’s Office of Research Services began to discuss the establishment of a consortium of libraries within AASHTO Region III. This consortium was established in 2001 as the Midwest Transportation Knowledge Network through the cooperation of Mn/DOT, the Wisconsin Department of Transportation and the Midwest Regional University Transportation Center at the University of Wisconsin–Madison.

The objective of the MTKN was not only to improve access to transportation information resources in the Midwest, but to support the continued existence of a strong National Transportation Library created within U.S. DOT in 1998. It was hoped that NTL would eventually be able to coordinate regional TKNs and support the development of well-staffed, well-funded transportation libraries at the state and local levels throughout the United States. In the interim, to help advance and fund this vision, the Transportation Library Connectivity Pooled Fund Study was created in 2005.

What is the Pooled Fund Study’s Goal?
The goal of this pooled fund study is to advance the accessibility and sharing of transportation library resources through better communication and coordination among state, federal, academic and private sector libraries.

What Have We Learned?
Since 2005, the Transportation Library Connectivity Pooled Fund Study has helped significantly change the transportation library landscape, expanding from the MTKN to a network of TKNs nationwide. The development of this national infrastructure has led to:

• Increased awareness of the value of library and information services and the importance of TKNs among transportation executives and practitioners. As a result, struggling libraries are now participating at a regional and national level, and two DOT libraries that had been eliminated were reinstated by their agencies. Critical to establishing this awareness was the “Transportation Librarian’s Toolkit,” developed to serve as a roadmap for establishing and developing library services and as an outreach tool.

• Increased library connectivity and access to information resources, resulting in more sharing of best practices within the transportation library community and cooperation

continued
in the collection, cataloging and sharing of resources. The Library Connectivity Pooled Fund Study has widened participation by state DOT libraries in the Online Computer Library Center—the world’s largest library catalog—and the Transportation Libraries Catalog, which makes accessible the holdings of 36 transportation libraries in a single database. The National TKN Resource Sharing Pilot funded OCLC Resource Sharing subscriptions for TKN libraries, forming a national resource sharing network of nearly 50 transportation libraries and information centers.

What’s Going On Now?
On an ongoing basis, the Transportation Library Connectivity pooled fund continues to promote the value of transportation libraries and facilitate their interconnectivity. It also:

• Provides individual technical assistance via site visits by the technical library services consultant to help establish higher quality bibliographic records, improve local workflows, place qualified librarians and select suitable integrated library systems.

• Advances the professional development and networking of member librarians by supporting their participation in conferences, workshops and webinars.

• Implements focused research and technology projects proposed by members on topics such as the Historical ASTM Standards Transfer Project, which rescued from destruction a complete set of historical ASTM standards at Washington State DOT Library.

What’s Next?
The Transportation Library Connectivity study will continue to address the challenges facing transportation libraries outlined in 2006 in “TRB Special Report 284,” focusing in particular on meeting the need for a sustained funding mechanism for TKNs. It will also adapt to the changing landscape of transportation library and information services so that it can continue to increase collaboration among the region’s transportation libraries and so that managers, engineers and planners are better able to find and apply the most recent, credible and validated technical information to their current projects.

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“This pooled fund study provides travel funding for our librarians to attend its annual meetings, giving us continuing education and professional development opportunities and practical tools we can use to enhance our customer service.”

—Sheila Hatchell, Library Director, Mn/DOT Research Services

“Mn/DOT has been a leader in this pooled fund study, helping other members tremendously by sharing its expertise and forward-thinking approach to transportation library services.”

—Maggie Sacco, Consulting Librarian, Transportation Library Connectivity Pooled Fund Study