

# The FHWA Travels Overseas to Assess Best Practices

BY GERRY SOLOMON

## Learning from our international neighbors

2008 Scan Tour to Canada and Australia

7 categories evaluated

20 potential implementation ideas

9 selected as top priority



Gerald Solomon

*As the Director, Office of Real Estate Services at the Federal Highway Administration, Gerald Solomon directs the development of regulations, standards and procedures required for the effective implementation of Federal and Federal-aid right of way and related statutes and policies. Email Gerald.Solomon@dot.gov.*

In September 2008, the Federal Highway Administration, in association with AASHTO, conducted an International Scan Tour to visit Australia and Canada. The primary purpose was to learn about innovative practices used in right of way and utility processes that might be applicable for implementation in the United States.

Seven key categories were investigated relative to right of way and utility needs:

**Alternative Project Delivery** – public-private partnerships and other alternative project delivery methods and how integration of processes with design and construction improves project delivery including cost, schedule and quality.

**Long-Range Planning** – identify critical future transportation (highway) corridors, managing acquisition and utility relocation costs and identifying the impact on project schedule, funding and programming.

**Design** – coordinating with project development to reduce costs and delays associated with late plan changes, addition of required parcels, changes in access requirements and accommodation of utilities.

**Environmental** – coordination to facilitate construction permit approvals, acquire land for environmental mitigation, acquire parcels containing contaminated or hazardous materials, streamline project development and minimize impacts.

**Acquisition and Accommodation** - acquiring and accommodating property rights and facilities owned by utility companies in the planning, environmental, and design processes; coordinate utility relocation activities to accelerate project delivery, and manage relationships/conflicts with stakeholders.

**Asset Management** – managing right of way assets, including implementation of performance measures, technology-based tools to inventory, track and manage assets, and methods to maximize benefits from assets.

**Project Team, Training, and Professional Development** – integrate right of way and utilities in project development and address the urgent need for succession planning through recruitment, retention, education and professional development.

The study team identified 20 potential implementation ideas that would merit consideration in the United States. Of those ideas, the team selected the following nine as the top priority for implementation:

- 1) **Integrate right of way acquisition and utility coordination using an alliance contract approach**
- 2) **Enhance cooperative relationship with property owners to facilitate timely acquisition**
- 3) **Promote visualization techniques to communicate anticipated project impacts to property owners**
- 4) **Develop framework to establish proficiency of right of way and utility professionals in core disciplines**
- 5) **Promote incentive-based reimbursement for utility relocations**
- 6) **Pursue strategies to facilitate corridor preservation**
- 7) **Promote use of multiple-level Memorandum of Understanding structure among transportation and utility interests**
- 8) **Develop GIS-based right of way project and asset management systems**
- 9) **Promote the use of best practices in utility coordination during the construction phase**

With the 2000 and 2008 scans, the U.S. now has a sizable toolbox of effective right of way and utility practices and strategies observed in at least six industrialized nations in three different continents. The fact that some of those strategies and practices are present in all or most of those nations is an indication of the strength and benefit derived from them.

As the U.S. is already implementing several recommendations from the 2000 scan, the next step is to evaluate which recommendations from the 2000 and 2008 scans (and to what degree), have already become accepted practice. The FHWA recently facilitated a peer exchange to evaluate the concept of voluntary incentives for right of way acquisition and relocation, which was one of the scan recommendations. The peer exchange noted 13 pilot voluntary incentive applications from eight different states.