



THE VOICE OF TRANSPORTATION

AASHTO advocates on behalf of right of way and utilities

BY BARBARA BILLITZER

Although it was founded back in 1914, AASHTO is not what you would call a household name. Short for the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials, AASHTO is a nonprofit and nonpartisan association that fosters the development, operation, and maintenance of an integrated national transportation system.

While the name suggests a singular focus on highways, it actually represents all of the transportation sectors, including air, rail, water and public transportation. Long considered the “voice of transportation,” AASHTO works to educate the public and key decision-makers about the critical role that transportation plays

in securing a good quality of life and a sound economy for the United States. More specifically, it serves as a liaison between state departments of transportation and the federal government.

Today, as other organizations and agencies are grappling with how to streamline or revamp old processes and procedures, AASHTO has a reputation for being flexible, nimble and poised for innovation. With a library of technical publications and mobile apps, they are the go-to place when it comes to detailed specifications for building bridges, highways, airports, and every other conceivable form of transportation. In fact, it has become recognized as the international leader.

Removing the Veil of Mystery

While there are several committees and subcommittees that intersect with right of way projects and interests, the AASHTO Right of Way and Utilities Subcommittee may be one of the most relevant. Much like the inner workings of IRWA, the heavy lifting is performed by committees made up of members who work for various departments of transportation and serve voluntarily.

In 2006, John Campbell, P.E., SR/WA assumed the role as Chairman of AASHTO's Right of Way and Utilities Subcommittee, a volunteer position he held for six years and just recently relinquished. A transportation industry veteran, John is the Director of the Right of Way Division of the Texas Department of Transportation, where he has worked since 1989.

John's expertise in right of way acquisitions for highway construction, relocation assistance, outdoor advertising along highways and utility adjustments has served him and the industry quite well. When asked about some of the more pressing challenges he faced during his six years as Chair, John said, "I would have to say that there was a cultural resistance to change and an underlying suspicion of unfamiliar partners and partnerships. At the time, there was enormous public backlash against toll roads. This led to a real sense of urgency to find innovative transportation funding mechanisms, foreign partners and identify new sources of funding and project delivery methods."

Initially, one of John's primary goals was to remove the veil of mystery surrounding the internal workings of public sector bureaucracy. In addition, he understood the importance of forming new partnerships and the role it played in improving the service to the public and making it more efficient, effective and accountable. Not an easy task.

An Evolving Industry

Working within the AASHTO Subcommittee structure, John was able to gain a wealth of exposure to other state experience. He gained immeasurable perspective from this exposure, specifically noting the importance of interacting with a network of similarly challenged peers with the same objectives. "We were all focused on protecting private property rights while maintaining a balance with the need to exert the power of eminent domain. While acquiring the right of way is critical for the delivery of transportation improvements, demonstrating responsible stewardship of public funds is essential. We all want to ensure our projects are performed in the most cost-effective manner possible," said John.

The transportation industry has evolved in many different ways since 2006. From his public sector perspective, John believes that the most significant change is the transition from almost exclusively self-performed right of way acquisition by the agencies to an ever-increasing reliance on contracted right of way acquisition services. This fundamental shift in the performance of right of way acquisition services has resulted in an urgent need for relief from private sector partners.

When asked about his accomplishments, John thinks carefully. "One is establishing a seat at the table for consideration of right of way and utility research initiatives. Another is opening the door to new partnerships in professional education and private sector performance of right of way acquisition and utility accommodation. Of particular significance is establishing an AASHTO forum for discussion and collaboration among members on the regulatory control of outdoor advertising. Hopefully by publication, the AASHTO Standing Committee on Highways will have approved our subcommittee resolution to create that forum and expand the charter of our subcommittee to include outdoor advertising regulatory control."



"Our transportation system, built largely in the '60s, '70s and '80s is deteriorating faster than our ability to keep up," said AASHTO President and Director of the Michigan Department of Transportation Kirk T. Steudle. In April, he addressed the current state of transportation infrastructure at Volpe, The National Transportation Systems Center.

John feels a great sense of honor and pride in having served during an exciting time of transition and being able to contribute to expanding the professional network of collaboration and partnership within the right of way industry. "My greatest hope is to leverage some influence with the collective Departments of Transportation and open the public sector market to market competition, professional collaboration and partnership with our private sector peers and counterparts in the right of way practice," he said.

Emerging Issues in Transportation

In April 2012, Matt DeLong assumed the position as Chair of the Right of Way and Utilities Subcommittee following several terms as the Vice Chair. A longstanding industry veteran, Matt is currently the Administrator of the Development Service Division for the Michigan Department of Transportation, where he has worked for over 20 years. In this role, he oversees the real estate and utility functions, outdoor advertising control programs, local agency programs and permitting. This experience has proven invaluable to those he partners with at AASHTO.

On the topic of emerging issues in transportation, Matt explained, "In general, federal reauthorization has the potential to make significant changes in transportation, and more specifically in the real estate and utility world. The global question of funding levels is dominating the discussion, but there are also several specific provisions being reviewed that could significantly alter the way we do business in the right of way and utility industry. Will the nexus between acquisition and environmental clearance be changed? How will relocation benefits be paid? These and other issues could

have tremendous impacts on our business practices. We need to have active participation with our partners at the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) in the implementation of any new or modified processes that are put in place."

Matt further explained that in the longer term, states will continue to see reduced staffing levels and lower budgets. Experienced but aging right of way and utility staff will continue to retire and in many instances, they will not be replaced. As a result, he believes that the need for quality training for new and developing right of way professionals will continue to increase, both in government and in the private sectors.

In identifying some of the current challenges facing the industry, Matt says, "Transportation professionals are challenged by the task of balancing resources in the face of the new realities of smaller budgets and fewer staff. Couple this with the ever-increasing demand for speed and cost reductions and it is easy to see why our jobs are more challenging everyday. All transportation disciplines are feeling the same constraints. However, because right of way and utilities are critical path items, they are experiencing challenge at full force. Our response must be to develop new ways to deliver high quality, time sensitive work products that meet the needs of our customers."

Some of Matt's key subcommittee projects include working closely with the FHWA on new federal initiatives that arise from the transportation reauthorization bill and the Every Day Counts initiative. He will also be working to formally integrate outdoor advertising control into Subcommittee functions.

Giving Transportation a Voice

AASHTO plays a vital role in serving as the liaison between state departments of transportation and the federal government. In terms of the Subcommittee's mission, Matt explained, "On a smaller scale, and with the formal addition of outdoor advertising control to our responsibilities, the Subcommittee on Right of Way, Utilities and Outdoor Advertising Control is the voice for all issues and concerns of the member states and affiliates in the areas under our charter. We have been successful in working with our federal partners to develop solutions, answers and consensus on some very critical issues. We must not only continue to be that voice, but we must also be the ear to the ground so that we are prepared for what the future will bring."

House Transportation Chair John Mica was given the green light to explore options for providing up to \$15 billion per year for a multi-year transportation bill. His proposed funding level for a new surface transportation bill is restricted to current transportation revenue, per a House rule adopted earlier this year.





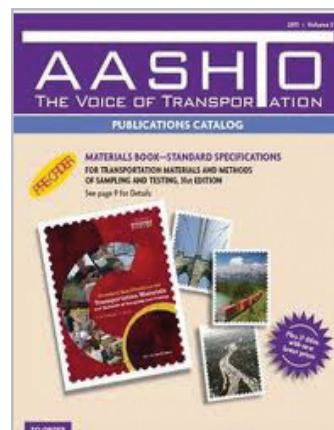
At the 2012 Annual Conference in Seattle, WA, John Campbell, P.E., SR/WA assumed the role of Chair of IRWA's International Transportation Committee. From left, IRWA's 2011-2012 International President Randy Williams, SR/WA, MAI, FRICS, John Campbell, P.E., SR/WA, Mark La Bonte, SR/WA, Hutch Goodman, SR/WA, and Jerry Colburn, SR/WA, R/W-RAC, the 2011-2012 International Transportation Committee Chair.

Focusing forward, Matt's goal is to reinforce the Subcommittee's role in serving as a forum for identifying and developing solutions to the issues they are currently facing or will be faced with in the future. "To this end, I see a much stronger role for the Subcommittee's Technical Councils, as they work to identify the topics and trends we will be facing, as well as dig down into the nuts and bolts of an immediate issue that needs resolution. It would be great if every state staff member could participate in our annual conferences, but we realize that that is not realistic or feasible. However, all staff members working in a specific area—from appraisal to property management to utility mapping—can participate in the meetings and functions of the technical councils. It is a great opportunity to share best practices, ongoing challenges and the unique solutions that can benefit the entire profession."

Collaborating with IRWA

Matt believes that John has played an instrumental role in creating a collaborative relationship between IRWA and the Subcommittee. "Over the years, a great partnership between the IRWA and the Subcommittee has been nurtured and strengthened under John's leadership of the Subcommittee on Right of Way and Utilities. John deserves tremendous credit for bringing the education and training needs of right of way professionals to the forefront of the Subcommittee's discussions. The educational opportunities that IRWA provides

are invaluable to the member states, consultants and all the individual professionals in our industry," said Matt. When asked about the future partnership opportunities between IRWA and AASHTO, John says, "I would say it is optimistic and has many more great possibilities. Our partnership with IRWA promises to fill the identified gap in the educational component of the larger scale solution to the industry wide workforce crisis through succession planning. To recruit and attract, train and retain and develop a professional, public sector workforce."



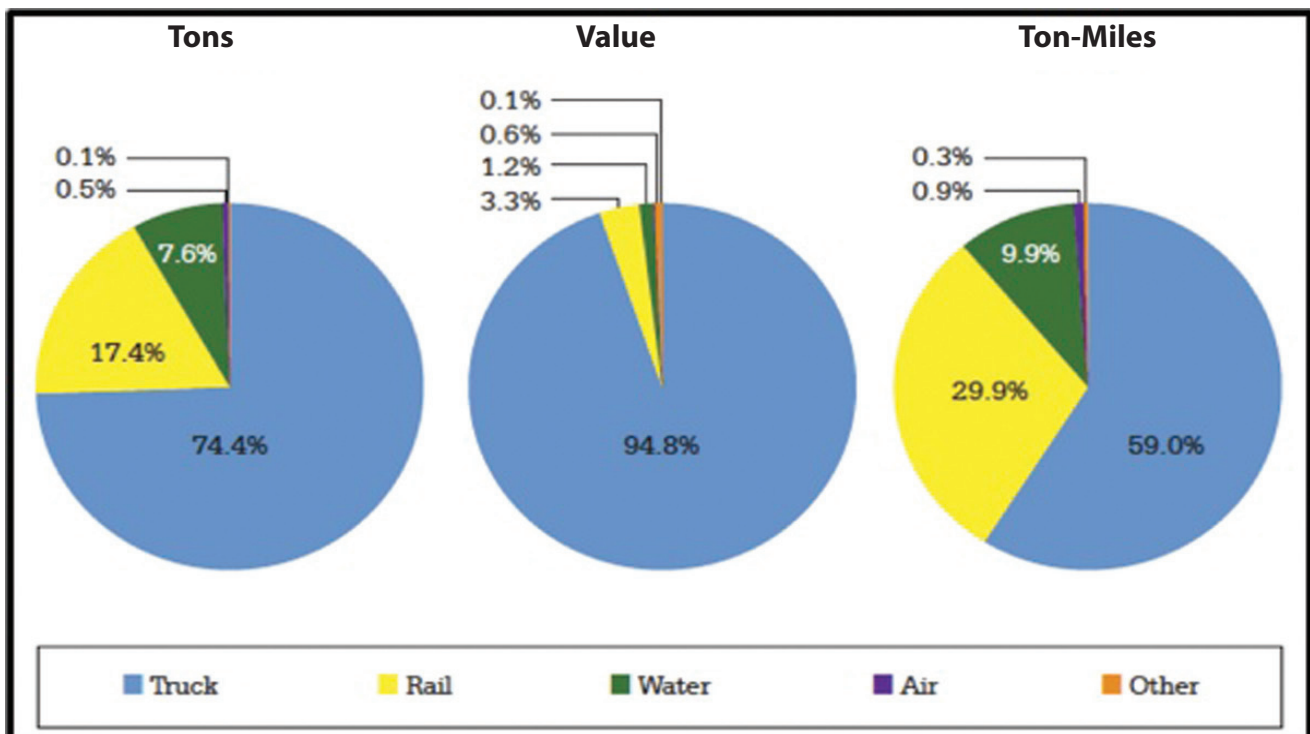
Recognized as the international leader in setting technical standards and specifications, AASHTO's publication library includes more than 200 titles covering everything from asset management data collection to bridge fabrication and wetland mitigation issues.

Matt agrees. “The best way for IRWA to assist us is to maintain active involvement with the Subcommittee, continuing to make IRWA course offerings relevant to today’s work and workforce demands and increasing the involvement of IRWA members in Technical Council activities.” Of course, serving as a strong and positive advocate for right of way issues works to benefit all of us.

At the May AASHTO Conference in Portland, OR, IRWA’s Executive Vice President Mark A. Rieck commented on the shared vision between the two associations. “The world of transportation is changing and AASHTO members are changing with it, adopting innovative strategies to address today’s needs,” said Mark. “As the central authority for the right of way profession, IRWA is committed to its long term partnership with AASHTO. We will do our part, sharing new ideas and delivering new programs for transportation professionals throughout the United States and beyond.”



The weekly AASHTO Journal showcases a Project of the Week to highlight excellence in state transportation department projects that are completed on time, under budget and/or using innovative management.



Modal Splits in 2035: An AASHTO study considered current and projected modal split using three measures: tonnage, value, and ton-miles. According to this study, trucks will gain modal share in both tonnage and value, while both rail and water will gain share in ton-miles. The increased share of ton-miles by rail and water can be attributed to the importance of bulk commodities typically moved by water and rail and to the growing importance of truck-rail intermodal on long hauls.