



Right of Way Planning Input is Encouraged

A 1980's perspective on getting a seat at the table

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BY EARL T. NEWTON, JR.

Right of way professionals have a great opportunity to contribute to the planning process. Many of them have existing knowledge and skills that can be used in the process. With a reasonable amount of training (e.g., short courses), this knowledge and these skills can be considerably enhanced to allow even greater contributions. In many State highway and transportation agencies, there are staffing needs that qualified right of way professionals can fill. Therefore, what is needed is to match the needs with right of way capabilities.

An important concept I wish to emphasize is that there is a role for qualified right of way personnel, whether right of way is acquired or not. For example, if there is a substantial

upgrading of a highway within existing right of way limits or there is relatively little right of way acquired, they can still contribute. Each phase of the planning process, systems planning, location and design offers opportunities.

In my discussion I will present eight principal concepts or observations. The first one is that in every State highway or transportation agency, right of way professionals perform a significant planning role in the location and design phases, although in most cases, this is limited to three areas. Second, some State agencies use their existing right of way personnel much more extensively. The third concept is that qualified right of way personnel have the capability



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to provide major contributions in the categories of social involvement, economics, land use, public involvement, historic and archeological preservation, noise and esthetics. The fourth concept is that appropriate training is needed to enhance capabilities. Fifth, we should seek ways to achieve right of way contributions to the planning process. Some strategies to accomplish this will be discussed. Sixth, among those who have planning roles, some should participate in research activities. Seventh, the assistance of professional societies should be utilized to provide forums for new ideas, provide education and promote professionalism. Eight, right of way professionals should be much more involved in the planning phases.

Capability

There are about 6,500 right of way professionals in State highway and transportation agencies or an average of 125 per State. There is a lot of talent in these agencies. This talent is attributable to the diverse educational background and work experience of these professionals. Their formal education includes the following principal disciplines: business administration, law, engineering, sociology, economics, agriculture and forestry. These are very desirable educational

backgrounds for contributing to the planning process.

Most of the State appraisers have acquired useful skills in the course of their work. For example, they have experience in preparing area analyses, site analysis, highest and best use studies and feasibility studies, all of which are very useful skills.

Acquisition agents are particularly strong on communication skills. They are dealing with the public everyday, and they do it very well. Because of their communication skills, they are capable of performing a much larger role in the public involvement activities in their agencies.

Relocation agents have a strong social orientation. They are dealing with the real world and have the capabilities for dealing with social and economic issues.

Training is needed for these right of way professionals to enhance their knowledge and skills and increase their capabilities. They

needed training in the planning process, as well as in specific categorical areas. Short courses are particularly needed. The kind of people I am thinking about for this training are the bright, eager people in our agencies who have the right attitude. Training will be discussed further below.

The focus should be on the categories that are particularly important and are most appropriate for right of way personnel. First, there is the category of social considerations. I see some of our State right of way personnel doing all the social studies that are needed in highway agencies. This is a tremendously important area. Social considerations include impacts on community cohesion and community facilities and services. Similarly, some right of way professionals can prepare all the economic studies that are needed.

Land use considerations are a logical area for qualified right of way personnel. In fact, they could very well be the principal land use experts in a highway agency. They deal with land use matters as zoning, building codes and master plans to some extent in the appraisal process. Public involvement is a subject with great potential. Right of way professionals can do all the public involvement work. Noise is

another category where some right of way personnel can prepare all the studies.

Historical and archeological preservation comes into a different category. There is a requirement for archeological and historical preservation expertise, but I do not see very many right of way people that have this expertise. However, there is a tremendous need for coordination, researching of information, interviewing and pulling it all together. The facilitation process is something that right of way professionals can do.

Esthetics falls in about the same category. Some of the other categories where right of way people can provide useful assistance are ecological impacts, air quality and water quality. For example, those with forestry backgrounds are

particularly suited to dealing with ecological impacts.

What type of individual should do this planning work? The person should have a favorable attitude, be interested in the work, a good team player, the skills to contribute, the knowledge and appreciation of the total program and how his activities contribute to the big picture. He should understand and appreciate the contributions of others. He should recognize that highway decisions are complex and require trade-offs. For example, an alternative that may be good for engineering may not be good in social and economic terms. Often there are tradeoffs. >>

To read the full article, visit the IRWA website and click on the Right of Way Magazine section. The archives can be accessed from the menu provided.



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