

Over-The-Shoulder

End of Project OTS Participants' Survey Responses

APRIL 5, 2016

1. **YOURSELF: Describe how the OTS project has been of benefit to you professionally? And if not, why?**
 - Met new Road Maintenance Managers and formed solid relationships where I can call and ask pertinent questions. Our quarterly visits to regional departments and Counties were very beneficial.
 - I have been able to develop working relationships with my peers in the other participating County's. Without the format of monthly phone conference calls and site visits these relationships would not be in place.
 - The OTS project has been a tremendous benefit as it has opened our eyes to best practices within our peer agencies. The project has also validated some of our current practices as best practices - which is just as helpful in making sure we are keeping pace with the industry.
 - It has been of benefit in learning how counties in the two states address issues. While the majority of the practices are similar, learning of some different approaches and techniques been helpful.
 - I can think of no better way to acquire a comprehensive knowledge of diverse and in depth transportation related subjects than to exchange information with a group of professionals who are current in their field of expertise. This describes the "Over the Shoulder Review". The volume of topics covered during the course of the review in conjunction with the variety of formats used (tele-conference, web-site info sharing, facility-site and field visits), provided a valuable perspective into the similarities and differences county transportation agencies have in accomplishing their missions. This review process enables people of influence within their range of expertise to examine how their peers from surrounding organizations conduct business regarding multiple aspects of business, which include: work practices, techniques, policies, procedures, knowledge of equipment, training, personnel, force account vs. contracted services, union contracts, personnel rules, etc.
 - I have received multiple comments about our programs and use of technology. Hearing that others are trying to mimic our scheduling system, implementing iPads, and starting a training area similar to us or wanting to talk to us about a program or project has us thinking that we are on the right path. Additionally it was great to meet other M&O likeminded professionals trying to accomplish similar goals.
 - OTS has greatly enhanced my knowledge of Road Operations and related activities beyond what I've acquired at my two career organizations. By evaluating other organizations' values of why "they do what they do," it significantly reinforced that I double check the reasons why we do what and how we do. As a result of OTS, the time needed to conduct fact finding when researching alternative solutions or changes to our program has been reduced thanks to the open dialog and new informal relationships I've made with the OTS professionals.

2. **YOURSELF: Describe your initial vision for the OTS project and how it was or was not realized.**

- The initial vision for this program included a broad range of topics to cover, however as the program progressed, it became apparent that discussing some aspects of our programs would in turn lead to other questions. This whole program seemed to be like an onion that gets peeled back one layer at a time, in order to reveal different approaches to business practices that each agency must face.
- I envisioned much of what actually did take place; a “safe” place for public managers and others to evaluate and exchange each other’s practices across a wide breath at both the technical and policy level. It was a lot to ask of each agency and I’m quite pleased that 5 of the original 8 counties followed through on such a commitment. It was great that when absences did occur there was still enough synergy left for meaningful discussions. Overall, this project greatly exceeded any expectations I may have had in the beginning thanks to the wonderful long-lasting commitment and priorities the agencies staff collectively had to each other and to the success of the project.
- The concept of monthly conference calls was an important aspect of what I anticipated accomplishing with the OTS Project. What I found was we all faced many of the same challenges in our jobs but sometimes each had unique approaches to handling them. Another positive outcome of the OTS Project was how beneficial the site visits were. From how agencies configured their crew break rooms, dispatched out their crews to chip seals and gravel road maintenance.
- Reason for starting OTS was to build relationships and learn new concepts that others might be implementing.
- What I expected was a "show and tell" process which sometimes does not lend itself to candid discussions and dialog. What I experienced was a deeper dive into practices and a very candid process in which agencies were not afraid to talk about the bad and the ugly in addition to the good. This is where true learning and improvement takes place - when agencies can trust each other to talk about what is not working and ask for help from their peers.
- I was not sure what was coming in the early conference call meetings, but am satisfied with the results. My only negative comment is that the breadth of the topics was probably bigger than the time available to discuss them.
- My initial vision for the OTS project was very close to how it went. I envisioned us on the phone talking about how each program worked and where each had successes and failures. I didn’t think that we would go to other shops to see firsthand how jurisdictions operated which I thought was very interesting.

3. YOUR ORGANIZATION: Cite some examples of new, valuable information learned from OTS conference calls that changed or tweaked your decisions (small or large).

- When discussing gravel road maintenance in one of our sessions there was a lot of interest in how agencies were handling gravel road conversions to hard surface and what agencies were doing for dust control. Because there was so much interest in the subject a separate day-long conference was held to discuss the subject. Many agencies shared their programs to the 85 plus attendees. Good information was exchanged at this meeting.
- Looking at other's equipment was very valuable. Learning about management structures was good also. Got other departments involved like environmental engineers and traffic.
- One of the things that we learned from the conference calls was that while some are using different technology to accomplish similar tasks we are all doing things very similar within our programs.
- There are many examples to cite. Something representative of a typical tweak implemented via OTS would be that of data collection associated with sign inventory. We will most likely be implementing coordinate based GPS data versus milepost data collection as a result of our conversations with OTS partners.
- As my organization is not a county road department, there was little we changed internally. However, several of the discussion topics have been shared with our client counties.
- Lessons from Washington Co: Switching our chipseal oil from HFRS-P1 to HFRS-P2; Pierce: Annual stormwater simulation school; Snohomish: Ops' workforces participating in the extended EOC (landslide) event; Pierce: How to place AC grindings on gravel roads; All: Underscoring the need to put more energy/ resources into asset management.
- This practice of sharing our work among our peer agencies has helped reaffirm most of our current business practices have been sound and well based. That said, there are always lessons learned through peer discussions that enable each of our organizations to benefit by either learning from each other's mistakes, or conversely by sharing valuable work practices that have successful results. Our organization benefited through learning what equipment other agencies utilizes in order to combat winter weather events. Our equipment was changed throughout the course of the last 2 years due to the lessons learned by partner agencies and discussions of what equipment has worked well. Two small sander/plow units were added to the fleets that were previously not available. By tweaking our specifications and making minor modifications to the vehicles we already had specified, we were able to outfit additional trucks in our existing fleet and place more iron the ground during winter weather events. This helped most with our versatility and our efficiency during winter weather events and allowed larger equipment to stay busy moving more material, while the smaller units were utilized as specialty strike force teams.

4. YOUR ORGANIZATION: Cite some examples of new, valuable information learned from OTS site visits that changed or tweaked your decisions (small or large).

- When doing site reviews we were very interested in how agencies configured their locker/lunch rooms. We are about to embark on a remodel and took away some great ideas from both Yakama and Pierce Counties that we will utilize in our design.
- Equipment. Pavement Treatments like AC/Blade patching, grind and inlay, chip seal, all good information.
- Lessons from Pierce & Spokane: Now implementing GPS fleet locators; Pierce: Now implementing mobile GIS field applications; Yakima: Using Google maps in field work orders; Spokane: Formal equipment training program with trainer position; Pierce: Paving intersections for chipseals.
- Our visit to Pierce County influenced our decision and timetable for implementation of a different type of asset management software based on information presented at their site visit. Site visits to Pierce, Spokane, and Yakima have influenced the design of a remodel to a portion of our operations facility. Our visit to Spokane County influenced the type of GPS technology we are implementing in our fleet and facility to respond to snow/ice events in our county.
- I attended the Pierce visit and parts of the Spokane and Yakima site visits. The Pierce centralized management system is probably the most detailed of any county in Washington and Oregon.
- Use of smart tablets utilized in the field operations for updating maintenance data information in live time. Use of Small plow/sander units utilized in specialty situations for winter snow and ice situations. Use of asphalt pavers and grinders and to repair distressed asphalt sections. Utilization of natural site plantings for water quality purification. Note - In addition to noting some of the valuable lessons learned by observing different organizations and their unique ways to resolve issues, this process also reaffirmed many of our current practices and procedures. This helped to reinforce why we conduct business the way that we do.
- June 2014 a group of crew leads and Supervisors from Pierce County took a Field Trip to Deschutes County to follow their Hot Applied Chip Seal Crew. Earlier in the year Pierce County found out that our hot oil distributor would not be able to deliver us oil as planned. With having to make the change in oil suppliers we changed over to using AC15P from Albina Oil. Doing our research of counties that have used this product we used the Over the Shoulder questionnaire on what type of Chip Seal Oil each county uses to chip seal. Deschutes County has been using this Oil for years and was happy to have our staff come watch them apply the oil and answer any questions we had about the product. Since we went on the field trip we have been working together with Deschutes County sharing tips to improve each other's chip seal program.

5. YOUR ORGANIZATION: What are some other processes, procedures, and/or practices you have changed or tweaked because of information from OTS participants?

- Lessons from Washington Co, Pierce and Spokane: Establish an operations engineer position; Jackson (from other dialogs & workshop): Alternative gravel road treatments; CRAB: Chipseal oil and asphalt alternative products, prices, and trends; Deschutes: Extending equipment service life practices; Deschutes: Reflectors mounted in guardrails; Pierce: Reviewing salt-brine anti-ice applications and performance.
- As an over-sight state agency, we have not made changes directly as a result of the OTS program.
- After discussing gravel road grading and the success several agencies had with grader mounted rollers, Deschutes County will be purchasing one for use on our gravel roads.
- Not so much changed our processes or procedures that we currently undertake, but reaffirmed most of our current business practices (with the limited resources we have available).
- When we start or have questions about a new program we have floated questions out to the group for feedback to help us get started. As we are refining our sweeping program we asked around how others are doing it which has helped us as we start moving forward.
- Sometimes it is the tweaks you don't make that make a big difference. Validation of a process from a peer can help you avoid fixing something that is not broken and instead focus on other areas that need improvement.
- Media interaction and relationships. General customer service. Gravel Road Maintenance.

6. YOURSELF: Describe the strength and value of new professional, peer-to-peer, networking relationships you formed due to the OTS project.

- Getting to know peers during the phone conversations and then during the site reviews was helpful when it came to picking up the phone and calling these individuals with specific questions about how they handled situations at their County. I would never have had the opportunity to meet many of these managers and supervisors without the introductions at the OTS project.
- All organizations benefit by knowing their partners in the business and to be able to share ideas, lessons learned, contracts, equipment, etc. I personally benefited professionally due to the interactions and shared information throughout the process and by meeting peers throughout the region.
- OTS gave me the capability to call a variety of co-managers with just about any question I might have. Had a team come in directly from the OTS team and independently evaluate my department as I considered a reorganization. Their inputs became part of the final plan.
- The potential to call about peers in the eight counties in the OTS Program is perhaps the most valuable opportunity resulting from the program.
- The connections / relationships that are formed out of this group are great. As we start a new program here I have used contacts from the OTS group to pick brains on how they perform certain work to help guide us as we start.
- I greatly appreciate and regularly use the easy connectivity with new peers and SME's that I now have due to the OTS projects. It is great if I have a question/ idea / concern that I can ask another about their take and experience. Both my organization and I have become more confident in tweaking and delivering services to the public, knowing outcomes of alternative solutions firsthand.
- This is probably the biggest benefit of OTS; peer-to-peer relationships and networking. I now have a group of professionals I can call upon for advice on any topic.

7. OTHERS: Describe the strength and value of new professional, peer-to-peer, networking relationships that others in your organization formed due to the OTS project.

- Several of our supervisors that sat in on the phone conference calls developed working relationships with other county supervisors.
- The relationships formed with peers in the region were valuable in terms of Fleet organizations, who share (and, continue to share) information related to similar equipment. Our pavement management specialists were sharing resource information, asset management information and software comparisons to better understand and evaluate road surface assets. Training programs that we use were shared with partner agencies and helped initiate conversations about equipment training programs for new operators.
- My Pavement Manager, Project Managers, assistant superintendent, Fleet manager - ALL formed great relationships with others involved with OTS.
- Our MPM that oversees our chipseal program has contacted a jurisdiction within the OTS group many times since they use an oil we are just starting to use. I see this relationship continuing throughout the years.
- As in the previous questions, others on our staff are doing the same connectivity. A recent example is our stormwater staff following up with Pierce County folks reviewing internal practices. The Gravel Road workshop is another example where staff-to-staff dialog continues to take place in the evaluation of products. Our safety officer has also followed up on several accounts with his counter-peers.
- Same as above. Very valuable.
- Same as #6.

8. OTHERS: Describe the value of your specialty staff (subject matter experts) participating with you in the dialogs or visits. Briefly describe some of the outcomes, such as their work areas.

- We had many different people involved with the discussions based on the subject of the meeting. This includes 2 other divisions. Both of the other divisions thought this was a great idea and appreciated the chance to be part of the conversations. Everyone thought great conversations occurred and that it spurred additional conversations about doing this on a more local level.
- As each of the field topics were presented to each of our road supervisors and crew leaders, many participated in the phone dialogs and cite visits. They expressed to me that it really opened their thinking about alternative ways to do their work and the performance evaluations thereof. It “professionally grew” them to listen to others alternative solutions. Our safety officer made some procedure tweaks after listening to other agencies. We also hesitated in applying AC grindings on gravel roads, but after listening to the others we had the confidence to go forward as we also received direction of what not to do.
- We invited the sign staff in to help us describe our program at Deschutes County for the session on traffic signs. It had a positive impact on our sign staff in several ways: They enjoyed being included in the conversation and felt valued as employees. They also enjoyed discussing and hearing how others were doing working with traffic signs. There isn't a lot of sign shop training going on state - wide and they were excited to be included in the OTS program.
- Specialty staff can share basic information about their respective programs through the telephone conferences where they give brief overviews of their specialties, while also offering specialists from other agencies the opportunities to listen in, ask questions, share information and follow up further in an off-line meeting. Site visits to each participating agency also allow not only specialists, but all the participants to see firsthand, live observations of how each agency functions in a day to day situation.
- Our Labor Relations Manager benefitted from his presentation during our hosting the OTS Team by interacting with others and learning what goes on outside our County.
- Involving specialty staff has resulted in the same type of benefit as we have all experienced - but on a more focused level. Some staff has been leery to participate - because you "put yourself out there" but quickly eager to learn about what others are doing with the same problems they face on a day to day basis when they realize what OTS is about.
- Learning how the eight counties address similar issues in either similar or different ways was helpful in confirming current practices or daring to explore new methods.

9. YOUR ORGANIZATION: Describe and cite examples of how your organization is better or stronger because of its participation in the OTS project.

- Just knowing we are all facing similar financial, technical, and personnel issues is a comfort. We have resources to assist in the efforts.
- Alternate methods of completing pavement treatment work. Better equipment purchases because we were able to look at other's equipment.
- We were able to transition smoothly into a new oil for our chipseal program and it helped confirm that our use of technology is in the right direction. We have had many conversations with people throughout this project asking how were we able to bring tech into programs, which some have gone back and started similar processes. We feel that confirms our approach we have taken.
- As an eastern Oregon county we have unique climate and therefore infrastructure issues that western Oregon counties do not experience. Our exposure to eastern Washington counties has allowed us to tap into a knowledge base that is significant regarding maintenance practices, treatments, products, etc. Overall participation in OTS has helped us identify our strengths and weaknesses as an organization by getting a perspective that we could not otherwise obtain. This has been an invaluable experience for Deschutes County.
- Most of the conversations in the OTS program regarding work practices helped to reaffirm that our current practices are valid. We didn't plan to change much and we currently don't plan to change much in the future, unless significant budgetary changes occur. That said, if there are areas of concern that agencies find of interest with partner agencies through the OTS program, follow up opportunities are always available for those agencies to meet off line and outside the OTS program and to pursue those interests in separate meetings, phone conversations, etc. One example of this reaffirmation is noted in our vegetation spray program: while other agencies of similar size and region accomplish vegetation control with force account personnel, our organization utilizes contractors to perform this work. Neither decision is necessarily wrong, but each organization must weigh out the cost/benefit ratios and consider which direction best suits their respective needs.
- Deschutes County is in the process of developing an asset management program. Several counties are already doing asset management so we learned from them about what does and doesn't work.
- We are constantly challenged by others and the public regarding the day-to-day choices or practices we make. OTS has either tweaked or reinforced our current choices giving our overall program a much higher level of credibility. Examples: 1) the strong need to add an "operations engineer" position to our staff; 2) reinforced decision to stay the current course of MagCloride for anti-icing; 3) helped us make a good manufacture and option choices on our two latest \$320 graders (Spokane); 4) we are improving our public outreach program (Washington Co & Pierce).

10. YOURSELF: What ideas or suggestions do you have in further sustaining and growing the peer-to-peer relationships that were founded from the OTS project?

- 1) Look beyond state borders; 2) Share ideas, concepts, and methods in any forum and in any format; 3) KEEP IN TOUCH!
- Continue to develop relationships and visit each other - bring other team members of your staff to different regional locations.
- I would like to start a local OTS group that would be founded off of the current one we have all been part of.
- I believe that agencies need to look beyond their neighboring county and look at what others are doing in the industry in other parts of the state and nation. I particularly enjoy looking to the Eastern Washington Counties as their weather, road conditions and traffic volume are similar to us in Central Oregon. They do things a little different than we do so there are things we can learn from them. Every County was unique and I felt I took away valuable information from each conference call and site visit.
- Continue the enhanced gravel road treatment program. Continue the chip seal road workshops. Consider future work groups through the OTS program that may include specialized work groups such as crew supervisors, pavement management specialists, bridge maintenance specialists, etc.
- The best relationships were the ones created between our peers in the other state - we see the other agencies in our state at other functions throughout the year - so those relationships are naturally sustained. I would like to see more joint Oregon/Washington county related activities. I think an OACES-AOC/CRAB joint conference every other year would help sustain our state-to-state relationships.
- In our day-to-day activities we need to continue to welcome each other's inquires or "sounding board" questions/ issues. We need to continue to encourage our staff consult with their peers in both OTS and other agencies about "how do they do it there?" issues. We can challenge the other agencies in our areas to have open dialogs using our professional circles and co-ops: APWA, AOC-OACES, CRAB, MORE-IGA, CPA of Washington Co, WA-GEM, Eastern OR COPWP-Deschutes, NWPMA, and NACE/NACo. We will continue to post our OTS dialog phone meeting notes and findings:
<http://www.co.marion.or.us/PW/Roads/Pages/OverTheShoulder.aspx>