2016 FTA State of Good Repair Roundtable

On July 13, 2016, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) hosted the 6th annual State of Good Repair (SGR) Roundtable event, to discuss SGR and transit asset management (TAM) practices among transit agencies. There were 44 participants, representing 27 transit agencies, three state departments of transportation (DOTs), the United States Department of Transportation (USDOT), and the American Public Transportation Association (APTA). The Roundtable took place in Minneapolis, MN, immediately following the 11th annual Transportation Asset Management Conference, hosted jointly by the Transportation Research Board (TRB) and American Association of State Highway Transportation Organizations (AASHTO). This document summarizes the discussion from the agency "round robin" and small group breakout discussions.

Each of the participants attending the roundtable event provided a brief update on the status of their agency with regards to SGR and TAM, and key issues facing the agency with respect to TAM implementation. Throughout the discussion there were several key themes:

- TAM implementation may take longer than initially expected
- It is important to have transit agency leadership support to generate communication across departments
- It is important to establish data governance policies and protocols
- Finding and retaining the appropriate and necessary staff can be challenging
- Agencies may be more prepared or mature in tracking some asset categories than others

The discussion focused on the following high level issues associated with TAM implementation:

Incorporating TAM and SGR Concepts into Capital Planning and Activities

Several agencies discussed issues related to capital planning and projects, and challenges or needs associated with incorporating TAM and SGR concepts. Key issues included balancing needs between system expansion and preservation, and building TAM into project scoping and contracts, as a way to institutionalize good practices and data collection from the beginning. Several agencies discussed efforts to leverage their asset and SGR data to make good decisions, in order to support back to capital decisions, and compliance with FTA requirements.

Another key issue related to coordinating fleet replacement. As discussed in the introductory session, some systems are now going through their first major overhauls and replacement, and trying to standardize practices to capture data and inventory needs now. This involves working across the agency, with acquisitions and contracts departments, as well as engineers and those writing specifications for new vehicles and equipment.

Data Collection and Management

Transit agencies discussed multiple issues related to data collection and management.

Collection

Some agencies mentioned collecting data from maintenance and how to identify the key items to collect and track, so as not to miss opportunities for important information they would later wish they had. For example, one agency mentioned that the existing maintenance management system only tracks labor hours, but nothing related to tracking or tagging the assets being worked on. The agency is now working

on assigning asset ID numbers in order to be able to track which assets are being serviced, frequency, maintenance activities performed, etc. Another common theme related to data quality, and in general trying to improve the quality and consistency of the data being collected, in order to be able to use in capital planning and other decision-making. Agencies also discussed developing mobile data collection tools that could allow staff in different locations (e.g., maintenance facilities, field inspections, etc.) could use to automatically upload asset related data.

Data Management

Data management was a common theme among most of the transit agencies, discussing both how to integrate and consolidate data across the agency, as well as migrating to more sophisticated management systems.

Some key issues related to migrating baseline data (especially for older facilities) from old systems to new, integrating dispersed data sets into one central location, and challenges associated with moving from paper to electronic asset management systems. In preparing to migrate to electronic systems, agencies are considering needs related to big data and warehousing, defining what "good data" means, how the data will be upgraded and synced, and aligning business processes and data gaps, so that the system will meet needs of all departments in a standardized way.

Participants also discussed developing protocols for collecting data, to resolve inconsistencies across departments. They also discussed working with field employees to learn about how they track assets, and giving them technology to do so, to feed into the enterprise asset management (EAM) systems.

Overall, participants indicated that EAMs have the potential to be incredibly useful tools, but cautioned against jumping into them too quickly, given the intensive set-up and data needs. They emphasized that establishing an EAM is a means to an end, as opposed the end focus itself.

Another participant mentioned wanting an EAM system that could help supervisors to assign work based on priority, safety, and risk rankings.

Internal Coordination

All of the agencies discussed issues related to internal coordination. This includes better coordination between departments (e.g., capital, maintenance, strategic planning, etc.), and developing a culture of asset management within the agency.

Regarding coordination across departments, some of the issues that participants mentioned included working with staff from different departments to understand their activities and processes, to learn the right language to use when working with each audience. One participant mentioned sometimes needing tailor the message to "sell" TAM concepts to others in their own language and on terms that would matter and be relevant to them, even if that means not communicating the full picture of TAM importance and activities at all times. Through the internal outreach and education process, some agencies have found that other departments were already tracking key asset information that they were not aware of, thereby identifying opportunities to leverage existing data. One participant noted that each department within the agency develops its own asset and risk management plan.

Another internal agency issue is embedding TAM into the organizational culture and operations, developing or identifying champions across departments and making it a core agency process.

Some agencies are working toward ISO 55000 certification, and find that framework to be very useful in developing their internal TAM program structure. One of the participants reported trying to learn from other public agencies in the area/county (e.g., environmental services) about how they track assets, to see if any lessons would be transferable to the transit context.

Executive and Leadership Support

Participants from agencies of all sizes discussed the need for support from and leadership at the executive level, to set the direction for the agency that this is a priority, and encourage coordination across the multiple departments. They expressed that in order to be truly successful, agencies need processes, policies, procedures, strategic plans that include TAM, risk analysis, and executive-level leadership. One example is developing policies and procedures for the chain of command to know which assets are coming in through maintenance and design/construction, in order to track them for TAM purposes.

Participants also highlighted the need for messages to set appropriate expectations with top level leadership. While it is important to "sell" TAM concepts as being able to help agencies make better decisions and save money and resources, they may not yield immediate results. It is important to make sure that agency leadership understands that the transition to TAM is a longer term process. Some participants also emphasized that top agency leadership should understand that the requirements in the FTA rule are meant to be more of a "floor" than a "ceiling" for agencies in developing their own TAM programs. Some noted concern that top leaders would require them to scale back some of the more comprehensive elements of their TAM programs, because they went beyond the requirements in the rule.

Workforce and Staffing

The participants highlighted the range in how agencies address TAM, with some agencies having one (or fewer) FTE dedicated to TAM, while others had a handful of dedicated FTEs. Several participants were new to their positions (or in newly created positions), indicating that many transit agencies are in the early stages of building their TAM programs and staff. Some participants discussed needing to figure out how to structure TAM within the agency and the associated necessary staffing.

Many participants highlighted the need for training multiple people on TAM concepts and key work activities, in order to have redundancy within the agency, in particular because so few FTEs are currently dedicated. Several agencies also mention concerns related to staff retirements and transitions, and how to maintain both the key institutional knowledge as well as necessary skills within the agency. One of the agencies with a more mature TAM program mentioned that several of the key staff most knowledgeable about the EAM system have retired or been promoted, leaving gaps in staff capacity to manage and use the system.

One participant noted that the staff needed to focus most of its agency on maintaining the fleet to keep it operational, leaving little time and capacity for bigger picture, more strategic efforts.

Developing Asset Inventories

Many agencies discussed status of their asset inventory development, including classification and organization efforts. In general, agencies acknowledged that the inventories are time consuming to

build, and the importance of allocating sufficient time and thought to developing relationships and asset hierarchies within the inventory.

Some agencies noted that developing the inventory and tracking for vehicles was relatively straightforward, but less clear and less mature for linear assets and for systems and sub systems. Issues included building the data set from scratch, as well as identifying the appropriate level of detail to support capital programming as well as use in the field. One agency noted the value of being able to reference the inventory in their recent triennial review.

Condition Assessments

Participants identified issues related to conducting condition assessments, including not having sufficient staff to conduct them, and determining whether to use internal staff or contractors to conduct the assessments. One agency mentioned that it was currently figuring out a system/schedule for sampling assets for condition ratings. Another participant discussed figuring out how to bring data from condition assessments into capital planning.

Risk Analysis and Investment Prioritization

Some agencies were in the process of developing investment prioritization tools, along with priorities for how to allocate investments and close gaps. Others noted wanting to learn more about and better understand criticality and risk, as well as wanting to learn about how take a more strategic approach, incorporating a broad range of issues when approaching risk. Participants also noted concerns about the inventory and risk register relying on subjective analysis, and wanting better data to improve the analysis and make it more objective.

TAM Program

Participating agencies were at various stages of TAM planning and program development, ranging from just beginning to national leaders with more mature programs. Some of the agencies newer to TAM mentioned that they were developing a TAM program maturity map and conducting agency gap analyses in order to identify where to best target their efforts.

Working with Subrecipients

Some agencies noted questions regarding working with subrecipients, including how to manage and plan for them, as well as how to ensure consistency in assessments among rural providers. They mentioned efforts to work with stakeholders and update asset data.

Facilities

Several participants mentioned challenges associated with developing the inventory and condition assessment for facilities, including the appropriate level of detail for buildings with multiple components or assets within them. They also referenced challenges with other facilities and park and ride lots. One agency that had developed an inventory said that it was more complex and took longer than expected, with issues around how to catalog each of the assets. Others mentioned incomplete data or data of questionable integrity, and instances of maintenance facilities being built with no documentation of assets.

Going Forward

FTA recognizes the value of the holding events that provide an opportunity for transit agency staff to exchange information and ideas in a peer environment. At the Roundtable, transit agency participants noted their appreciation for the opportunity to engage only with other public agencies, and that they would also like more opportunity to engage with transit agency leadership as well as FTA field staff and leadership on issues related to transit asset management. Participants also noted their desire for more such events, with opportunities for more time to discuss important issues, trainings, tours and field trips, and opportunities to meet with peer agencies as well as hear from those with different characteristics or different levels of maturity related to asset management. FTA is using insights gathered and feedback provided from the 2016 Roundtable to help guide development of training and technical assistance materials in general, as well as the 2017 Roundtable planned for August 2017.