

2018 FTA Transit Asset Management Roundtable

On July 15, 2018, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) hosted the [8th annual Transit Asset Management \(TAM\) Roundtable event](#), to discuss TAM practices among transit agencies. There were 84 participants, representing 38 transit agencies, six state departments of transportation (DOTs), two metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), the United States Department of Transportation (USDOT), the Transportation Research Board (TRB), and the American Public Transportation Association (APTA). The Roundtable took place in San Diego, CA in conjunction with the [12th National Conference on Transportation Asset Management](#), hosted by TRB.

This document summarizes the discussion from the agency “round robin” session. Each of the agencies attending the roundtable event provided a brief update on the status of their agency with regards to TAM, and key issues facing the agency with respect to TAM implementation. Participant responses were based on the following questions:

- What’s next after completing your TAM plan by October 1, 2018?
- What are you afraid of or nervous about in the next phase of TAM?
- What are you looking forward to in the next phase of TAM?

TAM Plan Status

Agencies are [required by the final rule](#) to complete their first compliant [TAM plan](#) by October 1, 2018. In general, agencies are prepared for the deadline and ready to move into implementation. Some agencies had already completed and approved their TAM plans, while others were preparing to review drafts with their boards. For some, TAM was still quite new, and they were working to complete elements of the TAM plan or had just started to bring them into a unified document. Given the amount of coordination required to successfully complete a [Group Plan](#), most Group Plan sponsors indicated that they had already completed their Group Plans.

Some participants noted challenges to completing their TAM plans, including data quality and availability, as well as shifting agency culture to make decisions based on asset conditions. Agencies that have been doing asset management for longer were more focused on implementation and maturing their TAM programs. Some activities more mature participants plan to pursue include:

- Developing in-house tools for investment prioritization or condition assessments;
- Dedicating additional staff or staff time for TAM;
- Building a more robust inventory;
- Providing agency-wide workshops to help employees understand their role in TAM;
- Using TAM to support a unified procurement process in the short- and long-term
- Approving TAM policies;
- Integrating TAM with other agency and regional planning efforts;
- Integrating FTA rules into other internal agency requirements;
- Developing web-based platforms to coordinate data among group plan participants;
- Developing TAM dashboards to display and communicate TAM information;
- Using asset management data to develop predictive analytics and measure risk;
- Implementing maturity models and self-assessing agency TAM maturity; and

- Moving towards meeting asset management industry standards such as ISO 55001.

State DOT participants emphasized their role in providing guidance and workshops throughout the state to support development of TAM plans, particularly with rural operators. In general, States are working to help make these processes more uniform and engaging TAM with [Statewide Transportation Improvement Programs \(STIPs\)](#) and other planning processes.

Challenges, Opportunities, and Next Steps

Resources

Common challenges across most agencies included limited time, money, and resources. Smaller agencies in particular noted the challenge of completing TAM requirements with limited staff capacity. Other agencies noted that they had seen their responsibilities increase without a corresponding increase in resources. While some agencies highlighted actions, such as using TAM as the foundation for budget development, to integrate asset management into their agency, many anticipated challenges in funding to implement TAM policies.

Competing Priorities

Participants also voiced concerns that more politically motivated projects would drive agency decision making, particularly around upcoming election cycles. One agency commented that the fundamental shift in priorities towards maintenance and replacement is simply not in line with its board's priorities. Even when it was clear that agencies were not able to meet their maintenance needs, there was still competition between funding for expansion and addressing state of good repair (SGR). One participant noted that TAM has to be a part of the business process in order to focus on delivering service, managing the inventory, and being able to take assets out of service without customer complaints.

Organizational Culture

Several agencies identified changing organizational culture as a challenge and/or next step. Participants identified the need to develop organizational culture that considers and integrates TAM across all departments. An agency with a strong culture supporting asset management will be able to move from a response and reaction-based asset management approach to a more informed and proactive approach. Strong organizational culture also enables an agency to effectively tell its story and communicate how TAM is helping to improve SGR.

Participants discussed the need to develop an organizational culture supporting TAM at both the staff and executive levels. "Wins" in this area include gaining stronger support from the C-suite team, and having effective staff members that communicate about asset management across the organization, as well as with MPOs and other relevant agencies.

At the staff level, this means ensuring that every staff member understands asset management and their role in implementing it, and using common language and definitions to discuss asset management across the agency. Some participants noted the importance of integrating TAM so that it can continue to function even with staff turnover or changing responsibilities. Other agencies noted that they had buy-in and cooperation from different departments, but they still needed to integrate these processes to achieve results. Some participants found it challenging to translate the high-level aspects of TAM in a way that connects back to employees on the ground. One success was an agency developing a one to

two month asset management training rotational assignment for new engineering employees that focuses on “learning from the ground up” at the facilities and track level.

At the executive level, shifting culture means not only ensuring executive support and resources for ongoing asset management efforts, but also developing top-down leadership and support for asset management through development of a TAM philosophy, alignment of TAM and capital investment plans, and project prioritization. Several agencies noted that they had started the conversation, and executives were willing to cooperate, but that they did not necessarily feel like they had full engagement and support. A particular challenge at many agencies is getting executives to focus on operations and managing existing assets over major capital investment programs and expansion projects, which are often more publicly visible and politically driven. Some agencies noted leadership transitions as a point of opportunity for shifting culture and gaining buy-in. Participants noted successes in this area, such as using SGR needs analysis to secure additional funding.

Participants warned against treating the TAM Plan or an asset management data system as the fix-all for agency challenges or as the end goals; rather it is an ongoing process of improvement and refinement that will continue to evolve beyond the initial October 1 deadline for TAM plans. One agency commented that they were going to return to the conversation about agency culture after the October 1st deadline to affirm that TAM will guide agency business practices moving forward. Another participant noted appreciation for the rule requirements in prompting the agency to ask difficult questions about the state of its assets.

Successful efforts to better align agency culture with asset management include:

- Hosting a series of workshops across the agency to help staff define their role in asset management;
- Launching a pilot to improve processes for inventory collection;
- Using internal marketing campaigns to raise awareness, including adopting a mascot or slogan;
- Developing a communications plan for asset management; and
- Refreshing organizational structures and staff roles and responsibilities to support TAM.

Data and Enterprise Asset Management (EAM) Systems

In general, agencies looked forward to using TAM to make data-driven decisions, rather than estimations or guesses. However, almost every agency identified gathering complete, accurate, and high quality data and integrating it across the agency as a key challenge.

With better data, agencies felt that they would be more equipped to track performance, measure risk, report data uniformly across groups, and connect TAM with other planning efforts. Several agencies aspire to use TAM for predictive maintenance, and wanted to learn from other agencies already implementing. One agency commented that a robust inventory would serve as a backbone for the agency and its partners’ efforts. Another emphasized clean data as providing a “single source of truth” throughout the agency. Agencies saw improving their data not just as a technical need, but as an integral part of organizational change.

Agencies struggled to identify the appropriate level of detail for asset inventories, and bring in new assets into their system without existing data sets. Several agencies also mentioned the challenge of coordinating data across modes, and the MPO’s tendency to support highway investments over transit.

They were hopeful that more robust transit data and the integration of highway and transit data into one database would support “making the case” for prioritization of transit investments.

Some specific steps agencies have taken to improve and integrate data include:

- Geocoding assets and integrating data with GIS;
- Implementing an agency capability maturity model;
- Signing a TAM directive and developing TAM standard operating procedures;
- Updating lifecycle management plans;
- Developing an improvement and monitoring plan;
- Linking [TERM Lite](#) with other data across the agency; and
- Implementing an ISO 55001-compliant asset management system.

While several agencies had purchased or were looking to purchase Enterprise Asset Management (EAM) systems, they acknowledged that buying an EAM system was not the solution to asset management. Even with an EAM system, there are challenges with inputting data, cleaning data for consistency, system configuration, and using the data to make useful predictions and decisions. Despite their limitations, EAM systems can be an extremely useful tool. One agency commented that inputting data into an EAM system would help them move beyond a culture of anecdotally-based decisions. Agencies that had already worked to collect and organize their data before acquiring an EAM system were able to use the systems much more effectively to their benefit.

Several agencies partnered with their MPOs, State DOTs, and other transit agencies to share EAM software. This strategy can facilitate managing data across agencies involved in group plans. There were also some agencies that developed their own data management systems in-house. This approach can allow an agency to tailor their asset management systems to address their unique data needs.

Emerging Topics

As agencies complete their first TAM plans, they also identified additional topics they looked forward to addressing beyond the requirements of the TAM rule.

TAM and Capital Investment Plans

A significant challenge and next step for agencies is improving linkages between their asset management and capital investment programs. This effort involves integrating data to build out long-range plans, effectively allocate resources, and program activities that address SGR backlogs. Agencies that have started this process noted that it was challenging but informative to demonstrate the relationship between SGR and capital investments to boards and other stakeholders. One agency noted that a [presentation](#) by Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) on their capital needs inventory at the 2017 TAM Roundtable helped inform their efforts. However, most agencies are looking forward to starting this work.

TAM and Safety

Several mentioned looking forward to better linking safety and TAM. Some noted the need for better safety data and organizational culture to support connections between operations and safety. Only a few participants mentioned that their roles directly connected to safety, and some looked forward to working more closely with safety-focused staff at their agencies. Given that FTA’s [Public Transportation](#)

[Agency Safety Plan final rule](#) was published in July 2018 (just after the roundtable), coordinating the requirements for TAM and safety will be a significant focus in upcoming years.

Regional Coordination and Target Setting

While a few agencies submitted optional [targets for TAM performance measures](#) in 2017, most agencies will be submitting them for the first time in 2018. Setting targets should be done in coordination with MPOs, who also must set regional asset management targets. Collaborating on targets has also encouraged broader collaboration on performance-based planning between agencies and MPOs, though one agency noted a need for more time to coordinate with MPOs on regional targets. Some agencies also noted an ongoing need for clarification on the requirements for coordination, target setting timeline, and protocols for target approvals. Agencies are working with metropolitan partners to support [Transportation Improvement Programs \(TIPs\)](#), and short- and long-range transportation plans. In addition, State DOTs supported coordination of statewide partners by interfacing across jurisdictions and agencies to help make processes more uniform.

National Transit Database (NTD) Reporting

Only a few agencies mentioned completing this year's optional [NTD reports](#) as a challenge. Some noted concerns about distinguishing between FTA and non-FTA assets for purposes of NTD reporting. A few participants were curious to learn more about the process of submitting and how the data would be used by FTA. In a later session at the roundtable FTA reported statistics on the first year of optional reporting and addressed FAQs about the NTD.

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 it continues to be useful to engage with transit agency leadership as well as FTA field staff and leadership on issues related to transit asset management. One positive element of the Roundtable was that many of the FTA staff from regional offices who are designated TAM [“points of contact”](#) were able to attend, providing opportunities for more in-person interaction and to better understand some of the needs in the field.

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 continues to use insights gathered and feedback provided from the 2018 Roundtable to help guide development of training and technical assistance materials in general, as well as increasing opportunities to bring peer agencies together to share knowledge and experiences.