

Meeting Minutes

**Advisory Council on Transportation Statistics
Tuesday, May 19 2015
Assistant Secretary's Conference Room E37-302
US Department of Transportation
Washington, DC 20590**

Members Present:

Michael Walton – Chair
Hermann Habermann
Paul Jovanis
Joe Schofer
David Lee
Leanna Depue

Members Not Present

Alicia Carriquiry
Barbara Fraumeni
Michael Replogle

Noted Visitors:

Steve Pierson - American Statistical Association
Tom Palmerlee - Transportation Research Board
Alan Pisarski
Paul Bugg – Office of Management and Budget
Jennifer Park – Office of Management and Budget (present by phone)

Introductions and Outline of this Meeting

Michael Walton, ACTS Chairman

Welcome and Update on Transition to OST

Greg Winfree, Assistant Secretary for Research

The Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS) is now fully integrated in the Office of the Secretary of Transportation. Nothing has occurred during the transition to becoming the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Research and Technology (OST-R) that has impacted the mission of BTS. When asked by the Council on his aspiration for BTS in the next few years, Assistant Secretary Winfree pointed out that the he Secretary of Transportation, Anthony Foxx, would like to view real time dashboard types of transportation information as a way for himself and other leaders to stay abreast of transportation events and trends. BTS should strive to be thought leaders as to how to provide this real time information if possible. In addition, BTS collects and distributes high profile transportation data and information and is answerable to our stakeholders for providing information in a timely and accurate manner. If possible, BTS should aim to release products in a timelier manner.

Action Item: In order to release the products in a timelier manner, BTS should educate U.S. DOT leadership about the legal requirements for the data providers to provide data, the time necessary to ensure quality and completeness. Furthermore, BTS should explore alternative procurement mechanism to meet task needs.

Action Item: Explore ideas for a dashboard containing real-time transportation information for U.S. DOT leadership.

Review of Action Items from Last Meeting

Rolf Schmitt, Deputy Director, Bureau of Transportation Statistics

Rolf Schmitt reviewed a handout covering the action items from the last ACTS meeting of May 14, 2015 and progress for each item.

Action Item: Be sure that state CEOs receive state-specific BTS publications at the same time as Congressional staff do so that the state DOTs are not blind-sided. Consider distributing materials through AASHTO.

Implementation of Statistical Policy Directive #1 and the Federal Information Technology Acquisition Reform Act (FITARA)

Jennifer Park, Statistical and Science Policy Branch, OMB

Dr. Jennifer Park briefed the Council on Statistical Policy Directive No.1 which provides a framework that supports federal statistical policy and serves as a foundation for federal statistical activities. The Directive also calls on federal departments to enable, support, and facilitate federal statistical agencies and units as they implement four core responsibilities. These responsibilities include:

1. Produce and disseminate relevant and timely information
2. Conduct credible and accurate statistical activities
3. Conduct objective statistical activities
4. Protect the trust of information providers by ensuring the confidentiality and exclusive statistical use of their responses

Dr. Park mentioned that federal agencies have demonstrated more success in supporting responsibilities 1 and 2 than for responsibilities 3 and 4 listed above. To better assist federal agencies in supporting responsibilities 3 and 4, some of the emerging best practices include the following:

- Formal and public acknowledgement of independent position of the statistical agency
- Independence and autonomy of statistical agency head, with direct access to the Department secretary
- A position of authority in making IT and confidentiality that may affect the agency's operation
- Authority to release statistical information without prior clearance for the statistical content by Department policy officials.

Action Item: Consider using peer reviews and self-evaluations to report agency outputs rather than focus on inputs.

Paul Bugg, Statistical and Science Policy Branch, OMB

Paul Bugg provided an overview of The Federal Information Technology Acquisition Reform Act (FITARA), passed by Congress in December 2014. OMB is developing guidance to agencies to ensure that this law is applied consistently government-wide in a way that is workable, effective, and consistent with other legal authorities.

He highlighted concerns expressed by federal statistical agencies that FITARA undermines their ability to make the promise of confidentiality because information systems are under control of Chief Information Officers instead of the statistical agencies. He also noted a concern expressed by others that Chief Information Officers will not have the ability to perform all duties in FITARA and could become a bottleneck. ACTS members were informed that the public comment period was open, but only for a short time, if ACTS wanted to provide recommendations on FITARA implementation.

Action Item: ACTS members agreed to meet in executive session and provide comments on FITARA to OMB.

**DOT implementation of Statistical Policy Directive #1
Patricia Hu, Director, Bureau of Transportation Statistics**

Patricia Hu presented DOT's plan to implement the Statistical Policy Directive No. 1 which affirms the fundamental responsibilities of federal statistical agencies.

Responsibility 1: Produce and disseminate relevant and timely information.

- Strategies under development by DOT
 - Expand BTS programs that provide critical information to decision makers
 - Include additional funding for BTS in 2016 budget
 - Define/execute improvements to streamline hiring and contracting process
- Strategies under Consideration by DOT
 - Adopt BTS recommendations of new technologies to reduce data collection costs and improve timeliness and availability of statistics

Responsibility 2: Conduct credible and accurate statistical activities.

- Strategy in Place at DOT
 - Recognize BTS' principal responsibility for maintaining GIS data pursuant to 49 USC 6302 and 6309.
- Strategies under Development by DOT

- Establish a Statistical Policy Council to spur collaborative resolution of statistical quality issues throughout the Department, pursuant to BTS Director's responsibilities under 49 USC 6302.
- Support establishment of a Senior Leader position for Chief Statistician.
- Strategies under Consideration by DOT
 - Facilitate BTS research agenda including Big Data.
 - Support OST-R's plan to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of hiring and contracting process.

Responsibility 3: Conduct objective statistical activities

- Strategy in Place at DOT
 - Authorize BTS Director to transmit the TSAR directly to the President and Congress.
- Strategies under Development by DOT
 - Ensure BTS can operate under the requirements of OMB's Statistical Policy Directives.
 - To Support BTS autonomy, give BTS Director oversight for managing its contract authority.
- Strategies under Consideration by DOT
 - Support OMB's implementation guidance on the FITARA to resolve overlapping authorities between DOT CIO and BTS.

Responsibility 4: Protect the trust of information providers by ensuring the confidentiality and exclusive statistical use of their responses.

- Strategy in Place at DOT
 - BTS follows the requirements of the Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act.
- Strategies under Development at DOT
 - Support secure computer system for BTS' confidential data.
- Strategies under Consideration by DOT
 - Support BTS' decisions regarding the security issues relating to the physical and virtual IT systems.

Action Item: ACTS will review current state of DOT response to Statistical Directive No. 1 and propose additional strategies for DOT to consider for all required responsibilities. Progress update on this item should be included in future ACTS meetings.

President's Budget Proposal and GROW AMERICA Act
Rolf Schmitt, Deputy Director, Bureau of Transportation Statistics

Rolf Schmitt presented an overview of the FY 2016 funding request for BTS in President Obama's budget. BTS is requesting a budget increase of \$3 million, from \$26 to \$29 million.

He also gave an summary of President Obama's plan for transportation reauthorization, "Generating Renewal, Opportunity, and Work with Accelerated Mobility, Efficiency, and Rebuilding of Infrastructure and Communities throughout America Act" or the "GROW AMERICA Act". Proposed language would authorize an Intermodal Transportation Data program to provide content for the Intermodal Transportation Database, create a port performance statistics program, and correct problems created by MAP-21 with mandatory reporting authority and other technical matters.

Senate Bill 1298 proposed on May 12, 2015 expanded on the GROW AMERICA proposal to create nationally consistent measures of performance of the Nation's ports, and requires DOT to report the potential impact of any potential labor induced stoppage at U.S. Ports to the Congress.

Stakeholder Interactions: a consistent, concise BTS message ACTS members discussion

Steve Pierson of the American Statistical Association posed the question to ACTS members on how we can better explain/brand BTS to stakeholders? ACTS members suggested the following:

1. Advocate for BTS' budget to increase from \$26 to \$29 million to begin to fill the critical data gaps: (1) long distance travel survey, and (2) vehicle use and inventory survey
2. Push for more autonomy over BTS publications.
3. Make a robust economic ROI argument for investments that yield returns in better safety and economic efficiency.
4. Explain better how BTS collects, compiles, and distributes transportation statistics to underscore the credibility of the statistics, thereby strengthening users' trust to BTS data.
5. Outreach to the user community to better understand how and for what purposes BTS data are used and what data/format could facilitate data access.
6. BTS should be the "gold standard" for data on transportation. Unbiased and transparent are more important than the highest possible quality.

Action Item: Develop a plan to collect stakeholder/user feedbacks on how BTS data is currently used and what specific data/formats could increase data access.

Transportation Economic Measures Karen White, Bureau of Transportation Statistics

Karen White provided an overview of the Transportation Services Index and the Transportation Satellite Accounts.

The Transportation Services Index is a monthly measure of the volume of services performed by the for-hire transportation sector that includes trucking, freight rail, passenger rail, and aviation. The TSI consists of three data series (Freight TSI, Passenger TSI, and Combined TSI).

- Freight TSI covers the activities of for-hire carriers.

- Passenger TSI which covers the activities of for-hire passenger carriers.
- Combined TSI includes all for hire transportation services.

The Transportation Satellite Accounts (TSAs) provide a means for measuring the contribution of transportation services to the national economy. Measurement of services provided only by for-hire firms misses the sizable contribution of transportation services that take place within non-transportation industries, termed as in-house transportation.

- For Hire: Bureau of Economic Analysis 's Input-Output (I-O) accounts show the transportation value added by air, rail, water, truck, transit, and ground transportation, pipeline, other transportation and support activities, and warehousing and storage.
- In House: TSAs add on to I-O accounts. Shows the value of air, rail, water, and truck transportation produced and used within non-transportation industries.
- (New) In-House Household Transportation and Annual estimates from 2002-2012 are now available.

Confidential Close Calls Reporting Program
Demetra Collia, Bureau of Transportation Statistics

Demetra Collia provided a synopsis of the Confidential Close Calls Reporting Program that BTS is conducting for WMATA and Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement.

- The program started as a pilot for the Federal Railroad Administration .and has expanded to the rail division of the Washington metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) and the off shore oil industry under the Department of Interior's Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement (BSEE).
- Key Elements of the Program
 - Confidential – BTS plays the role of neutral third party
 - Provides protection from discipline for reporting party
 - Focuses on impediments to safety
 - Voluntary
- Anonymous data collection started in 2007.
- Through C3RS corrective actions were proposed for implementation to participating railroads.

Public Comments and Wrap-Up
Michael Walton, ACTS Chairman

There were no statements offered by the public. Chairman Walton thanked the attendees.