

Evaluation of Montana Department of Transportation's Transportation Awareness Program

by

Jaime Eidswick
Research Associate

and

David Kack
Research Associate

Western Transportation Institute
College of Engineering
Montana State University – Bozeman

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PROBLEM STATEMENT

Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) has a Transportation Awareness Program (TAP) that promotes MDT to the public. Those managing the TAP program believe they do not have sufficient funds to accomplish the programs goals. MDT management would like to evaluate the TAP program to determine the effectiveness of the program and to have more detailed information to provide to the Montana Legislature.

The objectives of this evaluation are:

- to determine what percent of Montanans know about the program, and
- to determine the perceived benefits of this program and what improvements could be made.

BACKGROUND SUMMARY

The Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) currently has two ways of marketing themselves to the public: a public information officer (PIO) and the Transportation Awareness Program (TAP). TAP was started in 1990 by a member of the maintenance department as a way to inform the public about maintenance activities. In 2001, the TAP program was moved under the director's office and now promotes all activities of the DOT.

The TAP program has one fulltime employee who coordinates the program for the state. The rest of the program staff are volunteers from within the DOT who have other jobs such as snow plow drivers, office assistants, and staff from the right-of-way division. To help the fulltime employee and to ensure that the entire state is reached, there are coordinators in each of the maintenance divisions that coordinate the events in their area.

The TAP program conducts outreach at such venues as: local/county fairs, rodeos, drivers education classes, bus driver training, car shows, parades, elementary through university classrooms, and organization meetings. The general goals of the program are to talk to the public to educate them and answer their questions on topics such as fuel tax, noxious weeds, 511, snow plow safety, and work zone safety. In 2003, the TAP program had "hand-to-hand" contact with 120,000 people. That is an eighth of the Montana population.

The MDT employees who participate in the TAP program have annual training to remain current on the programs' topics. By using current MDT staff, the TAP program allows the employees to show pride in their job and explain to the public what they do. MDT employees that participate in the TAP program also learn about all aspects of MDT, as they must present the comprehensive programs of MDT to the public

The objective of the TAP program is to present a positive image of MDT through proactive marketing.

RESEARCH PLAN

Task 1: Project Management

Critical to the success of this and any project is the development of an appropriate project scope to provide initial direction and ongoing guidance for research staff. This task covers overall project management activities that may assist in promoting communication between project sponsors and the research team.

This task will also allow WTI researchers to create the survey questions that will be used during the phone surveys in Task 2.

Task 2: Phone Surveys

To assess the public's awareness of the Montana Department of Transportation and the Transportation Awareness program, Montana residents will be surveyed by telephone. Four hundred randomly chosen residents will be surveyed to determine the overall awareness level of the TAP program.

This task will be subcontracted to Montana State University – Billings. They will complete the 400 surveys, entering and analyzing the data.

Task 3: Mail Surveys

As a second part of the evaluation, a mail survey will be used to assess the specific benefits of the Transportation Awareness Program (TAP). Particular emphasis will be based on the programs strengths and weaknesses, to determine:

- if the topics discussed by this program are useful,
- if the handouts provided by this program are useful,
- if the staff seems knowledgeable,
- if there are any additional topics the public would like to know about, and
- if they have any suggested improvements.

To complete this task, the TAP staff will distribute 6,000 postcard surveys to the public at six large events this summer including the Billings fair, Kalispell fair, Missoula fair, Lewistown fair, Glendive fair, and the state fair in Great Falls. This distribution method will provide the data to answer the questions listed above.

WTI researchers will input and analyze the data.

Task 4: Final Report

The results of the previous project tasks will be summarized in a final technical report. As part of this task, MDT will have the opportunity to review a draft version of the final report.

BUDGET, SCHEDULE AND FUNDING

The proposed budget for this evaluation is approximately \$15,400, as shown in Table 1. The project schedule in Table 2 shows the project taking 9 months to complete, starting on April 12, 2004 and completing by December 30, 2004.

This evaluation will be funded through the Western Transportation Institute's University Transportation Center funds provided by the U.S. Department of Transportation's Research and Special Programs Administration and through principal investigator funds.

No funds are being requested from MDT for this project.

Table 1 Project Budget

Table 2: TAP Evaluation Schedule

<i>Work Tasks</i>	<i>Month</i>	<i>Apr</i>	<i>May</i>	<i>Jun</i>	<i>Jul</i>	<i>Aug</i>	<i>Sept</i>	<i>Oct</i>	<i>Nov</i>	<i>Dec</i>
1 – Project Management										
2 – Phone Surveys										
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4 –Final Report										