

TransAction

From the NDDOT perspective...

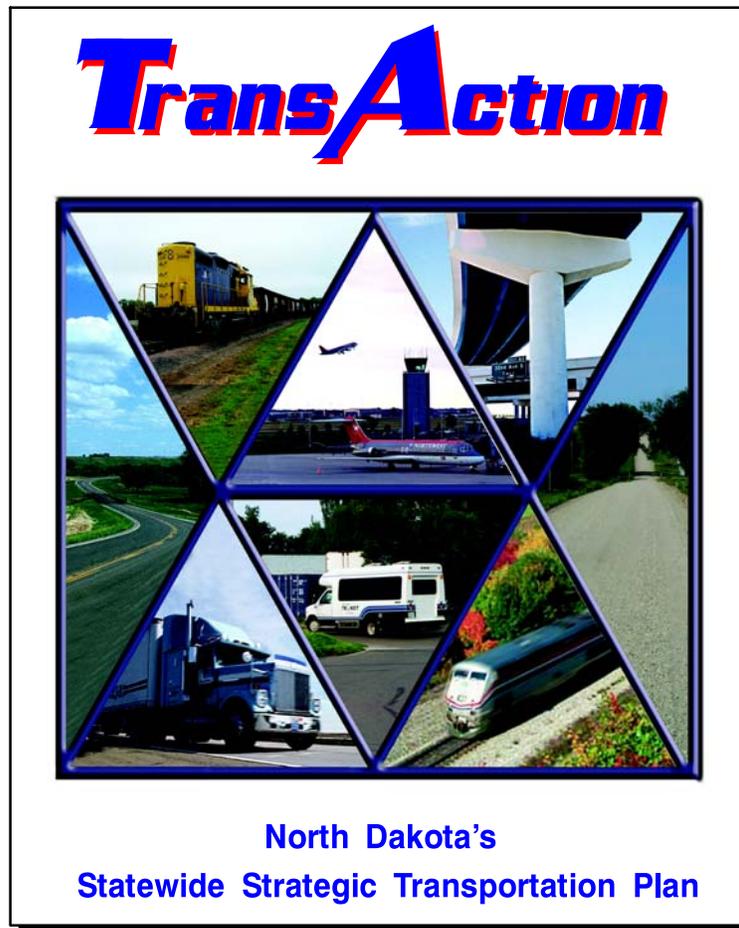
Progress

Federal Transportation Legislative Update

It has been 15 months since the authorization for the federal highway and transit programs, TEA-21, expired back in September 2003. Federal aid to the states has continued during this period through a series of short-term extensions. The current highway extension, which was signed into law on September 30, 2004, runs through May 31, 2005. The extension is based on FY 2004 appropriations. In 2004, North Dakota received approximately \$199 million.

North Dakota's FY 2005 appropriation is expected to be about \$202 million. Through May 31 we expect to receive about 2/3 of the FY 2005 appropriation; about \$130 million.

We hope that the highway reauthorization bill will move quickly through the congressional process when Congress convenes in 2005. The lack of a long-range federal funding commitment makes it extremely difficult to develop a long-range program. The uncertainty in the level of federal funding for the long term forces states to delay putting projects out to bid. This puts an extreme burden on states like North Dakota, which has a short construction season.

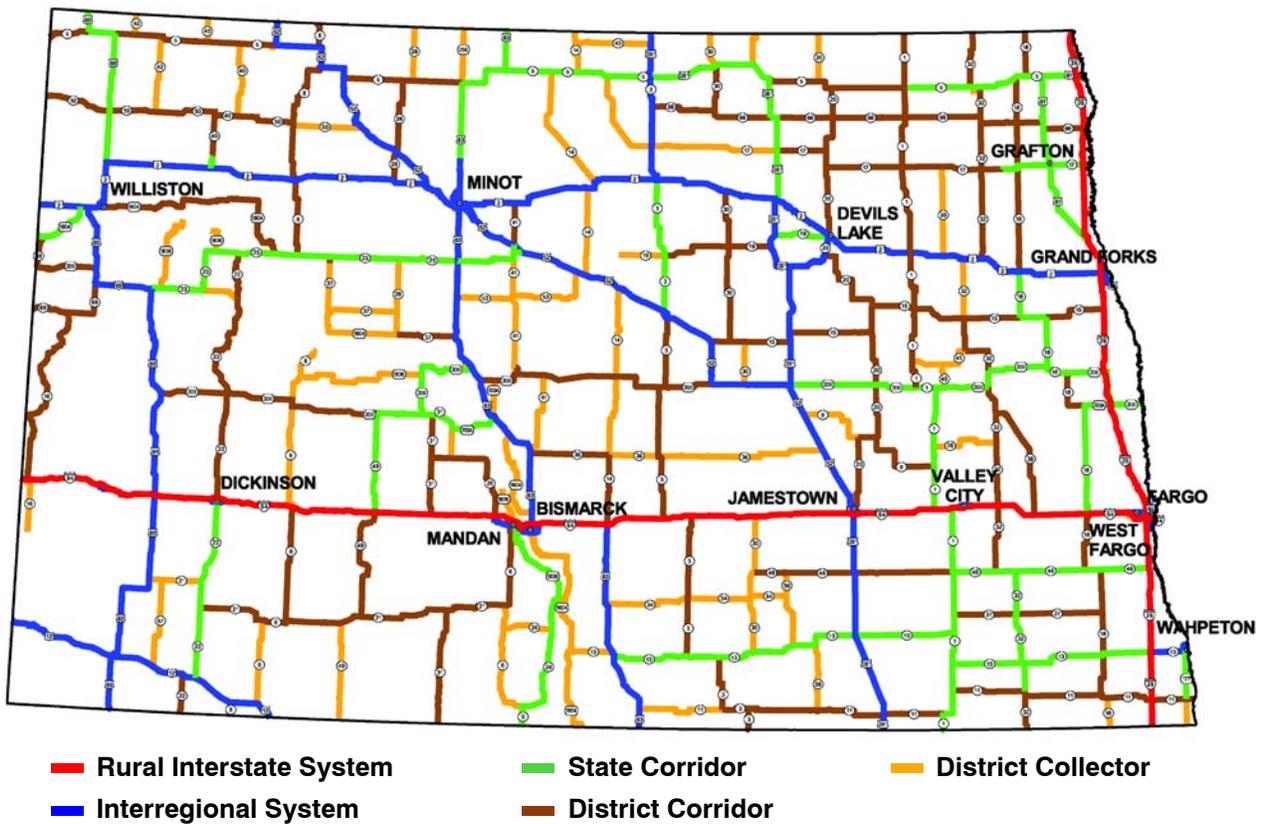


TransAction identifies 16 initiatives for advancing transportation issues in North Dakota. Recent activities in selected areas are featured in this newsletter.

Initiatives 1 & 2: North Dakota will strategically prioritize its use of transportation resources, and, North Dakota will define the levels of transportation service it will strive to provide and maintain.

The Highway Performance Classification System, or HPCS, was finalized late in 2004, and it helps engineers plan future roadway projects while getting the most value out of the department's limited resources. The HPCS identifies roadways using a five-level classification system based on several highway characteristics. These include traffic volume, load-carrying capacity, safety, reliability, travel speeds, and the connection of major traffic generators and destinations. All of these characteristics help determine the necessary performance level of a particular highway.

State Highway Performance Classification System



As part of its contract with NDDOT to develop a state personal mobility plan, the Small Urban and Rural Transit Center at North Dakota State University is working with a steering committee to identify personal mobility needs and define appropriate levels of service.

Initiative 3: North Dakota will enhance communication and facilitate cooperation and collaboration between and within governmental units, tribal authorities, modes of transportation, and the public and private sectors.

In the spring of 2004, NDDOT conducted a survey, in cooperation with the University of North Dakota, to gather information regarding how well the department is meeting the needs of its customers. The results show that 82 percent of the department's customers are either satisfied or very satisfied overall with the performance of the agency. The Drivers License and Motor Vehicle divisions' product and service levels earned a 90 percent and 86 percent satisfaction rating, respectively. Areas identified as providing opportunities for improvement include smoothness of ride, load-carrying capacity, and communication with the public. A follow-up survey is tentatively scheduled for the spring of 2006.

There are approximately 10 miles of state and BIA roads in the Devils Lake area that are acting as dikes, but were not constructed to function as dikes. These roads are at a critical elevation where they are in danger of being flooded or failing. Loss of these roads would result in large volumes of land being inundated, loss of homes, and possible loss of life. NDDOT is working, with a multi-agency committee to resolve this complex issue.

The 2005-2006 state highway map, published by the North Dakota Department of Transportation, is now available. North Dakota Tourism provides the cover and backside of the map. The highway map was produced digitally, and is approximately 60 percent larger than the old map. This makes it easier for motorists to read items like Interstate exit markings. The city inserts are also larger, allowing for more detailed information for tourists. Highway numbers are also larger and more readable. NDDOT worked closely with several state agencies, the Association of County/League of Cities to develop the format for the new map.

The department has also released the December 2004 issue of the *Transportation Handbook*. This publication is a quick-reference guide to statewide facts pertaining to issues involving highway, rail, and air transportation. It also lists facts about the department's organizational structure, goals, accomplishments, challenges, mission, and budget. The *2004 Transportation Handbook* is easy to read and is an important tool the department uses to get useful information to state residents.

Initiative 4: North Dakota will improve the performance of priority transportation corridors and facilities.

In November 2004, representatives from North Dakota attended the Ports to Plains trade corridor meeting in Laredo, Texas. The Ports to Plains corridor running from Laredo, Texas, to Denver, Colorado, is part of a Great Plains international trade corridor running from Canada to Mexico, including the Theodore Roosevelt Expressway running from Rapid City, South Dakota, along US 85 to the Canadian border.

The NDDOT is working with the state's congressional delegation to obtain a federal high-priority corridor designation for the Heartland Expressway, which runs from Rapid City, through western North Dakota, to the Canadian border. An amendment has been developed to include high-priority corridor designation for the Heartland Expressway as part of the Highway Reauthorization Legislation. Obtaining federal designation would provide eligibility to obtain special federal funding to develop a long range plan for developing the corridor. A request for a similar designation for US 83 has also been sent to Congress.

Initiative 5: North Dakota will incorporate economic competitiveness as an integral component of transportation investment strategies.

After several years of negotiation with FHWA, NDDOT was successful in securing emergency relief eligibility for raising Grahams Island access road. NDDOT has stayed ahead of rising waters in the Devils Lake basin by spending over \$135 million since 1994 on raising roadways and building bridges. In the past year, the Wood-Rutten Road was raised and a new bridge was built. Environmental clearance was granted for relocating US 281 in 2005 using emergency relief funding. These projects are critical to the economy of the Devils Lake area as well as to North Dakota.

Initiative 5: (continued)

The Department of Agriculture has joined in NDDOT and Department of Commerce meetings aimed at discovering ways the agencies can work together to enhance economic development and competitiveness. At the last meeting, the NDDOT presented information on rail loan programs. These are loans issued by the NDDOT to shippers and railroads to improve crossings and other rail-related infrastructure.

Initiatives 6 & 8: North Dakota will analyze the economic impacts of load limits and the benefits of establishing a statewide program to coordinate the administration of load limits, and, North Dakota will determine the opportunities for, and the economic and safety impacts of, a regional uniform truck size, weight, and permitting system.

The Upper Great Plains Transportation Institute at North Dakota State University has completed draft reports for the NDDOT analyzing the benefits of a statewide program to administer load limits, and for the possibility of a regional truck size, weight and permitting system. The findings of the studies will be presented at a conference tentatively scheduled for June 2005. In addition to North Dakota, the regional permitting analysis includes Minnesota, South Dakota, Iowa, Nebraska, Montana, Wyoming, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta.

Initiative 7: North Dakota will determine the feasibility of, and identify the conditions necessary for, developing an intermodal freight facility or facilities.

Studies examining the feasibility and opportunity for intermodal transportation facilities in Minot, Bismarck and Fargo continue to progress. NDDOT is providing assistance to each of these communities.

Initiative 9: North Dakota will appropriately use Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) technologies to enhance service, performance, mobility, safety, and security.

North Dakota 511 Travel Information Service has been a very popular information tool for motorists traveling through the state. In 2003, there were 156,324 calls to 511 and 243,203 calls in 2004. This is a significant increase, even though 511 did not go into service until February 10, 2003. For the entire weekend of December 30, 2004 to January 2, 2005, North Dakota 511 received 31,553 calls from travelers. The department also receives many comments on 511. A woman at the Minot Air Force base, who after calling 511 changed her travel plans, said even though the weather and roads seemed fine at the base, she found out the roads were icy and didn't travel. She thanked the department for the service.

The department's Intelligent Transportation Systems action plan has been sent to management for review. The plan includes:

- More Automated Bridge Anti-icing Systems
- Flood Detection/Warning Systems
- Freeway Surveillance/Over-height Detection Systems
- Permanent Dynamic Message Signs (DMS)
- Snow Plow Collision Avoidance System
- Weigh-In-Motion Stations
- Automated Road Closure Gates

NDDOT is taking part in a study with 15 other states for a new Intelligent Transportation System to detect animals crossing a roadway. A test area has been placed on US 191 south of Bozeman, MT, that uses a microwave beam to detect animals crossing the road. If the beam is interrupted, flashing lights on a sign are activated, alerting motorists to the presence of the animal or animals. If successful, the department could add this system to some state roadways in an effort to cut down on animal/vehicle crashes.

Initiative 12: North Dakota will take a lead role in promoting public-private partnerships to bring about selected transportation initiatives.

The NDDOT is working with the North Dakota Aeronautics Commission to help improve runways at the state's 72 international, regional, and municipal airports. The department is taking its Pavement Data Collection van to each airport to collect data on runway conditions. This data is sent to a consultant hired by the Aeronautics Commission to determine if any improvements need to be made to particular runways. As of December, data has been collected on all state runways with the exception of airports in Fargo, Jamestown, Bismarck, Minot, and 10 general aviation facilities. NDDOT hopes to have data collected on these runways by the end of February 2005.



Initiative 13: North Dakota will actively participate in regional and national transportation initiatives, programs, studies, and projects.

Congress has appropriated nearly \$1.5 million in the new agriculture bill for the Northern Great Plains Regional Authority. The NGPRA would promote economic development in North and South Dakota, Iowa, Nebraska, and Minnesota. NDDOT Director David Sprynczynatyk is the governor's alternate for the authority. One of the main ways the authority will promote economic development is through improving the region's transportation system.

Initiative 14: North Dakota will increase the emphasis on safety and security as integral components in planning, developing, and maintaining the transportation system.

The NDDOT works continuously with the railroads to identify crossings and signals that may need attention in regards to making the crossing safer for both motorists and the railroads. Fourteen projects to either upgrade or provide signals at designated crossings were programmed for 2004. Eight of the fourteen projects were for new signal locations. Five of the projects were upgrades to circuitry, LED Lights and constant warning system. The other project involved relocating a signal from another crossing that was downgraded to a passive crossing.

Projects took place in Medora, Gilby, Bottineau, Havana, Williston, Thompson and several locations in between. Three final inspections of completed projects were done in December 2004.

Eight crossings had surface upgrades to insure greater safety to motorists. Eight other low-volume crossings were closed through the Federally Funded Incentive Program to reduce liability and eliminate safety hazards. The \$7,500 in incentives that are given to the local township or city are used for future safety programs, such as early warning sirens, flashing beacons, signing, pavement markings, etc.

Initiative 15: North Dakota will develop a statewide personal mobility plan.

The Small Urban and Rural Transit Center (SURTC) and NDSU is under contract with the NDDOT to help the department find better ways to help meet the transit needs of state residents. SURTC recently issued reports on "Meeting Small Urban Transit Needs in North Dakota: A Case Study Perspective" and "Enhancing Passenger Mobility Services in North Dakota through Increased Coordination." To obtain copies of the reports, or find out more information, contact Jill Hough at the Small Urban and Rural Transit Center, North Dakota State University, 701-231-8082.

North Dakota's Transportation Mission

North Dakota will provide a transportation system that offers personal choices, enhances business opportunities, and promotes the wise use of all resources.

North Dakota's Transportation Vision

North Dakota's transportation system is an important part of regional, national, and global systems, developed strategically to help grow and diversify the economy and enhance our quality of life.

North Dakota's Transportation Goals

- Safe and secure transportation for residents, visitors, and freight.
 - A transportation system that allows optimum personal mobility.
 - A transportation system that allows the efficient and effective movement of freight.
 - A transportation system that enhances economic diversity, growth, and competitiveness.
 - Funding sufficient to protect North Dakota's transportation investment and address future transportation needs.
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