National Transportation Library

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I bring you greetings from the Bureau of Transportation Statistics and the U. S. Department of Transportation, the parent agencies of the National Transportation Library (NTL). I am pleased to be with you today and to provide you with some background, and a status report, on the National Transportation Library. As a long-time academic reference and fee-based information service librarian, I am mindful, as we develop the NTL, of your needs and requirements as primary points of access to Federal information.

Some of you have heard presentations that have been done at ALA and SLA conferences over the past two years. These focused heavily on the background and the need for the NTL. Today, our presentation is couched along the lines of GPO's and other Federal agencies' efforts in determining appropriate performance measures for Government Web sites, as discussed in the August 15 issue of the FDLP Administrative Notes, and tell you how the NTL is developing in relation to these performance measures.

Transportation, historically and now, plays an important role in the development and unification of the United States, and increasingly, is a major technology transfer focus, as other parts of the world address their infrastructure needs and the technological, social, and economic facets of developing, rebuilding, or rethinking transportation policy and practice. The U.S. transportation information output, as measured by major traditional resources such as reports, legislation, regulatory documents, journal articles, and trade publications, dates from the Nation's earliest transportation legislation—the Tariff Act of 1789—and probably totals about a million items--produced by both the public and private sectors. Add to that the growing electronic information resources and the count swells. Thus there is, on the one hand, a need to develop approaches to knowledge management for today's transportation researchers, practitioners, policymakers and the general public.

On the other hand, there is an equally growing need for preservation and archiving this body of information. Libraries and information centers specializing in transportation are disappearing, and the body of transportation literature that documents the history, public policy, practice, and social and economic development aspects of transportation is being discarded, or perhaps even worse, quietly disintegrating in back rooms and storage areas for lack of funding and expertise to bring it under bibliographic control or preservation programs.

Transportation has not enjoyed the level of public investment to provide access, and to develop and preserve collections that we have seen in agriculture, medicine, education and other science and technology areas. For example, in 1998, it was estimated that transportation invested only $.40 per transportation worker in information, whereas medicine spent $13.30, and agriculture $6.00, per worker.

The one major public investment that has been made in transportation information is the Transportation Research Information Service (TRIS) a bibliographic database developed in the early 1970s by the Transportation Research Board with Federal and state monies.

The NTL grew out of an awareness on the part of our parent agency, the Bureau of Transportation Statistics, one of the younger operating units of the Department of Transportation, of these issues. This, together with their awareness, gained through several years of responding to what were supposed to be statistical data inquiries, that users of the numeric and statistical representation of transportation often needed more information beyond just the statistics and that many had no formal library access to needed material, led first to a fledging digital library and ultimately, in 1998, to the legislative mandate, contained in Sections 5109 (d), (e) , (g)(b) of P.L. 105-178—the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century, to:

1. establish and maintain a National Transportation Library containing a collection of statistical and other information needed for transportation decision making at the Federal, State, and local levels;
2. facilitate and promote access to the Library for purposes of improving access to information and statistics, as well as sharing information throughout the transportation community;
3. develop in coordination with other transportation libraries and public and private information providers, and
4. by extension, to support the International Transportation Data Base to be developed by BTS.

In sum, we have satisfied the first basic evaluative criteria: We have a legal mandate.

However, the legislation doesn't mandate dedicated funding, an example that many of you know all too well: new programs without new funding!

The second criteria—goals and objectives—is met, both in our legislation, and in our mission statement, which is contained in our Five Year Plan that is, in turn, a part of our parent group's five year plan.

Our infrastructure—the third criteria—is not so clear. Funding, as I said earlier, is not dedicated. Organizationally, within BTS, we will be reporting to the BTS Director through a newly created Office of Information, which includes several specialized information gathering and analysis groups, special studies, and the information technology group. The recently hired NTL Manager, Nelda Bravo, will be joining us from the Illinois Regional offices of the FHWA in early November. Ms. Bravo is a transportation and information technology specialist. We have several other positions ready to be advertised. These equate to library counterparts for collection development; public services, and technical services. We expect

to advertise these shortly. Much of the work is, and will continue to be, done through contracts, and here we expect to work closely with the library community on many of the projects.

Functionally, we are organized into six operations:

- the digital library,
- TRIS Online,
- Reference,
- DOTBOT,
- Union Catalog, and
- the National Transportation Data Archive.

Each has different staffing, technology, and communications requirements.

Briefly, let me touch on the criteria of site content in connection with each of these operational areas.

The digital library to date contains over 6000 electronic documents that are either created as such or are the product of our own imaging operations. We are working on collection development policies and also a core collection. I entertain grandiose fantasies about producing the transportation equivalent of the Harvard Business Core Collection. Essentially, we are dedicated to capturing present, future, and retrospective materials that reflect transportation policy, technology, and practice in the U.S., and to a lesser extent, worldwide, for all transportation modes. The process is selective, following fairly rigid criteria, and we expect to use panels of experts for the retrospective materials.

We are on the third draft of an Order to be issued via the DOT Office of the Secretary to have all DOT information products, broadly defined, and their metadata, forwarded automatically to us. This does not supersede the requirement to send things to NTIS, to publish through GPO, or to mount on agency Web sites. Our move is aimed at capture and permanent access. We believe that the DOT produces some 3000 transportation reports annually and that there are probably another 1500-2000 transportation and transportation-related reports issued by other Federal agencies.

The states, local and regional agencies produce a significant body of literature as well, and that is heavily reflected in TRIS. Journal literature output in transportation and transportation-related subjects is well captured by TRIS, and we will provide full text links there. Trade publications and association materials which meet our collection development guidelines, and where the publisher grants permission, will be available in full text; otherwise we will have to rely on citations in TRIS and links from that component of NTL.

The DOTBOT, the NTL spider, is an InfoSeek search engine, as is the NTL, incidentally. DOTBOT is only licensed at the moment to crawl through DOT Web sites. We have a temporary license to spider outside the DOT and we are hoping the results will result in expanding the license to allow us to crawl through the additional 1600 Federal Web sites we have identified as having major transportation content. Review of the spider's gleanings will also provide content for the digital library. Persistent URLs are created for those items we

wish to retain. The searches you do in each DOT operating administration's Web sites are being done by DOTBOT as well.

We are using the Dublin Core Metadata standards, and we hope to begin to input records to CORC soon, and perhaps to create MARC crosswalks. The Transportation Research Thesaurus, the TRT, recently developed under the Transportation Research Board, is used for subject terminology. The TRT continuation is under discussion now, and the NTL may take a leading role in advancing its future. At the moment, the TRT is available on CD-ROM from TRB, and there is a plan to publish it in print. A multi-lingual version is also a goal over time.

We've hit the point where we need to get serious about a corporate authority file and are beginning to work with one of the academic transportation libraries on developing an authority file that can be used for both TRIS Online and the NTL.

The digital library is very much a work-in-progress. Our policy is to assign persistent URLs except where the item is a standard, regulation, legislation in progress, guidelines or another material which may be continuously updated and where it is critical, from our perspective, that the user have access to the latest version. We run a monthly program to identify defunct URLs and have found that we can retrieve most under their new URL or move them to the NTL with an NTL URL. The site is authentic, official and timely, but not yet comprehensive. This is our work for many years to come.

Content of the NTL was bolstered by the loading, earlier this year, of TRIS, the Transportation Research Information Service, on the Web. Of the 500,000 records in TRIS, we have loaded 400,000. Licensing restrictions at the moment preclude our loading the international record component of TRIS, but we are hopeful that we will be able to do so shortly, and conversations are ongoing at OECD, even as we speak about this.

TRIS previously was available only on vendor platforms such as DIALOG and SilverPlatter, or to sponsors only. It is now free and accessible to all users, and we are working on full-text links for some 70% of the records. Here we must deviate a tad from the free content criteria. About 40% of TRIS comprises citations to journal articles and 27% are citations to conference papers and other copyrighted association publications for which royalties are required. We expect to provide links to document delivery services which can provide a major percentage of the cited articles and ILL links to transportation libraries that have agreed to participate. We will also be working on access for users without ready access to libraries for ILL.

The remaining content of TRIS is citations to technical reports in the public domain and we are actively working with NTIS to link to the reports in their database and to purchase the 10,000 or so they have imaged in recent years. These will be in the NTL digital library with persistent URLs, and to NTIS for users who wish to obtain copies. NTIS has provided us with a file of some 50,000 links in the transportation arena and we are now matching them to TRIS "PB" numbers, and you will see more live links to the NTIS order system each time you access the database.

The union catalog is in its early developmental stages. We will begin with a project early next year, in cooperation with the DOT Library, to bring the 23 libraries and information centers within the DOT, countrywide, under bibliographic control and link them to the NTL. The union catalog will not, at this stage, have merged records, other than for the DOT libraries that choose to have their holdings reflected in the Headquarters Library catalog. We hope to begin to work with the larger academic transportation libraries on linking them shortly.

Our Reference Service is our human interface with our users. They contact us by e-mail or by phone, and we respond accordingly. There are several reference librarians and several subject experts under contract to Netalyst who answer the inquiries, and I work on some of the more gnarly ones. We have followed the trend used by many e-mail reference services that are moving to forms-based input. The form is online at <http://www.bts.gov/cgi-bin/ntl/ref/ref.cgi>.

The Reference Service closely tracks the content of answers sent to users. From that information, and from scanning of transportation news, we hope to anticipate frequently asked questions, and address them directly on the Web pages we maintain.

In particular, we now keep a list of hot topics on the Reference form. For instance, shortly after concerns arose about Firestone tires, and the subsequent link to Ford vehicles, we added a FAQ for these issues.

We expect over time to have special projects underway. At the moment our only one is a Web site dedicated to the overlap between agriculture and transportation, with a focus on rural transport. There are a few brochures for this Web site for distribution. The Web site may be accessed at: <http://ntl.bts.gov/ruraltransport>.

Over time, our total content will be more complete. But I hope this will give you some sense of the effort being mounted and our goals and objectives.

Design issues are still being addressed by the DOT and the NTL. Adherence to prevailing ADA and Federal security requirements will be continuously addressed. As we add additional resources to the NTL - DOTBOT, TRIS Online, the list of Transportation libraries, and the Union Catalog - we recognize that customers would like the option of a single point of access. We will be conducting tests to determine how best to present a unified search and browse interface.

Last week's release of the dynamic NTL is one step in this direction

NTL uses cookies in TRIS Online. We use them to allow users to assemble a "basket" or shopping cart of citations from searches for printing and review. We are shifting to session cookies, in keeping with Federal policy mandates.

Cookies will be an ongoing challenge for TRIS Online, since we intend to serve as a gateway for full text and document delivery to numerous other sites. In keeping with e-commerce practice, these sites may use cookies in a variety of ways, and we have no control over these sites.

We do not share our usage data with anyone, nor do we provide conduits for any third party cookies from our own Web pages.

We do measure our usage. We measure session use in TRIS and number of visitors to the NTL, and our reference responses. TRIS is averaging about 7200 user sessions per month. We respond to about 2000 reference requests monthly, and there are some 83,000 visitors to the NTL site monthly and about 217,000 hits on DOTBOT.

We are visible. NTL is the first answer when searching Google for "transportation library;" the fifth on Northern Light, and one of seven libraries listed in Yahoo's Home Business and Economy. FirstGov provides easy access to the NTL as does GPO Access.

Marketing and outreach is ongoing within the transportation community. We need to do more in the academic market and with local and regional bodies. Usage and questions received indicate that we have a significant new body of transportation information end users and one that is not a traditional research library one.

We have good children's and young adult Web pages within DOT, and the Garrett A. Morgan program is the primary point for contact with the educational community. The NTL has been actively involved in promoting the GAM projects within the components of the library community that interact with young adults, children, educators and media specialists. By advertising the GAM transportation poetry contest through the Web sites, listservs and newsletters of these groups last spring, there were thousands of poems submitted. This year the contest will focus on young adults and will be a Web design contest. We'll keep you posted on this.

In closing, I'd like to share one of those poems with you. It was written by Andy, a third grader from Ohio and kind of sums up how we hope the younger generation, who will reap the benefit of the actions we are now taking with the NTL, and will share Andy's view: "transportation is cool."

Transportation Moves You

Transportation is cool.
A bus takes you to school.
It is not a fake.
A boat will float on the lake.
You can walk on the street.
By using your feet.
You can go far.
When you are in your car.
You might ride in a train.
You might ride in a plane.
Transportation moves you.
Whatever you do.