



Memorandum

U.S. Department of Transportation
Office of the Secretary of Transportation

Subject: ACTION - Developing a Systemic Approach for Increasing
the Public Availability of Information about Agency
Operations

Date: March 20, 2015

From: Kathryn B. Thomson 
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To: Heads of Operating Administrations

ACTION REQUIRED

In order to implement a commitment U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) made in its third Open Government Plan, we are requesting each DOT Operating Administration (OA) to submit a plan establishing a system under which it makes appropriate proactive releases of DOT information and data. Our goal is not to direct how OAs manage information and data releases; rather, our goal is to ensure that all DOT OAs have a systemic approach to effectively generate and manage public releases of data useful to the public.

SUMMARY

The DOT recognizes the value of providing the public with information and data about agency operations and decisions. The DOT has a long history of making this type of information available on our Web sites. The vast amount of information we make available about our programs, including reports, databases, and publications, and the way that we highlight important initiatives using methods such as social media, have made DOT a recognized leader in this area.

In an effort to continually increase the availability of information and data about our work, and to effectively coordinate on the types of information we make available to the public, we are assessing our disclosure practices throughout the Department. Effective disclosure can enhance transparency and improve agency efficiency by reducing the time we spend responding to inquiries from outside DOT and improving the public's understanding of our operations and requirements.

BACKGROUND

On his first full day in office, the President issued a memorandum on information transparency and open government and committed to creating an unprecedented level of openness. In December 2009, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) issued the Open Government Directive, which highlighted three principles essential to an open government – transparency, participation, and collaboration. Transparency promotes accountability by providing the public with information about what the Government is doing. Over the past several years, the Department has developed three Open Government Plans outlining steps that DOT will take to improve transparency, participation, and collaboration.

The Department's third Open Government Plan commits to increasing the amount of information provided on DOT's web pages – in a systemic manner designed to ensure ongoing releases of data, by requiring the OAs to create plans for doing so.

In developing the attached outline for each OA's plan, we brought together selected experts from the OAs representing a variety of disciplines, such as Public Affairs, Open Government, Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), Records Management, Web, Communications, and Data. This cross-modal, cross-functional group discussed: (1) the term "proactive disclosure" – used to describe the information and data we provide to the public on our own initiative; (2) our strengths – what we are currently doing well in this area; (3) classes of information requested by the public to be routinely posted; and (4) various methods that our constituents use to request information, such as direct contact with program offices, press and Congressional inquiries, formal requests under FOIA, and searching our Internet pages. Personnel from our various areas of discipline are performing excellent work to improve the accessibility of information. To improve and measure the effectiveness of our transparency, however, everyone agreed that we need to have a more coordinated approach – both within each OA and throughout the Department.

We have created a SharePoint site to provide guidance and facilitate communications and cross-modal collaboration. The SharePoint site will also be used to track progress in plan development and implementation.

TIMELINE

Each OA must designate a lead point of contact for this initiative and submit that name to open@dot.gov, by March 31, 2015. The designated lead and all members of the OA's cross-functional team will be given access to the SharePoint site.

Each OA cross-functional team must develop an OA-specific action plan (see attachment) for making "in demand" information publicly available on an ongoing basis.

The OA-specific plans must be completed and posted to the SharePoint site by July 31, 2015. After review, OA plans will be publicly posted at www.dot.gov/open. Plans must be fully implemented no later than September 30, 2016.

Attachment: Developing a Systemic Approach for Increasing the Public Availability of Information about Agency Operations

Developing a Systemic Approach for Increasing the Public Availability of Information about Agency Operations

Guidance for Developing OA-Specific Plans¹

1. Describe how your OA identifies information/data in demand for posting.
2. Describe your plan for posting the following sets of information (all of which should be posted on the Web by each OA):
 - *Congressional reports and testimony*, such as what is made available through <http://testimony.ost.dot.gov/>.
 - *FOIA request logs*, posted at least annually, following the example set by OST at <http://www.dot.gov/foia/foia-electronic-reading-room-category-four>.
3. Describe your plan to review the following sets of data to determine whether your OA will post them on the Web (if you do not already do so in some format):
 - *Funding/apportionment tables*. Examples of best practices include FHWA <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/map21/funding.cfm> and FTA http://www.fta.dot.gov/12853_13935.html.
 - *Correspondence logs*.
4. Describe your plan to ensure that before information is posted, appropriate reviews take place to prevent the release of private, privileged, or other sensitive data.
5. Describe your process for ensuring that FOIA Electronic Reading Room records are current (four categories, including “frequently requested records”) as required by 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(2).
6. Identify at least one **new** information and/or data release that makes the OA more efficient, results in a new disclosure or significantly improves current disclosure, and is responsive to a demonstrated need for the information.
7. Highlight several examples of current releases that have made the OA more efficient and/or were responsive to a demonstrated need for the information.

1. Additional information may be found on the SharePoint site at <http://our.dot.gov/team/OpenGovt/publicinfo/default.aspx>.