Investment in traffic signal operations is one of the most cost effective means to improve transportation system operation. And yet, traffic signal systems are historically under funded, their capabilities under utilized, and their benefits poorly understood by decision makers. To increase national awareness of the value of improved traffic signal operation, IMSA in cooperation with the National Transportation Operations Coalition (NTOC) is sponsoring a Traffic Signal National Report Card. The objective of the Traffic Signal National Report Card is to highlight the need for funding support for traffic signal operations, the performance challenges due to limited resources, and the cost effectiveness of increased investment for traffic signal operations. The release of the national report card results will be the topic of a national press event.

The results contained in the Traffic Signal National Report Card are based on a traffic signal operation self assessment that was released by the NTOC in the summer/fall of 2004. More than 370 agencies responded representing 49 states. The number of signals represented by the responding agencies represents about one third of all signals in the US. There was good distribution among cities, counties and state and among signal system sizes.

The overall results are not surprising. On a 100-point scale, the overall national score is in the low 60s. The results seem to indicate that typical mode of operation can best be described as “fighting fires”. Due to resource constraints, there are few agencies that are able to manage their signal systems in a systematic, thoughtful, strategic way. Basic needs are met, but just barely.

The national results will be unveiled to transportation practitioners during the ITE Technical Conference in Las Vegas on Feb 28-March 2. (More information about the conferences is available at: www.ite.org.)

Following release of the National Report Card to the technical community, we are preparing for a national press event in early April (probably the week of April 4). The press event is intended to create national press exposure on the results of the National Report Card and to increase awareness of the need for more support for traffic signal operation.

The national press event is likely to generate press inquiries in local areas. It is best to be prepared! Therefore, IMSA strongly encourages your agency to conduct a local press event at the same time as the national press event.

It is not too early to begin discussions with your management and press office about a local press event. The goal is to have a well-articulated and constructive message to deliver to the press that appropriately represents your agency’s results and desires regarding your traffic signal system. In the coming month, IMSA will provide you with more information about how you can prepare for national press event and your local press event.

About the National Associations Working Group

Background

The National Associations Working Group was created in 1995 in partnership with the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT). NAWG member associations represent elected/appointed officials and transportation practitioners from state and local government, transportation service providers, academia, and industry representatives. At the outset, the NAWG was an informal group of national associations whose members shared a common interest in understanding the concepts, practices and applications of intelligent transportation systems (ITS). The Working Group was convened regularly with the support of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to share information, discuss emerging topics, and provide materials and information needed to enable a broad range of constituents to make informed, educated decisions about ITS.

Now in its ninth year, the National Associations Working Group has evolved to become a formal committee for outreach and communications under the banner of the National Transportation Operations Coalition (NTOC). In its new role, the NAWG has expanded its mission to include not only informing and educating national stakeholders on the concepts, practices, and applications of ITS, but to also communicate the benefits of Transportation Management and Operations strategies to decision makers at the state and local level. Recognizing that ITS technologies is one of the valuable tools that supports good Transportation Management and Operations (M&O), the NAWG members agreed that incorporating M&O and working under the NTOC was a necessary progression.

A major resource of the NAWG is the facilitation of the ITS Cooperative Deployment Network (ICDN), which is an online resource that is available through the NTOC Talks website and via a newsletter that is mailed to subscribers bi-monthly. The ICDN provides current news, insights, and resources for transportation professionals and those interested in learning more about ITS technologies and Transportation Management and Operations initiatives.

In June 2004, the NAWG selected the American Association of Highway and Transportation Officials (AAHTO), represented by Valerie Kalhammer, as the Chair association, and the National Association of Regional Councils (NARC), represented by Peggy Tadej, as the Vice Chair association. This was the first year for the nomination and selection of a formal Chair and Vice Chair.

The NAWG meets six to eight times a year (meeting schedule is available on the NTOC General Calendar in the Washington DC metropolitan area.)