

Transportation Libraries and Information Centers: Current Practices and Future Directions

Over the past decades, the transportation, technology and information landscapes have changed with the availability of resources and user preferences and expectations. Driven by these shifts, transportation libraries and information centers are evolving to meet the challenges and take advantage of the opportunities presented by these trends.

The Need for this Project

Among the challenges that transportation libraries and librarians face are the mistaken notion that staff can find everything they need on their own through the internet, the failure to understand the depth and breadth of services that librarians can offer, and the lack of value placed on good information to improve and maximize the operation of transportation agency programs.

The [Transportation Research and Connectivity pooled fund](#) sought to better understand the current environment and examine these challenges. Surveys of library stakeholders—librarians, research program managers, library users and agency leadership—provided perspective on how transportation libraries and information centers are currently serving their users and how those who manage transportation information can navigate the future.



TRANSPORTATION research and connectivity

The Transportation Research and Connectivity pooled fund study, TPF-5(442), is a consortium of state departments of transportation (DOTs) and other partners that supports the coordinated development of transportation libraries as well as research organizations without dedicated libraries.

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PROJECT PARTICIPANTS

Three distinct groups were surveyed for this project. Respondents included:

- 29 library and information services users
- 27 state transportation agencies
- 7 state DOT leaders

14

PHYSICAL COLLECTIONS

Of the responding state transportation agencies, almost half maintain in-house print collections in a dedicated library space.

10

COLLABORATIVE SYSTEMS

Ten agencies reported partnering with state libraries or universities to manage and provide access to transportation information.

Current and Emerging Trends

The synthesis report revealed three primary challenges:

- **Evolving technology.** Information technology is transforming all libraries, with print collections ceding ground to digital, or virtual, collections. A robust, virtual statewide transportation information resource may be just what's needed for transportation libraries and information centers to meet users where they tend to be—online.
- **Changing workforce.** As experienced staff retire, their knowledge needs to be identified, preserved and managed. Transportation libraries and information services programs are well suited to spearhead or participate in an agencywide knowledge management program.
- **Downsizing and transitioning to virtual collections.** Whether libraries are losing space, going virtual or partnering with another organization, strategic planning can help ensure that the services offered are responsive to agency needs and aligned with agency priorities and culture.

Preparing for the Future

A sampling of the findings from this synthesis can inform next steps:

- **Develop an overarching strategy.** A clearly articulated vision of why the library exists and the information, services, products and other value the library provides is vitally important to staying relevant and retaining or increasing resources.
- **Increase collaboration.** Digitization can be costly and difficult without sufficient staff and expertise. Working with a variety of external partners may have significant payoffs and greatly increase access.
- **Redefine the library.** A collaboration of transportation library and research program staff and agency leaders can produce transformational changes that benefit both the library and the agency at large.

READ THE SYNTHESIS REPORT:

- [Transportation Libraries and Information Centers: Current Practices and Future Directions](#), December 2022.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- [Digitization](#) (National Transportation Library LibGuide).
- [The Next Normal: The Post-Pandemic Future of Library Services](#), Dave Shumaker, ITI NewsLink, April 2021.
- [Why Knowledge Management is Critical for DOTs](#), AASHTO Committee on Knowledge Management, May 2019.