TRANSIT ASSET MANAGEMENT

Fall 2024 Discussion Forum
Group Plan Sponsors

U.S. Department of Transportation
Federal Transit Administration

Overview

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) [Transit Asset Management](#) (TAM) Program organizes discussion forums to support professional capacity building for transit agency staff. Discussion forums bring together a small group of transit professionals to engage virtually on topics that go beyond the requirements in the [TAM Rule (49 CFR 625)](#).

The Fall 2024 Discussion Forum focused on creating a space for group plan sponsors to discuss their unique needs and challenges when creating a group plan. Participants were group plan sponsors who manage transit assets or otherwise contribute to fleet management planning and related practices. The goals of this discussion forum were to:

1. Promote peer-to-peer education and collaboration around successfully managing a group plan.
2. Support transit agencies with TAM-related practices when managing their group plan, such as setting performance targets or engaging with participating agencies.

3. Understand the state of the practice for how group plan sponsors manage their group plan, and if there are specific resources FTA can provide to assist these sponsors.

This document highlights the main successes and challenges that come with maintaining a group plan as described by participants and summarizes perspectives shared during the facilitated discussion.

> **TAM Group Plans**
> - The purpose of the group plan option is to reduce the planning and reporting burden on smaller Tier II transit agencies.
> - Group plan sponsors tend to be the State DOT, or a direct or designated §5310 or §5307 recipient.
> - Tier II agencies may develop their own plans or participate in a group plan.
> - The group plan uses consolidated performance targets that apply to the group of participants, rather than to individual agencies.

Participants

Name	Group Plan Sponsor	City and State
Andy Jensen	Utah DOT	Salt Lake City, UT
Ashley Porter	Florida DOT	Tallahassee, FL
Ellen Kent	Michigan DOT	Lansing, MI
Joachim Bean	Ohio DOT	Columbus, OH
Scott Donahue	South Carolina DOT	Columbia, SC
Teresa Wong	Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority	Los Angeles, CA

Successes and Challenges

Participants provided short introductions to their organization and experiences with sponsoring a TAM group plan. They shared how many group plan participants they manage, as well as strategies they implement to create a successful group plan.

Identified Successes

- **Use of consultants:** One DOT shared how they hired a consultant to create a dashboard for their group plan participants, allowing agencies to see the condition of their assets with visual representations. The consultant also went in person to conduct a third-party assessment of the assets. Previously the DOT had relied on the transit agency to conduct

assessments, which led to a misrepresentation of assets reported to be in a state of good repair.

- **Completing group plans in-house:** Multiple attendees have their group plan participants assess the condition of vehicles and facilities themselves, and then use that information to set performance targets and create the group plan. They make use of the FTA TERM scale, and have agencies report to them directly, though some are considering switching to a consultant.
- **Form templates:** One attendee shared that they send out a simple form for concurrence with performance targets and regularly check in with their group plan participants. This constant engagement has led to efficient tracking and timely updates to their asset inventory.
- **Setting performance targets across agencies:** By coordinating well with MPOs and transit agencies, the group plan sponsors are able to successfully collect and set the performance targets for their groups. To set these targets, the group plan sponsors largely use vehicle mileage and vehicle age.

Identified Challenges

- **Managing and updating group plans:** The process of keeping group plans current can be challenging, with frequent updates and adjustments required to address changes in assets, service providers, and funding. This includes maintaining accurate performance targets and asset inventories.
- **Transit agency capacity:** Many transit agencies struggle with limited staff and technical capacity, which can affect their ability to complete tasks such as NTD reporting and accurate condition assessments. Ensuring frequent communication and providing sufficient support to smaller agencies is a challenge for group plan sponsors.
- **Ensuring accurate reporting:** One group plan sponsor discussed the difficulties they experienced with getting their group plan participants to accurately evaluate the condition of their assets. To address this issue, the group plan sponsor hired an external consultant to conduct an outside review.
- **Staff turnover and restructuring:** Several of the group plan sponsors discussed internal reorganization, staff turnover, or changes to the number of agencies they oversee as being challenges that need to be addressed on a somewhat consistent basis.

Summary of Discussion

Q1: What is the approach you take towards managing a TAM group plan?

The process of managing a group plan often involves close collaboration with the agencies covered under the group plan. For example, one agency sends out a form for agencies to confirm their agreement with the targets. This process helps ensure that the agencies are aware of the calculations used to determine these targets, although there are rarely any issues with the targets themselves. They also consult with the agencies and MPOs to gather feedback on the appropriateness of the performance targets and see which things they may wish to have prioritized with future funding.

Some group plan sponsors have also developed and implemented databases to help streamline the tracking and reporting processes across multiple agencies, ensuring that necessary assessments are done regularly and accurately.

Q2: How do you collect and set performance targets for the group plan?

One of the challenges discussed by the group plan sponsors was collecting and setting realistic performance targets for a wide range of group plan participants, since there tends to be variations across different agencies. Group plan sponsors must create targets that are realistic and achievable while accounting for these differences. One DOT suggested that grouping similar agencies based on the type of service they provide could be beneficial, though they have not yet implemented this idea. However, there was consensus among the attendees that while collecting and setting performance targets could be a challenge, they have successfully developed approaches to managing it.

The group plan sponsors typically use basic metrics like vehicle age and mileage to set performance targets, while some of the more involved sponsors also use visual checks and photographs to verify reported conditions.

Q3: What outstanding challenges do you face when developing the group plan?

Continuous follow up is an important part of the process when managing group plans. Many transit agencies may be smaller and not have a lot of staff, which means they need extra support to complete tasks such as NTD reporting. This means a lot of calls and outreach done by the group plan sponsor to the agencies. Some of the group plan sponsors even do the NTD reporting themselves, since they may oversee agencies with limited capacity.

Staff turnover and organization restructuring also present challenges to the group plan sponsors, because the nuances of developing a group plan can be difficult to teach to new employees. Creating templates, databases and hiring external consultants are all ways that agencies have attempted to address these challenges.

Related Resources

- FTA's TAM Program Website
  - https://www.transit.dot.gov/TAM
- TAM Roles and Responsibilities Fact Sheet
  - https://www.transit.dot.gov/regulations-and-guidance/transportation-planning/transit-asset-management-roles-responsibilities
- Group Plan Sponsor Workbook
  - https://www.transit.dot.gov/sites/fta.dot.gov/files/2022-02/FTA-TAM-Group-Plan-Sponsor-Workbook-2022_2.pdf
- Group Plan Sponsor Checklist
  - https://www.transit.dot.gov/TAM/gettingstarted/Sponsor_workflow
- Group Plan Participant Checklist
  - https://www.transit.dot.gov/TAM/gettingstarted/GroupPlanParticipant_workflow
- Performance Management Resources
  - https://www.transit.dot.gov/PerformanceManagement
- TAM Performance Measure Fact Sheet
  - https://www.transit.dot.gov/TAM/FTAOutreachMaterials/perfmsrFS
- Transit Asset Management Resource Table
  - https://www.transit.dot.gov/tam/search