

2017 FTA Transit Asset Management Roundtable

On August 28-29, 2017, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) hosted the 7th annual State of Good Repair/Transit Asset Management (TAM) Roundtable event, to discuss TAM practices among transit agencies. There were 135 participants, representing 66 transit agencies, 10 state departments of transportation (DOTs), two metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), the United States Department of Transportation (USDOT), the Transportation Research Board (TRB), the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA), and the American Public Transportation Association (APTA). The Roundtable took place in Cambridge, MA.

This document summarizes the discussion from the agency “round robin” and session discussions. Each of the agencies attending the roundtable event provided a brief update on the status of their agency with regards to TAM, and key issues facing the agency with respect to TAM implementation. Participant responses were based on the following questions:

- What is new related to TAM in your agency in the past year since the Final Rule was published?
- What have been some of your agency’s successes and challenges in the past year?
- What are you most looking forward to/nervous about related to TAM in your agency in the coming year?

Learning Curve for Agency Staff and Boards

A recurring theme in the round robin was how many people were relatively new to their positions (less than a year) working on TAM. There was a mix of people in newly created positions related to TAM – either the first at their agency, or expanded staff related to TAM – and those who were filling existing positions in which the previous person had either left the agency or transitioned to a different role. This indicates both that many agencies are taking TAM and the FTA rule compliance seriously by adding staff, but also that many transit agency staff face a steep learning curve to build staff capacity, and organize agency efforts for TAM both more generally and more specifically for rule compliance.

In addition to new staff, several participants noted new executive and board leadership. One participant noted that the agency has a new Chief Executive Officer, Chief Operating Officer, and much of the Board of Directors is new. This presents opportunities to educate new leaders early about the importance of TAM and how to institutionalize across all agency operations, but can also prove challenging to get the necessary leadership attention and support, when those leaders also need to quickly familiarize themselves on many other important and time sensitive matters.

There was a range among the participants of agencies with dedicated TAM staff, and others for whom it is a collateral duty. Many mentioned the value of having dedicated staff, and feeling that they needed additional support, whether in-house or through consultants.

The discussion of new staff and leadership and other agency reorganizations highlighted the importance of knowledge management within the organization, and to recognize the need to treat staff and their knowledge as a valuable asset. In some agencies where the one person dedicated to TAM has left, the replacement feels as though they are starting from scratch. One participant noted that the TAM

program will outlast everyone who is in the room, highlighting the need to maintain and manage the information and knowledge well.

Educating and Coordinating with All Levels of Agency Staff and Leadership

Regardless of staff and leadership tenure, many agencies highlighted the need for education and coordination both from the “top-down” and “bottom up”. Several agencies mentioned efforts to educate their boards, highlighting how TAM integrates across the entire agency, and is not just a side effort on its own. They also mentioned challenges associated with political desire to expand service and open new lines, and communicating the importance of keeping up with maintenance costs.

Other participants highlighted both challenges and successes educating and coordinating across departments at the staff level. Some had successes with regular outreach to maintenance staff and using the TAM process to articulate investment needs, while others noted resistance from staff in such departments, who may view TAM efforts as overly cumbersome or making more work for them without reaping benefits. One participant highlighted success with internal outreach, holding a daily coffee date with maintenance staff to be sure to understand their needs and reflect them in the TAM plan.

Securing Appropriate Consultant Support for TAM

Some participants noted that they are working with consultants to assist with developing their TAM plans and helping to collect and manage data. Common themes included figuring out the appropriate language to use in RFPs and procurements, and how to ensure that the agency will own and be able to adjust the data. Some agencies mentioned challenges with data currently housed in systems maintained by contractors, and the desire to migrate systems to integrate for TAM.

Coordinating TAM Plan with other Existing Agency Activities

Several participants discussed connections between existing TAM-related activities at the agency, and those needed to comply with FTA requirements. They emphasized that they wanted to make use of existing activities and systems to comply with the FTA requirements, rather than creating duplicative or parallel systems just for rule compliance. Some mentioned hoping to use the TAM requirements as an opportunity to bring together multiple related but disparate activities or systems, thus creating more efficiency within the agency. One participant from a State DOT discussed internal coordination within the agency to align and find commonalities between the asset management plans that the agency needs to develop for both highway and transit assets. Another participant highlighted that the agency will organize its TAM plan as appropriate for its purposes, and provide references or a crosswalk to the TAM rule requirements to demonstrate compliance.

Connecting TAM with Agency Capital Planning

Connecting to agency capital planning decisions is critical to TAM success.

Some agencies mentioned challenges associated with agency funding levels, in particular if they fluctuate from year to year, or do not have strong political support for transit in the region. Other agencies are very busy with major capital projects, which may be good for the agency overall, but still need to maintain the focus on strategic investments to support TAM needs.

A common challenge is balancing the desire for new and expanded service or assets with the need to maintain existing assets. One participant voiced frustration, saying that the agency leadership focuses on the new assets, but does not give sufficient consideration to how they will be used by the customer.

Other agencies mentioned success in communicating these needs among leadership, and that they are able to focus primarily on maintaining existing assets first in their capital planning.

One participant noted that it has been challenging to bring SGR data into the capital planning process, and that needing to comply with the TAM rule requirements has helped to make the case internally to do so. This process has helped to ensure that the agency has sufficient and appropriate data to have a balanced discussion about both new and ongoing funding needs.

A few participants noted recent or upcoming major fleet replacements, and another indicated a need for more information on asset lives and replacement costs, and how to maintain operations while undergoing a major replacement.

Coordination across the Region and the State

Participants discussed issues and experiences with coordinating TAM activities with other agencies, such as other transit agencies in the region, their MPOs, or across the state. One challenge noted was in the case of sister transit agencies in the same region who may share some assets or services, but do not have the same level of maturity regarding TAM or consistent agency policies and practices regarding TAM. These issues may need to be addressed in decisions regarding the shared assets, as well as the coordination with the MPOs in setting regional targets, and the level of data and analysis that is reasonable to expect from all agencies.

An MPO participant noted that they had adopted regional TAM performance targets, but still had questions remaining as to how to update the regional long range plan. A State DOT participant noted challenges associated with a wide range of geography and transit service models across the state, and how to determine the appropriate useful life benchmark across multiple operators and fleets included in the Group TAM Plan.

Data Collection and Management

Data collection, storage, management, and analysis continue to be critical issues for transit agencies in TAM implementation. There are several common themes associated with data:

Collecting and Integrating Data on New Assets

Some agencies mentioned new assets coming online soon, and the need to ensure from that they are collecting correct and comprehensive data on those assets from the beginning. This requires coordinating and aligning with all of the appropriate stakeholders, determining needs, and developing protocols.

Determining the Necessary Data to Collect

Multiple agencies noted the challenge in determining the appropriate data to collect and the appropriate scale. There is a tension between getting everything at once and not having to go back or repeat the process, but also not wanting to waste resources or set unrealistic expectations by collecting data and an overly granular level.

Appropriate Use of Software

Many agencies use advanced software systems such as Enterprise Asset Management (EAM) systems to maintain and analyze a wide range of data related to their capital assets.

Some participants from smaller transit agencies or those newer to TAM noted interest in exploring such systems, but were wary of overly complicating their efforts. At least one mentioned that their current approach of using Microsoft Access databases was mostly sufficient for their purposes. There was interest in seeing the data and format required on the new NTD reporting forms, and whether that would prompt any changes to how they organized data within the agency.

Other agencies noted that they were in the process of upgrading older data systems, and the new functionalities that would become available, such as tracking labor costs and actual costs of assets, and improved data automation.

Several participants noted that they were not sure what system to select and how to write the procurement to get the services that they need. This included adjusting the contract models to ensure that the agency would own and be able to edit the data.

Condition Assessments and Inventorying Assets

Several agencies highlighted progress in developing inventories and conducting condition assessments. Some successes included updating vehicle mileage and ridership data, and completing facility assessments, including the [TAM Facility Performance Measure Reporting Guidebook](#). Others noted challenges with scoring assets and compiling the inventory, or not having yet begun to assess facilities. At least one participant mentioned using consultants to conduct portions of the condition assessments, due to staffing constraints at the agency.

Going Forward

FTA recognizes the value of the holding events that provide an opportunity for transit agency staff to exchange information and ideas in a peer environment. At the Roundtable, transit agency participants noted their appreciation for the opportunity to engage only with other public agencies, and that it continues to be useful to engage with transit agency leadership as well as FTA field staff and leadership on issues related to transit asset management. One positive element of the Roundtable was that many of the FTA staff from regional offices who are designated TAM “[points of contact](#)” were able to attend, providing opportunities for more in-person interaction and to better understand some of the needs in the field.

Participants also noted their desire for more such events, with opportunities for more time to discuss important issues, trainings, tours and field trips, and opportunities to meet with peer agencies as well as hear from those with different characteristics or different levels of maturity related to asset management. FTA continues to use insights gathered and feedback provided from the 2017 Roundtable to help guide development of training and technical assistance materials in general, as well as the [2018 TAM Roundtable](#), which will be held in conjunction with the [TRB 12th National Conference on Transportation Asset Management](#), in July 2018 in San Diego, CA.