2019 FTA Transit Asset Management Multimodal Roundtable

On July 16-18, 2019, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) hosted the first of two 2019 Transit Asset Management (TAM) Roundtable events, to discuss TAM practices among multimodal transit agencies. There were approximately 80 participants, representing 38 transit agencies, six state departments of transportation (DOTs), two metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), the United States Department of Transportation (USDOT), and the American Public Transportation Association (APTA). The Roundtable took place in Baltimore, MD.

This document summarizes the discussion from the agency "round robin" session. Each participant identified as a "newer attendee" or "experienced attendee," based on attendance at previous roundtables.

Participants in the "newer attendees" group discussed the following questions:

- What are you expecting to get out of the roundtable?
- Where is your agency at in terms of meeting your TAM goals/mission?
- Successes of the past year?
- Challenges of the past year?

Participants in the "experienced attendees" group answered the following questions:

- What have you learned over the past year?
- Words of wisdom for newer attendees?
- Successes of the past year?
- Challenges of the past year?

After discussion in small groups, participants reported to the entire group summarizing discussion from their tables. Key themes identified from the exercise were:

- Expectations of Roundtable and Lessons Shared
- Progress Towards TAM Goals
- Gaining Buy-In From Leadership
- Organizational Culture
- Asset Inventories and EAM Systems

Expectations of Roundtable and Lessons Shared

In general, all participants, especially newer participants, wanted to learn more about what other agencies are doing and how they have overcome similar challenges. Specific topics agencies wanted to learn from their peers include how agencies are:

- Capturing and reporting asset data for NTD
- Developing hierarchies for asset definitions
- Completing condition assessments
- Setting goals
- Implementing SGR based on the TAM plan
- Achieving culture change

- Using resources to support the TAM program

More experienced participants shared knowledge on these and other topics. Key recommendations included:

- Establishing good data management standards and practices from the beginning
- Building out a transit asset management program one step at a time
- Establishing TAM buy-in as early as possible
- Making it easy for all staff to incorporate asset management into their work, from the CEO to field staff.
- Determining exact EAM needs before investing.

In addition to peer learning, agencies wanted clarity from FTA on broader questions related to TAM, including:

- The relationship between asset management and safety
- How to best communicate needs to FTA
- The distinction between NTD requirements and TAM plan narratives

Progress towards TAM Goals

Agencies shared their progress towards meeting TAM goals and mission. With a range in how close they felt to achieving their TAM goals, many recognized the challenge of meeting FTA mandates with already limited funding. Several identified completing their TAM plan and achieving compliance as their primary success, and wanted to learn from other agencies how to move into implementation. Some agencies have already seen efficiency improvements in their organizations as a result of working towards their TAM goals. Many agencies shared a desire to increase internal maturity in asset management. One agency suggested that a strategic plan could help agencies with TAM implementation during the four years between plan cycles. Agencies hoped for additional guidance on "what's next" after completing the TAM plan.

Gaining Buy-In From Leadership

Agencies identified the importance of gaining-buy in from across the organization, particularly leadership. Agencies face challenges with limited engagement, with one participant noting that the accountable executive was not a part of quarterly meetings with other senior leadership. Participants noted that asset managers can use data to understand and communicate resources needed to support TAM. They also noted that charters or other binding documents can support accountability from executive leadership. Several agencies increased commitment from their executive leadership, and saw this as one of their most important successes of the past year.

Organizational Culture

Participants identified building TAM culture as a challenge they wanted to learn more about from peers. They wanted to understand how TAM is organized and located in the agency. Agencies are working to better integrate data and plans between various departments. Agencies are also working to shift their culture from a reactive to more proactive, planned approach.

Asset Inventories and EAM Systems

Participants identified the importance of and challenges with data consistency and integration, as well as identifying the data fields needed for asset management. One agency noted that their data was both overwhelming and insufficient. They emphasized the return on investment for gathering specific data points, and recommended focusing on data that supports Federal requirements, lifecycle goals, targets, and fiscal responsibility. Agencies noted the importance of allocating more resources for analyzing data.

Agencies shared the important of considering the functional specifications and purpose desired from an EAM system before buying or developing one. While off-the-shelf systems may not include every feature desired, they are cheaper and place less burden on IT staff. In-house systems are more customized to agency needs but require more time and effort from IT staff. More experienced agencies recommended having policies, procedures, and training complete before implementing the system. Several agencies identified gaining buy-in for and acquiring an EAM system as one of their successes of the past year.

In particular, completing the inventory was both a greatest challenge as well as success once achieved. Several participants noted the need to remain proactive and persistent in developing the TAM inventory. The ultimate goal is to standardize data tracking and improved communication across all departments. For example, agencies want to have a data dictionary or clearer nomenclature standards to maintain consistent definitions and naming conventions across departments. Some agencies can get bogged down by the task of having a completely robust inventory; however, more experienced agencies emphasized starting with what is known and building from there. Multiple agencies noted specific challenges with linear assets.

Additional Successes

- Completed TAM Plan on time
- Publishing TAM Plan in library
- Developing asset management and SGR policies
- Developing asset definitions with input from other departments (finance, engineering)
- Connecting TAM targets to five year capital investment planning horizon
- Submitting NTD data
- Making TAM information accessible on Sharepoint
- Developing a cross-functional asset hierarchy that is consistent across the system
- Developing a risk-based approach, risk management plan, and/or risk register
- Achieving ISO certification
- Identifying assets that were previously unaccounted for

Additional Challenges

- Working with limited funding/resources and determining how best to allocate
- Managing infrastructure assets
- Coordinating TAM and the Safety plan
- Assessing assets on FTA's timelines
- Being proactive, rather than reactive
- Data management and standardization

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. As with previous years, 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.

This was the first year that FTA hosted separate TAM Roundtables for multimodal and bus operators, which allowed for more in-depth discussions with more similar peer agencies, and also provided an opportunity to open registration to more participants from any given agency.

FTA continues to use insights gathered and feedback provided from the 2019 Roundtables to help guide development of training and technical assistance materials in general, as well as increasing opportunities to bring peer agencies together to share knowledge and experiences.