

2019 FTA Transit Asset Management Bus-Focused Roundtable

On September 4-5, 2019, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) hosted the second of two [2019 Transit Asset Management \(TAM\) Roundtable events](#), to discuss TAM practices among transit agencies. The September Roundtable was designed for smaller Tier I and Tier II agencies that do not operate rail, and focused on fundamental issues related to TAM implementation. There were 71 participants, representing 33 transit agencies, 3 state departments of transportation (DOTs), 1 metropolitan planning organization (MPO), the United States Department of Transportation (USDOT), and the American Public Transportation Association (APTA). The Roundtable took place in St. Louis, Missouri.

This document summarizes the discussion from the agency “round robin” session. Each of the agencies attending the roundtable event provided a brief update on the status of their agency with regard to TAM, and key issues facing the agency with respect to TAM implementation. Participant responses were based on the following question: what should we know about your TAM program (recent success or what's next for your agency)?

For many agencies, discussion seemed to center around the following issues:

- TAM and Capital Investment Plans
- TAM and Investment Prioritization
- Decision-Making Support Tools
- Coordination
- Organizational Culture
- Oversight Reviews

Opportunities, Challenges, and Next Steps

TAM and Capital Investment Plans

Some participants reported success in using information from condition assessment reports to inform agency capital investment plans. They were able to use the information to determine replacement needs and monitor state of good repair (SGR) of their assets and in some cases, this led to better investment decision-making and cost savings.

Several agencies discussed focusing on developing a more accurate asset scoring system to help improve procurement plans. Some are including criteria like useful life, mileage, and condition in the scoring system. Other agencies are using more mature financial modeling techniques to better understand and forecast replacement needs. One agency emphasized the importance of considering current budgets and forecasted future funds when planning for upcoming needs, and ensuring that funding decisions be data driven.

TAM and Investment Prioritization

As many agencies work to update their investment prioritization practices, more are starting to use more sophisticated approaches, including considerations such as vehicle year, vehicle condition, and cost of replacement versus rehabilitation. One participant noted that their agency is required to use performance-based allocation for funding received from the State. The agency is integrating that practice into the TAM program to consider SGR (based on mileage and age), project type, and major

expansion or minor enhancement, to decide how to prioritize spending on maintenance, rehabilitation, and replacement of assets.

Decision-Making Support Tools

Many agencies expressed an interest in utilizing more formal tools for asset related decision-making. One participant noted that their goal is to move from the current database systems in Excel and Access to a more comprehensive system with the ability to easily extract data. They listed using TERM lite as a possibility. Some agencies are starting to consider more advanced tools, such as enterprise asset management (EAM) systems, to manage asset data and better inform prioritization and decision-making processes. However, EAM systems require a significant amount of data; one participant shared that instead of an EAM system, their agency is using a statewide ranking system and are currently developing a tablet application for condition assessments.

Coordination

Participants highlighted the value of good working relationships and communication across various stakeholder levels. They talked about the value of strong internal coordination within agencies, including among different departments (e.g., planning, finance, and operations) and highlighted the need for additional coordination when working with operations contractors. Some also stressed the importance of strong collaboration and establishing a common understanding of TAM and its related roles and responsibilities with MPO partners.

The Roundtable included participants from both Group Plan Sponsor and Group Plan Participant agencies. Representatives from both types of agencies stressed the need for clear guidance and expectations from Group Plan Sponsors and the need for attention to detail and compliance from Group Plan Participants, particularly in providing data in the requested format to Sponsors. Some Group Plan Sponsors also mentioned challenges with inconsistent scoring systems for condition assessment among participants.

Organizational Culture

Gaining buy-in for TAM at all levels remains a challenge for a number of agencies. Some participants noted that they are still struggling to get executive level decision makers on board with the benefits of TAM, and this can create barriers for TAM plan implementation. Others highlighted challenges with others at the staff level understanding the importance of TAM, how it can lead to a better functioning agency, and potentially have a positive impact on their role. Some agencies find this particularly challenging because they do not have a dedicated TAM program manager – for many it is a collateral duty in addition to already demanding positions.

Agencies that have had success in developing a TAM culture shared that it's vital to understand that executive level approval is just as important as acceptance and support from operations and maintenance staff. In their experience, to create a team environment, everyone that impacts TAM at an agency should be engaged and encouraged to get involved and invested. One participant discussed a strategy to start with maintenance personnel and work with them to identify processes that integrate other departments. They determined that the maintenance inventory directly relates to other

departments like finance and grants, and created a connection between those groups. That partnership was the start of building their TAM team at the agency.

Oversight Reviews

The FY19 Comprehensive Oversight Reviews included TAM for the first time. Some agencies at the Roundtable had completed their reviews without any clarification needed, and some had minor deficiencies. Other agencies preparing for their reviews were feeling positive because they had used the existing resources to guide the development of their TAM Plans, though some felt some apprehension given that it would be the first time they were evaluated on TAM.

Additional Successes from Individual Agencies

- Completing 4-year project to inventory all facilities
- Successfully completing 50% assessment of assets and SGR report. Now moving forward with changes to performance targets.
- Reducing headway to less than 10 minutes and increasing service frequency with 41 new buses. Next, will implement enterprise project management software and EAM program.
- Currently deploying CAD AVL system and planning a new facility in the next five years.

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.