

## AASHTO LEGISLATIVE ENGAGEMENT AND OUTREACH PROJECT

The purpose of this research was to evaluate AASHTO's current methods of Congressional engagement and outreach, and to develop recommendations for improvement. While AASHTO is known for credible technical assistance to the House and Senate, the goals of this research were to:

- Expand regular engagement with committees that are not transportation-oriented
- Expand regular engagement with individual member offices
- Seek specific input from the Transportation Policy Forum to determine how best AASHTO can serve as a legislative resource to state DOTs

### APPROACH

To complete this project state department of transportation (DOT) officials from six states were interviewed as well as internal AASHTO staff. Engineering and policy staff were interviewed to understand their interaction with committee members and Congressional offices. The participants provided anonymous comments and suggestions which contributed to the recommendations for this project. Unfortunately, due to time constraints, we were unable to meet with intended Congressional staff and committees.

### FINDINGS

This section outlines findings and insight from internal staff and state DOTs noted during the interviews.

- State DOTs noted they were happy with the current status of the AASHTO policy teams. It was noted the new leadership has made great strides and they feel very welcome to call Joung or Jim if there are policy concerns.
- More clarity on AASHTO's legislative role. It was noted that AASHTO's role in the legislative outreach is ambiguous. The policy and engineering offices have differing opinions and perspectives on their role in providing comments to federal register. There is a clear divide among staff on AASHTO's role as a technical expert or a transportation advocate.
- DOT staff requested more diverse representation when AASTHO meets with White House or Congressional staff and the need for representation from blue and red states.
- Some committees and have asked for more information on AASHTO's Congressional work. There is a desire from some committees to be more involved on policy outreach.
- The policy roles of Jim and Joung need to be more defined. State DOTs are unsure who to call when they had policy questions.
- Committee members noted they would like more informational sessions with AASHTO and updates on notable projects. They noted they only hear from AASHTO when there is a specific policy issue but they would like more on-going communication.

- Many DOTs rely on their lobbying staff in DC on federal issues but would like to know more on what other state DOTs are finding and any challenges that they are undergoing. DOTs noted that they hear of meetings that AASHTO conducted but would like the opportunity to know how these are translating with Hill staff.
- A desire from AASHTO staff to be more proactive in policy and with Congressional offices.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following section outlines recommendations to improve the Congressional outreach within AASHTO.

### For AASHTO Members

- **Schedule conference call/webinar/podcast led by AASHTO to provide policy updates to state DOT government affairs staff.** A weekly call was mentioned as a way to communicate Congressional happenings. The informational can be led by policy team members that had any Congressional interactions that week.
- **Schedule meet and greets with specific Congressional committees.** Establish a more proactive approach with Congressional staff to share updates from state DOTs or updates on specific policy areas especially in preparation for the 2018 congressional midterms.
- **Plan committee fly-ins for Hill meetings to convey specific policy issues.** Many committees have expressed an interest in Hill meetings to share policy concerns for their specific committee. AASHTO staff would be present to assist in messaging.
- **Establish a “community of practice” for state DOT government affairs staff to discuss on-going policy issues at the state, local and federal level.** Many government affairs staff expressed the desire to establish their own committee to meet with other DOTs to discuss on-going issues.

### For AASHTO Staff

- **Establish a process for informing AASHTO staff on comment periods and submitting comment letters to the federal registry.** Staff noted that there is not a clear process to inform their committee members on upcoming comment periods. They noted that there had been missed opportunities for their members to provide comments and for AASHTO to lead the effort.
- **Provide more insight on congressional issues during the weekly policy meeting that could impact the policy team and their committees.**
- **Create a database of Congressional hill meetings.** Staff will input meeting information, action items and overall feedback to keep the policy team informed.
- **Schedule prep meetings for AASHTO staff prior to Congressional meetings.** Staff expressed interest in meeting with Kathy Ruffalo to gain more insight on the purpose and goal of the Congressional meeting so they can better engage with Congressional staff.