SDDOT 2006 Statewide Customer Satisfaction Assessment
Study SD2006-03

Appendix G
Internal Stakeholder Summary Report

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Overview

ETC Institute conducted one-on-one interviews with members of the Executive Team on May 31- June 1, 2006. The purpose of the senior manager interviews was to gather input about a wide range of issues related to SDDOT’s external customer survey, including the following:

- Perceived Value of the Survey
- Expectations for the Customer Survey
- How Executive Team Members Rate the State’s Transportation System
- How the Quality of the State’s Transportation System Is Changing
- What the Executive Team Thinks SDDOT Does Best
- What the Executive Team Think the Department’s Customers Would Say that SDDOT Does BEST?
- How the Executive Team Thinks SDDOT Can Improve
- Questions the Executive Team Would Like to Ask Residents On the Survey
- Questions the Executive Team Would Like to Ask Other Groups
- Suggestions to Make the Results of the Survey More Meaningful

A total of thirteen members of the Executive Team were interviewed. Most of the interviews were conducted in Pierre as face-to-face meetings. The interviews with the Regional Engineers in Aberdeen and Rapid City were conducted by phone. The names and titles of those interviewed are provided below.

- Laura Schoen – Director of Communications
- Darin Bergquist – Director of Operations
- Tim Borneberg – Project Development Engineer
- Kevin Goeden – Bridge Design Engineer
- Joel Jundt – Rapid City Operations Engineer
- Peggy Laurenz – Human Resources
- Judy Payne – Secretary
- Roxanne Rice – Director of Management & Budget
- Loren Schaefer – Director of Planning & Engineering
- Todd Seaman – Rapid City Region Engineer
- Jeff Senst – Aberdeen Region Engineer
- Kevin Tveidt – Deputy Secretary
- Thomas Week – Mitchell Region Engineer
- Tom Johnson – Pierre Region Engineer

This report contains a summary of the one-on-one interviews. The information from the internal interviews will be used to develop questions for the focus groups that will be conducted during the second week of July 2006.
Perceived Value and Expectations of the External Survey

Every member of the Executive Team indicated that they thought the External Customer Survey was a valuable process for the South Dakota Department of Transportation. Some expectations of the survey that were mentioned by members of the Executive Team included the following:

- We need to share and be open with the survey results.
- The survey needs to address various safety issues so improvements can be made.
- I would like to see this survey, like the last, provide us with a clear picture of what our priorities should be.
- We need to gather information that can easily feed our performance measure on the dashboard.
- The only expectation I have is that we get an accurate assessment of customer satisfaction.
- It is important that the survey results are used as a decision making tool.
- Results from the survey should be easily incorporated into the new business systems.
- I expect the data to be an accurate indicator of met and unmet needs, and should suggest areas for improvement.
- The survey needs to differentiate between State and County/City roads so respondents are only assessing roads that are SDDOT responsibilities.
- We need to study the survey results and take appropriate actions.
- It is important that we obtain an exceptional demographic mix of respondents.
- I expect the customer satisfaction survey to present us with opportunities for improvement.
- It is important for us to assess our performance through these customer satisfaction surveys. I expect us to use the data to influence our strategies.
- I would like the survey to assess the perceptions of the customers because that helps us define the strategic direction of our programs.
How Executive Team Members Rate the State’s Transportation System

Every member of the Executive Team rated the State’s Transportation system as good or excellent. Some of the reasons that members of the Executive Team gave their ratings are provided below:

- Opportunities exist to improve our road, rail, air and water transportation services. However, given our limited resources, we have a very good system.

- Our pavement management operations are excellent.

- We provide great services with limited funds.

- We are providing services at the same level or above most other states.

- We are continually working to improve the quality of roads we provide.

- The department establishes rational priorities. Our leadership is great.

- Our winter snow removal operations are among the best in the country.

- Our transportation system is good, compared to other states I have seen.

- We are able to provide good quality services that effectively meet the needs of our customers with a budget far less than other states.

- Our STIP processes are great.

- Our transportation system is good. However, we are a long ways from excellent. We need to sustain the same level of maintenance that we have worked so hard to build.

- We need to be doing some necessary maintenance but our funding/budget won’t allow us.

How the Quality of the State’s Transportation System Is Changing

Compared to five years ago, most of the Executive Team thought the quality of the State’s Transportation system had improved. Some of the reasons that members of the Executive Team thought the quality of the State’s transportation system was getting better are provided below:

- Although I think it’s better, it is difficult to determine how much we have improved…that’s why this survey is necessary.
• We have gotten better overtime but that improvement will be hard to sustain because funds are decreasing.

• I lack specific evidence showing major improvement or deterioration of the system.

• We have definitely improved based on our condition ratings.

• Our expansion of services that we provide has created a lot of improvement over the past few years.

• Construction zone operations have been improved and are now much more user friendly.

• Employees are more connected and are taking ownership of their responsibilities which in turn has improved the DOT.

• Overall our highways and structures have improved but we still continue to have staffing issues.

• Maintenance operations have stayed relatively the same over the years.

• We have improved in many areas but the most significant improvement has been our resurfacing operations.

• Construction safety has improved dramatically. We still are struggling with our resurfacing though.

• We have made quality equipment investment decisions which has increased productivity and reduced downtime.

• The number of overlays we have completed has definitely improved our roads.

What Executive Team Members Think SDDOT Does Best

Winter Snow Removal Operations was mentioned as a strength of the DOT by most members of the Executive Team who were interviewed. Other items that were mentioned as strengths included the following:

• One of our biggest strengths is pavement management.

• We have quality engineers that manage money/cost of operations extremely well.

• The guys we have out in the field are much better than any other state.
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- We respond to customer needs quickly and to their satisfaction.
- The quality of work provided by our research department is recognized nationally.
- We are proactive when removing snow and treating roads before/after storms.
- DOT does many things to solicit public input about proposed projects.
- It is obvious that we balance and prioritize funds rationally.
- Our winter operations are probably the biggest strength we have.
- Road maintenance strategies are top notch. We have some of the finest roads in the country.
- We conduct extensive research studies before changes are made.
- Given our states unique population, we are very good at providing the right amount of transit services.
- We do a great job of removing snow in the winter. We get very few complaints.
- The field guys are very hard workers and take pride in their work, they live and breathe it!
- Our main line striping techniques are very good.
- Signage is used the right way in our state.
- We have worked with the public and adjacent property owners to make decisions on how roads should be built with the least inconvenience.
- Enforcing traffic control standards and sign policies are things we do very well.
- Snow removal on our highways is done quickly, efficiently, and effectively.
- We do not allow snow storms to stop our customers from traveling. We get the roads cleared quickly and provide a safe surface for our users.
- Our construction programs are very high quality.
- Resurfacing and scraping operations have improved and are now a real strength with in our organization.
Winter maintenance and snow removal are what we do the best.

The 511 and communication services we provide are very informative and useful.

Our winter operations are outstanding!

We have good quality employees who care about what they do. Also, our leaders make good decisions.

The maintenance services we provide are very good.

Winter operations are great because during the winter season we have a good number of employees dedicated solely to snow and ice removal.

Expand our highway system to keep up with traffic demands.

What the Executive Team Thinks the Department’s Customers Would Say SDDOT Does BEST?

General Public

I think the public would say that our winter road maintenance is very good.

From what I’ve heard, the public is extremely satisfied with the 511 program.

We do a good job removing snow in the winter, informing them about road conditions, informing them about construction and maintenance that will affect them, and being responsive to their needs.

The general public here in South Dakota have high expectations and I would think our customers would say that we do a great job at meeting their expectations.

They would say that we are responsive to their local needs.

The general public is very impressed with snow removal and the overall maintenance of our roads.

Generally people think we do a great job removing snow. Especially in rural areas.

Most of them would say that we communicate well and provide them with the information that pertains to them.

I think for the most part they are satisfied with winter maintenance.
• I would like to think that they are pleased with signs and striping here in South Dakota.

• Snow removal is generally good. We have had severe snow storms that cause interstate closings but most of the public understands.

• We have had a lot of positive feedback regarding snow removal.

• I know that they are very happy with the 511 services we provide.

• Everyone loves the great online information (Safe Travel USA) we provide when construction is under way.

• Some special interest groups are concerned with the number of fatalities.

• The stakeholders from past focus groups have had positive comments towards the DOT.

• Political groups have hurt our efforts and seem to talk just to be heard.

How Executive Team Members Think SDDOT Can Improve

When asked where the Department needed to improve most, members of the Executive Team offered a diverse set of responses. Some of the items that were mentioned as areas for improvement are listed below.

• Safety improvements need to be made to reduce fatalities.

• Pavement management could be improved by researching different types of materials that are used.

• We need to do a better job training and mentoring so leadership can grow.

• Internal processes and procedures can always be improved, no matter how good we are doing.

• I don’t think communication is up to par with other states.

• We need to focus on the timeliness of projects and completing projects relative to public expectations.

• Safety related issues are a definite concern with our DOT.
• Our roads are good, quality roads but are not the safest.

• We do a below average job of educating the people on what exactly we can and can’t do.

• Communicate clearer expectations/vision to all DOT employees.

• Accurately estimate costs in long range plans so adequate funds will be budgeted.

• Debris removal on roads and ditches are two complaints I hear all the time.

• Educating and communicating project plans, timelines, etc. with the public.

• We need to do a better job of planning construction jobs that are more convenient for adjacent property owners, etc.

• We need to focus on system preservation instead of expansion because funds are decreasing.

• Environmental concerns such as spill prevention, erosion control, etc. always need to be developed.

• Continue improving the communication with the public. It is important that they are aware of what exactly is going on in their area.

• Some of our highways are not the smoothest.

• We need to conduct additional long term cost analysis on resurfacing versus new construction.

• Animal and debris removal are growing concerns with the public.

• Continue to improve snow removal techniques, we shouldn’t be satisfied with the service we currently provide.

• We have to do a better job of rewarding our employees or we will loose quality people.
Questions the Executive Team Would Like To Ask on the Survey

Members of the Executive Team were asked if they could think of any questions they would like to ask on this year’s survey. Some of the types of information they said they would be interested in learning for the 2006 survey are listed below.

- Various questions regarding striping satisfaction.
- How well are we communicating with the public?
- How would you prefer to get information about the DOT?
- Do you attend public meetings?
- Is the information provided by 511 services useful?
- Are the 511 services useful to you?
- Questions regarding dynamic message signs.
- Were you satisfied with how construction work zones were planned?
- What should our investment priorities be?
- Should we widen existing roads or build new road networks?
- What areas need the most attention? What should receive the most money?
- Are you willing to give up certain services in order to make others better?
- Do you think we are spending money wisely? Why or why not?
- What is your level of satisfaction with various safety issues?
- Were SDDOT employees helpful, courteous, and knowledgeable?
- Were we responsive to your needs?
- Do you think we should be snow plowing 24 hrs/ day? If yes, are you willing to pay more to do so?
- Do you believe it is a better investment to expand existing roads or build new ones?
- Questions regarding the trade-off of various services
• Are we communicating and providing the information that is important to you?

• How would you like us to provide information (i.e. TV, newspaper, etc.)?

• Different types of benchmark questions.

• Do you know exactly what DOT responsibilities include?

• What should DOT responsibilities be?

• What should be upcoming priorities to focus on?

• Are you satisfied with the services we provide? How important are the various services we provide to you?

• What improvements can we make?

• In the future, how should highways be funded (increased gas tax, etc.)?

• Nothing specific just make sure the questions asked allow us to track our progress

• Are we using message boards correctly?

• Should we schedule construction around motorcycle rallies to reduce congestion and increase safety?

• Are truckers satisfied with the automated services we provide?

• Are the drive through truck services satisfactory?

Suggestions to Make the Results of the Survey More Meaningful

Members of the Executive Team were asked if they could think of some ideas that would make the survey results more meaningful. Some of their suggestions included:

• The survey should be designed to fit our strategic measures such as the dashboard.

• It would be great if the same questions were asked so that we could track the changes in our performance.

• Make the report easy for “non researchers” to understand.
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- Benchmarks would be useful so we can see where we stack up against other states.
- Nothing, as long as the survey results are accurate performance indicators.
- It would be useful if we could gather data reflecting the public’s views on budgeting and funding.
- We need to make sure we use the results as a part of our dashboard so that we can base decisions off of it.
- Activity based budgeting information would be helpful.
- Trend data will be extremely useful. We need to continue to do this survey because it allows us to track our performance. Also, it gives us another resource to use when developing strategic plans.
- The data needs to line up with some of our performance measures.

**Potential Barriers or Obstacles of the External Survey**

Some of the Executive Team members expressed concern with various barriers or obstacles that could impact the implementation of recommendations from the survey. Some of the possible difficulties that could be encountered are listed below:

- State legislators can be obstacles, no matter what we do.
- How or if to publicize survey findings.
- It is important that we are not to generic.
- We need to design a very detailed survey that is easy to understand so the public can complete it relatively easy with minimal mistakes.
- A huge obstacle is informing the public so they understand the survey is not politically charged.
- Funding issues may be an obstacle because I am sure we will be criticized by a few people for using funds on a survey instead of maintenance, resurfacing, etc.
- Lack of “follow through” action by DOT management.
Views About Promoting the Customer Satisfaction Survey

Most members of the Executive Team thought it would be a good idea to promote awareness about the survey. Some of the comments on this topic are listed below:

- Definitely, it is a great idea to promote the customer satisfaction survey
- It is a good idea to publicize the survey.
- I think we should promote the survey to get maximum participation
- We should let the public know about the survey.
- It is better that we publicize so more people feel comfortable participating
- It is very important that we publicize the fact that we are doing a customer satisfaction survey, it will build good will with them

Other Comments

At the end of the interview, members of the Executive Team were asked if there were any other comments they would like to make. These comments are provided below.

- I would like to exclude special interest groups from participating in this survey.
- Nothing really, I am just anxious to see the results. This is going to make our lives a lot easier.
- In the past the customer surveys have been interesting and helpful. I look forward to the results.
- I look forward to reviewing the results and having another important tool available to us.