DOT FIRST IN HIGH URBAN STATES

In approaching the subject one must ask, “Do you really want a state DOT?” Assuming you do, good luck on your deliberations. A state DOT might be the best means of solving transportation problems in your state. It really depends on how your state is constituted, how urban it is, and what transportation problems you have.

As of late 1976 we have in the 50 states 33 established DOT’s, four under development and four in the process of being under study. It is significant that all of the states that do not have DOT’s do not have a concentration of urban areas and are chiefly concerned with rural highway problems.

DOT—GENERAL PHILOSOPHIES

What should a state DOT do? Where would one seek for guidance in answering this question? Perhaps we should look at what the federal government has set forth as its philosophy. Perhaps that might be adapted for state use. If we go along with the federal government, we might want to develop: “State transportation policies and programs that would provide for the fast, safe, efficient, and convenient transportation at the lowest cost and consistent with the other objectives including the efficient utilization and conservation of resources.”

I believe personally that the objective is to assure a coordinated, integrated, and effective approach to transportation. A state DOT should provide leadership in identifying and solving transportation problems. As an alternate to this, most states, because they are so dependent on federal funds and by a lack of funding for any state program, find themselves carrying out the federal government’s program. Program emphasis, of course, goes where the federal government puts its money.
MANY ASPECTS TO CONSIDER IN PLANNING DOT

In organizing your state DOT, you should answer questions such as how broad should your scope be? How autonomous do you want it to be? What checks and balances? Who is it to report to? How is it organized? How do you group the traditional and perhaps nontraditional functions. What about the various modes?

More importantly, administrators thinking of sponsoring a DOT must be concerned with how it can be sold politically. One must keep in mind just exactly what actually can be pushed through the legislature.

It must be observed at this time that most state DOT’s are still modified and patched up highway departments. Most state DOT’s are still groping to see what their role in total transportation should be. And this is bound to hold for the short range as well as the medium range. Now there is certainly nothing wrong in my opinion with this approach because the majority of travel is via highway and the private auto does still prevail.

DOT ORGANIZATIONAL MAKE-UP

In looking at DOT’s we should realize that they come in all shapes and sizes. They may or may not concern themselves with the various modes. Let’s analyze one to see how it works or should work. Well, all DOT’s must have certain functions. These include matters such as administration, finance, maintenance, planning, operations, and things of this nature. Or as I sometimes term it, getting work done which includes the preconstruction, the construction, and the after construction functions.

All DOT’s have someone they must report to or who is their boss. This is usually a governor or someone or some people that he controls by virtue of having the appointment power. There are two general DOT types. One is the type where the governor has a professional secretary responsible to him, and the other type is where the governor appoints a board, perhaps for staggered terms, and the board or commission looks out for the running of the DOT.

No matter how it is organized, management philosophy, whether it is properly or nonproperly applied, must eventually prevail. Work simply must get done.

Professionalism and Politics

In analyzing the two types, one type has the governor as the head, then a commission or board which has a secretary or director to handle the various functions. This type in my opinion leaves more room for
politics—see Figure 1. The other type, which has the governor appoint a professional secretary or perhaps a political secretary, leaves more room for professionalism—see Figure 2.

A DOT secretary must be a good professional, and it would be well if he were a good politician. It is unusual to find both in one man as these characteristics are diametrically opposed. PR men are not good engineers, and engineers are not good PR men. However, you might want both in your department, and there is some merit to this idea. The organizational chart (Figure 3) indicates this. This type has a political secretary with a highly qualified professional deputy. The political secretary is concerned with matters such as relations with the governor and how he wants the thrust of the department developed, relations with the media, the legislative program, and of course, communication with people. The professional deputy in turn worries about matters such as management, consultant selection, getting work done, and operations.

FUNDAMENTALS OF MANAGEMENT

Regardless of how the organization is determined the fundamentals of management must apply. Management can be approached in many
ways. I have listed what I call four basics: communications, basic rules, physical meetings, and “bypass surgery”. What do I mean by these?
Communications

Well, I think we all know what communications is. It is both horizontal and vertical in nature and must be constantly done and is the cause of most things that go wrong in any organization. You simply cannot communicate too much or too effectively.

Basic Rules

One must have basic work rules when dealing with state merit systems. The employees must know when they are to begin and end work, and there must be certain basic rules or behavior, salary, retirement, and things of this nature. These should be pretty well spelled out and known to everyone.

Meetings

It is very important to have structured meetings on a periodic basis. A few secretaries I know have a weekly meeting with their department heads, usually at the start of the week to get the week off right and perhaps a monthly or bimonthly meeting with such people as district engineers and other heads of departments for more formalized communication. A well structured agenda is a key to success. Also there is the visitation to outlying units of the department in physical meetings to get the word across to them and to also receive input.

"Bypass Surgery"

"Bypass surgery" in this case indicates structuring meetings so that subordinates who are not usually recognized by the secretary or the top brass have the opportunity to present themselves, their ideas, and work so that the higher echelon of management structure has some idea of what is being developed below them, matters that they do not ordinarily see. Examples of this would be a key person giving the results of an environmental study or a unique planning study that might be going on in one of the urban areas.

QUALIFIED PERSONNEL REQUIRED

Of course, we all know that good management begins at the top. Qualifications should be clearly enunciated. You should get a person that most nearly fulfills the qualifications. Continuity should be provided because the chosen person simply isn’t going to be there all the time and someone is going to have to carry on after he leaves. The top manager must have complete authority to see that planning, administration, development, execution, and operations will be performed
in the department. And in turn the subunit managers are going to have to have the authority to get things done, but must also realize that they must communicate with the other divisions and must report upward to the boss.

FINANCE AND MULTI-YEAR CONSTRUCTION PLANS

If I were organizing a DOT at this time I would probably use finance as my basis. I would organize the department around the budget functions such as the five-year or multi-year construction plan, maintenance plan, etc., and go on a cash flow basis getting the most cash to spend now out of the process. I would certainly concentrate on construction lettings since they have the most visibility. If lettings are done right, it has been found that most of the good things that DOT’s want will happen soon.

INDIANA—DESIGN DOT TO NEEDS

For me to outline an ideal department of transportation and expect it to fit and function in your state would be like trying to dictate one dress design and expect all the women in Lafayette to wear it. Needless to say, it would be impossible to fit all of their tastes or figures.

Once upon a time we seriously considered a dress code for women employees of the Florida Department of Transportation. When the rising hemlines on the mini-skirts reached a maximum of distraction, we then circulated a questionnaire and found out that about 25% were opposed to mini-skirts, 25% were opposed to midis, 25% were opposed to maxis, and about 25% were also opposed to pantsuits. That totaled 100%. And in fear they would wear nothing, we abandoned the whole plan. We figured each knew their own taste, their own figure, their own needs and demands so we let them dress accordingly. And we can say the same thing about your proposed department of transportation. You know your own taste, your own needs, and your own demands. So you should design your DOT accordingly.

CONCLUSION

As a concluding note—one of our more shapely secretaries showed up in a red blouse, a white mini-skirt and a blue blazer, and she had stars in her eyes. At first I did not know what to do. Finally I saluted and then retreated. Maybe you will want to do the same. Good Luck!!