

STRATEGIC PLAN

The Transportation Research Board's Travel Survey Methods Committee (ABJ40)

30 July 2007

MISSION:

The mission of the TRB Travel Survey Methods Committee is to advance the capabilities of public and private organizations and their leaders through the effective design and deployment of travel related surveys. This includes identifying effective sample frames and sampling techniques, question structure and format, supporting technologies, and opportunities for knowledge sharing across a wide range of transportation users and contexts.

SCOPE:

The Travel Survey Methods committee focuses on all types of transportation modes and customers, including motorized and non-motorized travel, personal and freight travel, household and business travel, private and public modes, short- and long-distance travel, workplace and recreational travel, visitor and other travel. The committee's scope encompasses survey design, sampling, instrument development, data collection, data processing, data analysis, and reporting of results to enhance the quality, usefulness and cost-effectiveness of survey products for policy and planning, including project evaluation and systems forecasting. It also includes surveys and data collection that measure activity patterns, including telecommunications, that allow people to fulfill needs without physical travel.

ACTIVITIES:

The committee's scope is extensive, so subcommittee activities facilitate focus while helping ensure depth in committee contributions. Current subcommittees emphasize the following areas:

- Freight surveys – to understand goods movement, within and across regions, by industry sector and mode;
- Household travel surveys – to appreciate trends and preferences, and anticipate urban futures for use in regional planning endeavors;
- New technologies – to determine how emerging technologies can improve survey quality (by reducing sample bias, respondent burden, and item non-response, while improving data accuracy);
- Stated response surveys – to facilitate use of complex choice scenarios for more reliable behavioral models and more accurate response forecasting;
- Transit surveys – to enhance our understanding of existing and potential transit users, their behavior, attitudes, and opinions.

In addition to subcommittee activities, members maintain an informative website and produce quarterly newsletters, which help ensure dialogue and timely distribution of relevant information. A paper review coordinator and team manage the annual meeting's paper review process, including session organization for presentation and publication (in the *Transportation Research Record* series) of recent, valuable research in travel survey methods.

GOALS:

A long-standing committee goal remains improvements in the quality and usefulness of transportation surveys conducted at the local, state, and national levels. To this end, identification of current and coming research needs within the field of travel survey methods is an important objective. Many challenges exist, in the form of budget limitations, declining response rates, and the emergence of more demanding models of travel behavior. Opportunities also exist, in the form of new technologies (including price reductions in

GPS, growing Internet access, and greater use of automatic vehicle identification [AVI]). To better ensure that such data are assembled, understood and put to good use, adequate training is also imperative. The committee seeks to promote adequate opportunities for the continuing professional development of survey designers and data set users, as well as training of new persons in these roles.

To fulfill its objectives, the committee and its friends are dedicated to developing an understanding of the types of questions and analytical problems that need to be addressed by users of transportation survey data (including behavioral analysts, planners and policy makers). The committee membership consists of active survey experts from local, state, and national transportation agencies and businesses, from around the globe. Productive liaisons and continuing communications with other TRB committees, transportation-oriented agencies, and experts in the U.S. and abroad facilitate this quest. The committee recognizes that a diverse, engaged, and informed committee membership is required to successfully function in the role of stimulating research on survey methods and disseminating research results to improve the conduct of transportation surveys.

GENERAL STRATEGIES:The committee's Action Plan (shown below) pivots off several general strategies. These are active communication of committee interests, identifying and addressing research needs, and distributing such research.

Regular **interaction** with survey experts and data users from around the world, including committee members and friends, ensures active collaboration and dissemination of new techniques and opportunities. These activities include partnering with members of groups like the American Statistical Association (ASA), International Association of Travel Behavior Researchers (IATBR), the International Steering Committee on Travel Surveys (ISCTS), and the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR). Interaction occurs through conference attendance, listserv participation, and other means. Useful information from these interactions is included in the committee's high-quality quarterly newsletters. Along with other relevant news and documents, these newsletters are highlighted at the committee's user-friendly, informative website (www.travelsurveymethods.org), and regular emails to all friends and members (by the committee chair, secretary and other committee leaders). Such engagements provide an environment where interested parties freely suggest and organize special workshops and panel sessions, pursue relevant Calls for Papers, and ensure that the travel survey needs and interests of the larger transportation community are met.

A major mission of TRB committees is the **identification and cultivation of critical research needs**. Recently, TRB leadership identified the need for a Research Needs Statement database (<http://rns.trb.org>), to facilitate new research through well-defined questions and some direction in key topic areas. A research agenda allows a structured and prioritized listing of existing and emerging research issues, each of which will be discussed at a level of detail that adequately and specifically articulates its purpose to practitioners, academics, and policy makers. The Travel Survey Methods committee is pursuing this presently, and expects to provide a wide array of top topics, to be updated annually. Likely topics include the following: (1) survey participation and non-response, (2) technologies for improving data quality, (3) mixed-mode data collection issues, (4) mixed-frame sampling issues, (5) the changing legislative and regulatory environment for surveys, and (6) survey data privacy and confidentiality. Top topics will be periodically fleshed out for pursuit of more formal sponsorship opportunities, under TRB's Cooperative Research Programs and other funding programs.

The committee also pursues top talent for presentation at the Annual and other TRB-sponsored meetings. The chair and sub-committee chairs solicit and review papers on transportation surveys for TRB publication and presentation, the committee organizes technical panel and **paper sessions** on transportation surveys at annual and mid-year TRB meetings and actively seeks to co-sponsor sessions on related topics. Committee members and friends collaborate with complementary committees to pursue

sessions on topics of joint interest, and support research distribution at other venues (such as IATBR, ISCTS, and ASA meetings).

ACTION PLAN

Strategy 1: Maintain excellent communication with subcommittee leadership and committee members and friends, from around the world.

Annual Actions:

- Newsletter, annual and summer meetings, regular emails soliciting feedback, ideas and contributions from all committee members and friends.
- Regular interaction with members of related organizations, like IATBR, ISCTS, AAPOR and ASA, as well as other TRB committees, to become aware of and disseminate new ideas, develop new conferences and workshops, pursue new research endeavors, and so forth.

2007/2008 Actions:

- In addition to the above-mentioned activities, this summer's July meeting in Chicago includes review of the draft Strategic Plan.

Strategy 2: Define transportation research needs in the field of survey methods and advocate for innovative, valuable research.

Annual Actions:

- Review and update the committee's research needs statements, in order to maintain and active and current list of topics on-line, via TRB's publicly available database.
- Cultivate research needs awareness among federally-supported University Transportation Centers (UTCs) in order to promote travel survey methods research endeavors. Establish working relationships between researchers (faculty and students) and committee members and friends (interested experts in various topics) to facilitate such research.

2007/2008 Actions:

- Develop these statements and submit for committee member review, formally at the July 2007 meeting in Chicago and informally by all members and friends on their own time. Lisa Aultman-Hall to post the top 10 to 20 of these statements on-line by August 2007.

Strategy 3: Solicit research results and review technical papers on transportation surveys for presentation and publication.

Annual Actions:

- Release Calls for Papers in May of each year. Develop panel sessions on key topics. Organize special workshops, as needed, to take place Sunday before annual meeting. Create and sponsor TRB sessions on transportation surveys at annual and mid-year TRB meetings and actively seek to co-sponsor sessions on related topics.
- Alert members and friends to related conference and research opportunities.

2007/2008 Actions:

- Two formal Calls released (on freight and new technologies). Spearheading panel session (on health, travel, and land use decisions), and co-sponsoring panel sessions (on time use & information technologies, and data cataloging/"findability"). Organizing Sunday workshop on advances in stated response survey design. To review paper submissions and form paper sessions in August/October 2007.

Strategy 5: Document state of transportation survey practices & their value to our communities

Annual Actions:

- Update document on state of survey practices in transportation, identifying benefits obtained by planners, policymakers, businesses, the public and others. Update discussion of critical issues that remain, and cost-effectiveness of travel survey programs.

2007/2008 Actions:

- Identify existing work from which we can pull such documentation (e.g., Stopher et al.'s NCHRP report, TR Circular E-C109 by Schofer, Lomax, Palmerlee & Zmud), and assemble for comment and synthesis.