University Liaisons
University Publications Staff

You may have read in our July Eye on Research newsletter that a new PSR format is "coming soon". It's here, along with what we hope will be a much streamlined process for the universities. This new process and format is being implemented immediately.

Overview of the Changes

- Universities will continue to electronically submit the text for PSRs, after the material has been edited at the university, but we are requesting that it be no more than 800 words. We also are requesting that universities provide the names of all the researchers who would like to see credited in the PSR.
- A graphic is no longer required, but may be included if it will most effectively convey the information. Text would then need to be shortened to make space for the graphic.
- PSRs are no longer required to be held at the university until all technical reports are ready.
- RTI will now do the layout, final editing, and publishing of PSRs, coordinating with the Project Director and Research Supervisor when needed. An example of the new 2-page layout is attached.

Transition Plan

- PSRs initially submitted to RTI after August 15, 2006 will be finalized under the new process.
- PSRs for which RTI has already requested a Press Proof will be finalized under the existing process, with the university proceeding to publication as approved by RTI.
- PSRs submitted prior to August 15, 2006 for which RTI has not requested a Press Proof will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis by RTI, with the goal of expediting completion of the PSR as much as practical.

This new process will allow PSRs to be finalized and published sooner than is practical under the existing process. It should also reduce the number of times that university publications staffs have to handle each report. The university typically should not have to deal with a PSR once it is submitted to RTI.

Attached is a copy of our new Project Summary Report Standards. This material will be included in our on-line manual soon. We hope you view this as the positive change that we believe it will be for universities and TxDOT.

Sincerely,

Rick Collins, P.E.
Director, Research and Technology Implementation Office

An Equal Opportunity Employer
0-4609: The Feasibility of Partial Privatization in the Enforcement of Outdoor Advertising Regulations

Background

The Highway Beautification Act (HBA), passed under President Johnson in 1965, is the primary legislative mandate governing the regulation of outdoor advertising in the United States. The Act requires the states to exercise "effective control" of outdoor advertising along the Interstate and primary highway system. New billboards are permitted only in areas determined to be commercial or industrial, and must conform to standards set by agreement between state and federal government. These standards govern spacing of billboards as well as size and lighting. Although the same requirements apply to existing billboards, nonconforming signs that were legal when erected are effectively allowed to remain.

Texas law also regulates outdoor advertising on state-maintained roads not controlled by the HBA. These "rural roads" account, however, for only 5 percent of the approximately 16,000 signs for which TxDOT issues permits annually. For this reason, TxDOT requested the researchers to focus primarily on the enforcement of the HBA.

What the Researchers Did

Ensuring effective enforcement of laws restricting billboard construction is in the long-term interest of the billboard industry as well as the public. However, effective enforcement remains a challenge in many areas of the country. A few states have outsourced some of their HBA enforcement activities to

In exploring the options for privatization, the Center for Transportation Research considered the division of responsibilities under the potential partnership arrangements with the private sector, and the associated cost to TxDOT for the contract. To make their assessment, the researchers obtained an extensive amount of information on the following:

- The legal framework for outdoor advertising regulation in Texas and the power-sharing among federal, state and local authorities.
- Current enforcement practices in Texas, including permit reviews, sign inventorying, new site inspections, documentation of violations, and other tasks. In addition to mailing a survey to all TxDOT districts, the researchers visited five districts selected for case study: Houston, Dallas, Tyler, Laredo, and San Antonio.
What They Found

The outdoor advertising regulations are highly detailed and in some ways complex. On-premise advertisements for products or services sold at an establishment are exempt from the regulations, provided that these products or services are not “incidental” to the establishment’s principal activity. The interpretation of what is “incidental” is among the “gray areas” in which enforcers of outdoor advertising regulations must exercise judgment. Another task in which caution is needed is the determination of whether the area around the site of a proposed sign qualifies as industrial or commercial. Sham businesses intended to qualify an area as commercial or industrial are among the problems encountered in making these determinations.

The states that have partially privatized each present a different model of privatization. Oklahoma has outsourced the taking of sign inventory, whereas Florida and Michigan have outsourced most other field activities, such as new site inspections, as well. In Florida, privatization was accompanied by transfer of responsibility for administrative decisions (e.g., permit approvals and cancellations) from the FDOT regional offices to the state headquarters in Tallahassee. FDOT has credited this centralization for increased consistency in the application of regulations, which, in turn, contributes to the avoidance of disputes. Inconsistent application of outdoor advertising creates not only feelings of grievance, but also precedents that companies can exploit to undermine the regulations.

Contract durations have varied from one year in Oklahoma to ten years in Florida. Longer contracts have the potential to benefit the contracting agency by: (1) reducing administrative costs (with less frequent re-letting) and (2) providing the contractor with greater assurance of the ability to recover sunk costs, which is likely to reduce the bid price per year of service. The researchers found, however, that the ten-year duration of the Florida contract is excessive for recovery of sunk costs.

What This Means

The importance of the sunk costs is prone to exaggeration by counting as sunk certain up front costs that are more truly variable; many of the assets that may be acquired up front are highly transferable between outdoor advertising control and other uses, in which case their costs are largely variable. Moreover, shorter-term contracts have offsetting advantages: They provide the contracting agencies with greater ability to respond should initial assumptions of costs be proven incorrect or should the needs of the department change.

Enforcement practices in Texas could be improved significantly through greater specialization of labor. The enforcement system is highly decentralized, with authority and responsibility largely devolved to the 25 District offices. Particularly in the less populous Districts, the personnel involved may devote only a portion of their time to HBA enforcement, and often a minor portion. Personnel who are more
Section 5

Project Summary Report Standards

General

Project Summary Reports (PSRs) are required only for research projects. Their main purpose is to communicate information about research results to a broad audience, even though they typically do include some technical information. They serve as a link between conducting research and implementing the results of that research.

The ideal PSR is a clear and concise description of:

- why the research is important,
- what the research accomplished, and
- how the research results can best be put to use.

The material for the body of each PSR is prepared, edited and submitted by the lead university on the project. The PSR is then reviewed, formatted, finalized and published by TxDOT. An electronic copy of each completed PSR is returned to the university to be posted or published as they desire.

Contents

The body of each PSR is limited to 800 words (if no graphics are included) and discusses the topics listed below:

1. Background — a brief description of the purpose and scope of the project and why the research was important.
2. What the Researchers Did — a brief summary of project activities (e.g.: literature review, interviews, laboratory and field testing, surveys, monitoring of test sections, development of a draft specification), and problems encountered, if any.
3. What They Found — a summary of the research findings and what conclusions can be drawn from them, and whether or not the findings were as anticipated.
4. What This Means — suggestions from the research team for putting project findings to use.

A graphic is not required in a PSR, but may be used if it will most effectively convey the information. The 800 word limit must then be reduced to make space for the graphic(s). Graphics should be clear, simple and referenced in the text of the PSR to effectively convey meaning to the reader.

The university should submit the names of all the researchers who should be credited in the PSR, along with the material for the body of the report.

A Technical Report Documentation Page is not required with a PSR.
Copyrights

The same standards for use of copyrighted material, and ownership of copyrights, apply to PSRs that apply to technical reports. See section 3 of this chapter.

Ownership and Release of Data

As stated generally in Article 16 of each Cooperative Research and Implementation Agreement, release of information contained in a PSR is restricted prior to approval of the report by TxDOT, to the extent allowed by the Texas Public Information Act.

Submission to RTI

Each Project Summary Report is submitted to RTI via email, with the required contents attached as an MS Word file. The email should be sent to RTIMAIN@dot.state.tx.us, with a subject line containing the report number and "PSR."