1. TTI Researchers Honored at TRB Annual Meeting

A prestigious “best paper” award was given to a team of TTI researchers during the Transportation Research Board (TRB) 87th Annual Meeting in Washington, D.C. The paper, “License Plate and Telephone Numbers in Changeable Message Sign AMBER Alert Messages,” won the D. Grant Mickle Award for outstanding paper in the field of operation, safety and maintenance of transportation facilities.

Authors Conrad Dudek, Steven Schrock and Brooke Ullman conducted research in six Texas cities and the TTI driving simulator to determine the effects of displaying license plate and telephone numbers on changeable message signs. The research revealed that the information on AMBER alerts can overload motorists and they are not likely to recall license plate and 10-digit telephone numbers. The research was sponsored by the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) and conducted through research project 0-4023, “Automated Dynamic Message Sign Design and Display.”

The recipients of the award were all TTI researchers at the time of the project. Since then, Dudek has retired from Texas
A&M University and the Institute after 43 years of distinguished service. He is a professor emeritus of the Zachry Department of Civil Engineering. Schrock is now an assistant professor in the Department of Civil, Environmental and Architectural Engineering at the University of Kansas. Ullman is an assistant research engineer in TTI’s Signs and Markings Program.

The annual D. Grant Mickle Award was named after TRB’s executive director from 1964 to 1966.

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### 2. Consolidated Transportation Center to Serve Metroplex

After more than three years in the making, the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) held grand opening ceremonies January 23 for the new DalTrans Transportation Management Center. The new 54,000-square-foot building, located along Highway 80 in Mesquite, replaces a much smaller facility and now brings all three operating agencies (TxDOT, Dallas Area Rapid Transit and Dallas County) under one roof.

TTI also occupies a three-office suite in the new building that will support researchers working on transportation operations and intelligent transportation system projects. The office makes a convenient meeting location with TxDOT sponsors. For setting up meetings, TTI staff can contact Lisa Palmer in the Dallas office.

The new center expands DalTrans’ capabilities and becomes the central traffic operations center for all highway management and intelligent system integration for 30 cities in the Metroplex.

TTI Communications helped TxDOT plan the grand opening, producing a video, still shots, a calendar, graphic art and invitations. Employees working on the project included Michelle Hoelscher, Clyde Hance, Jim Lyle, Stacy Schnettler, Brandon Webb, Christie Madsen and Debbie Murillo. Assistant Agency Director Chris Poe was also involved with the grand opening.

DalTrans’ complete intelligent transportation system includes
200 cameras that monitor more than 1,000 square miles. Through the use of dynamic message signs, Internet information and media traffic reports from radio and television, motorists have access to real-time travel information.

Courtesy patrol trucks, dispatched when help is needed, are operated each day on 300 miles of Dallas County roadways. In 2006, the courtesy patrol responded to more than 97,000 incidents.

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3. UTCM Colloquium Outlines Successful Research Programs

With an off-beat title, the latest University Transportation Center for Mobility (UTCM) Colloquium was presented to a full house January 28. “Communicating the Value of Your Research: How to Convince Your Mom That You Contribute to Society” was presented by Tim Lomax (whose mom is convinced her research engineer son contributes to society because of year-round media mentions of his Annual Mobility Report) and Johanna Zmud, president of NuStats, a survey science consultancy based in Austin that specializes in transportation studies.

The presentation was the result of a National Cooperative Highway Research Program (NCHRP) project designed to help researchers, research directors and managers focus on the value of their research, not just the findings. As part of the project, Zmud, Lomax and others examined the elements of successful research programs and projects.

“We want to help ensure that the hard work of researchers actually makes a difference and is noticed for the value that it has for many purposes,” Lomax said. “The first step, we think, is for us to think about the value of that research and how a range of audiences might understand that value. Knowing that will help guide them to the people and groups that are most affected by the results. The next step is to know how to communicate that message to the right audience.”

Zmud detailed several case studies of successful research projects and programs in a wide range of topics over the last
two decades. She told the audience that the value of communication for each successful project differed; various methods and outlets were used to successfully promote the value of the research depending on the project. “The common element to creating the widespread perception of value was a strong communication strategy,” Zmud said. She recommended that a communication plan be built into proposal budgets. She also said that the case studies clearly show that the development of interpersonal relationships was the most important communication element in the successful projects.

Lomax urged audience members to offer suggestions on how to improve the presentation (his mother is reluctant to accept the same old news clippings). Zmud and the other team members will use those suggestions as they conduct workshops on their findings.

The PowerPoint presentation, “Communicating the Value of Your Research: How to Convince Your Mom That You Contribute to Society,” can be viewed at the UTCM website.


4. New Topics Addressed in Research Development Seminars

In her continuing series, Associate Agency Director Katie Turnbull organized and presented two new Research Development Seminars in the month of January: “Getting Involved with the Transportation Research Board” and “Conducting Literature Searches.” The seminars are designed to support the Institute’s research diversity goal, enhance internal communication, promote professional development and foster collaboration among TTI staff.

In the January 8 seminar, Turnbull examined the complex organization of the Transportation Research Board (TRB) and offered tips on how to get involved in the numerous TRB committees. Senior Research Engineer Brian Bochner told attendees how the TRB Annual Meeting is a great networking opportunity for employees interested in getting

During a recent Research Development Seminar, Senior Research Engineer Brian Bochner had tips for researchers prior to the TRB Annual Meeting. In another seminar (below), Research Librarian Hong Yu presents “Conducting Literature Searches.”
involved in research projects.

January 31, Research Librarian Hong Yu provided a live demonstration in the seminar “Conducting Literature Searches.” The seminar was designed to show researchers how the TTI Library staff can help them prepare proposals and conduct research.

The “Conducting Literature Searches” seminar will be repeated February 13. Another Research Development Seminar, “Writing Winning Proposals,” will be held February 20. All of the seminars are held in room 102 of the Gilchrist Building with Polycom® links to all TTI offices.

top

5. TTI Anniversaries

5 Years

Michelle Jones, Senior Office Associate (KWE)
Mary Levien, Research Services Administrator (RDO)

10 Years

Brooke Ullman, Assistant Research Engineer (FSM)
Joe Zietsman, Center Director (HAQ)

15 Years

Sharon Hansen, Supervisory Project Administrator (BUS)

20 Years

Sandra Schoeneman, Research Associate (FWZ)

25 Years

Denise Pineda, Senior Research Services Administrator (RDO)

top
6. Employee Recognition Program Now Underway

In an effort to “honor and appropriately recognize” TTI staff, the first phase of the new Employee Recognition Program has been launched. Initially, all budgeted employees can order a free polo-style shirt (color choices are maroon, white or black), a TTI cap and a magnetic TTI name badge.

In an Institute-wide email, Director Dennis Christiansen urged everyone to wear their shirts in a show of unity for TTI Day scheduled for April 29. (Orders must be made by March 15 to be delivered in time.)

“In recent months, TTI has been facing some significant challenges, and we’re all aware there are more to come. That does not change the fact that we have an outstanding staff with a depth and breadth of capability unmatched at any university,” Christiansen wrote. “We should all take great pride in our ability to retain employees, which is reflected by TTI having the lowest employee turnover rate in the Texas A&M University System.”

The second phase of the Employee Recognition Program will start in the next few weeks and will include choices of other merchandise as years of service milestones are achieved.

“We have outstanding people. It is our desire to give our people the full recognition they deserve,” Christiansen wrote.

7. TTI in the News

There have been numerous mentions of TTI and our experts in recent media reports. Here are links to some of the stories.

Technology and traffic PC Magazine Jan. 31

East Coast satellite traffic report network Wall Street Journal Jan. 29

Traffic light confusion KLTV-TV Jan. 25

Cheap cars Business Standard Jan. 20
8. Committee Taking Nominations for 2008 Employee Awards

The TTI Award Selection Committee is accepting nominations for the 2008 annual employee awards. The program recognizes outstanding employee service to TTI by encouraging and rewarding superior employees for annual performance and career achievement.

Awards include $1,000 stipends for awards in the research, professional, technical and support categories, and a $3,500 stipend for the two career award categories. Team award winners receive a plaque. All award winners are invited to the annual Trinity Industries Award Luncheon.

The Staff Awards Review Committee has made the process easier this year by consolidating the nomination forms from 11 different forms to only four. The Award Selection Committee, composed of TTI employees invited to serve by the director for a one-year term, will review the nomination packets and make award recommendations to the director. The awards will be announced at TTI Day on April 29.

The award nomination process for 2008 is as follows:

- Step 1: Nomination forms due Friday, Feb. 22
- Step 2: Supporting material due Friday, March 28 (support letters, bios and draft citations)

Detailed criteria and eligibility for each award are found on TTINet at: http://ttinet.tamu.edu/ttipeople/employee_awards/. If you have questions about the award nomination process, please contact Becca Simons.
9. Investigation: Secret “Mission Possible” Meetings Uncovered

With less than two months before TTI Day, CenterLine has learned that covert members of a planning committee conducted a top-secret meeting January 30 to finalize plans for the annual event, scheduled for an undisclosed location April 29. However, satellite photographs that show the planning committee visiting the new Brazos County Exposition Complex a few months ago would indicate that TTI Day might change locations this year.

The various clandestine groups of the 2008 TTI Day Planning Committee are finishing their work on numerous classified tasks, including selecting a speaker, planning skits and other activities, determining door prizes, coordinating the setup requirements with the Brazos County Exposition Complex and organizing the online registration document.

“We have a lot of work done,” is about all the information TTI Day Chair Lance Bullard would reveal. “These have been high-security clearance meetings, so all I can tell you right now is that the theme for TTI Day is “Mission Possible,”” and lunch will be included.” Bullard says more information may be released in the coming weeks.

The planning committee will meet at least once more to go over final plans.

10. Editor’s Corner: Take Action toward Active Voice

TTI editors recommend that documents use “active voice grammatical construction” as much as possible. In the past, technical and academic writing has leaned heavily on passive voice to focus attention on the activity instead of the author and to establish distance between the author and the content. Today’s readers,
however, usually value clear writing and speedy reading over formal wording.

In active voice grammatical construction, a sentence’s subject takes the action described by the verb. In a passive voice sentence, the subject is acted upon. For example:

Passive voice: Data were collected at the intersection.
Active voice: Cameras collected data at the intersection.

While the two sentences are similar, the second sentence provides clearer and more complete content because it specifies who or what performed the task. Authors are sometimes concerned that active voice will emphasize the author or researchers over the project activities, but choosing appropriate subjects will avoid that problem. Readers assimilate information more quickly in active voice than passive voice. Simple, active sentences produce clear and meaningful writing, and editors recommend that you aim for at least half active voice throughout documents. To write in active voice:

- Choose verbs that show action.
- Identify the subject of your sentence and confirm that it is the actor.

Clarity of content is one big advantage of active voice. Instructional documents such as manuals, guidelines and handbooks especially benefit from active voice because some passive voice sentences make it difficult for readers to determine the meaning of a sentence. For example, a software manual might include the sentence “The total is calculated and entered at the prompt.” Does that sentence mean that the software program automatically calculates and enters the total based on earlier entries, or does it mean the user needs to perform the calculation and entry? A clearer way to write the instruction would be “The user totals results from all districts. The program prompts the user to enter the calculated total.” If your document speaks directly to the reader, your instruction could be even simpler: “Total results from all the districts and enter your calculated total at the prompt.”

Try it out on your own writing. Search for passive voice and see if the sentence would be easier to understand if converted to active voice. Whether you are writing a proposal, technical report, paper for journal publication or other type of document, your readers will thank you.

*Editor’s Corner is written by Rhonda Brinkmann, research*
Rhonda is happy to take requests for column topics.

11. Reminders/Calendar

Feb. 11—Q&A with Director Dennis Christiansen
   Gilchrist Building, Room 102
   10:30 a.m.-12:00 p.m.

Feb. 13—2008 Texas Motorcycle Safety Forum
   Austin
   For more information or registration:
   http://tti.tamu.edu/conferences/tmsf08/

Feb. 20—TTI Blood Drive
   Gilchrist Building, Room 103
   9:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m.
   Contact Nancy Stratta for an appointment

Feb. 20—Research Development Seminar
   Writing Winning Proposals
   Gilchrist Building, Room 102
   9:00 a.m.-10:00 a.m.

March 17—TxDOT RMC project proposals due to TTI RDO

March 17-19—2008 Transportation Research Forum
   For more information or registration:
   http://www.trforum.org/forum/2008/

CenterLine is a production of TTI Communications.
We encourage your comments and suggestions for articles about TTI people and research efforts.
Please send email to news@ttimail.tamu.edu or call Rick Davenport at (979) 862-3763.