

50-State Transportation Governance & Finance Report Webinar Q&A



Jaime Rall
J.R. Rall Consulting LLC



Burt Tasaico
North Carolina DOT



Travis Brouwer
Oregon DOT

Question: Does this report provide recommendations for best practices in communication and collaboration between state DOTs and legislatures and how they were compiled?

Jaime Rall: Yes, we asked all of the survey respondents to offer their recommendations and advice for their counterparts in other states. This is in the “Communication and Collaboration Between State Legislatures and DOTs” chapter. One thing that I found interesting is all the different situations people encounter in their communications and collaboration. You get a well-rounded sense of what they thought worked well, what hadn’t worked as well, and what they really thought other states should consider.

Question: Is there a map or list of states and municipalities with toll roads?

Jaime Rall: Yes, this is addressed in two different ways. For the question, “Are there toll roads within a state’s borders?”, that information is only in the state profiles. If you look at the first table in a state’s profile, the “Statewide Transportation System Statistics” table, in the roads and bridges section there is a field for “Toll facilities”. This shows toll facilities that are owned and operated by anyone (state, local, or private entities).

The second question is: “Does the state use revenues from toll facilities to pay for transportation infrastructure and activities?” If a local entity operates a toll road within a state but the revenue does not go to the state DOT, the answer in this section would be “No”. This information is found in Table 23, “Revenue Sources Currently Used by States for Roads and Bridges” on pages 58-63.

Question: When your DOT presents the information in the report to legislators and staffers, what areas do you focus on most?

Travis Brouwer: We have not presented the information directly to legislators or others but instead used the report to better understand where other states are, how they are governed, beginning the research from there and reaching out to other states to better understand their governance structures. It’s mostly a starting point for our own efforts to develop information and analysis for legislators and governor’s office.

Burt Tasaico: We have not taken tables in the report but have used the underlying data. For example: we have made a comparison of what types of revenue mechanisms are available in other states that are not used in North Carolina, and vice versa. The underlying information has been used to generate additional conversations.

Question: How have the legislators and their staff responded when shown the report and the tables?

Burt Tasaico: They have been very receptive. We have used similar graphics as Jaime had shown, such as a word cloud, to show what opportunities there are. Interestingly enough one of the legislative staffers made a comparison of what had changed between the 2011 report and the update in 2016.

Travis Brower: So far we have not shared the information directly with legislatures, though we have shared some of our work based on the report. The report has been a tremendously valuable resource, as it would have been a herculean effort to pull this together by ourselves.

Question: Does the study include any information on MPOs or other geographic considerations?

Jaime Rall: State/local issues are a huge topic and very important, but were outside the scope of this report. MPOs are talked about briefly in the second chapter, “Participants in State Transportation Governance and Finance”, and then in most of the state profiles they come into play in the “Planning and Projects” section.

Question: How long did it take you to do this report? It’s so comprehensive!

Jaime Rall: The report was published in November, and the survey had gone out a few months earlier that summer. And of course there were some months before that spent developing the survey tools in collaboration with the NCHRP advisory panel and AASHTO. There had to be enough time for respondents to fill out the surveys, and then we had to quickly turn around and compile all of that information, making sure everything is accurate and as apples-to-apples as possible. Travis I think you used the term Herculean, I’m going to plant a flag in that adjective for this report and I’m so glad that everybody could be a part of this and make it come together.

Question: What did you find most surprising in writing and using this report?

Jaime Rall: Every state has its share of unique approaches to problems. There are a lot of moments where I read a survey response and went, “Huh, I didn’t know that.” I also was the lead investigator on the 2011 report, but a lot of things have changed since then. I mentioned there are states that index not only gas taxes but also tolls, fees, and fares, which I thought was a novel approach that was not highlighted in 2011, but that has arisen as a way to keep up with growing costs. Or Mississippi’s elected transportation commission as another example. The volume of these little things remind me not just that states are innovators, but also that living in the United States, as I hear from my counterparts in Europe all the time, it’s really in many ways like a confederation of different nations, with how different they really are.

Burt Tasaico: I had those “Aha!” moments as well. To me, it was going in and knowing for sure that one size did not fit all. Every state is unique in its own way, and each one of us is applying what works best for us and utilizing resources that may not be available for other states. For example there are states that have revenues that are tied in to crude oil. If I was to bring that to North Carolina that would not be very good, because there is no crude oil to mine in North Carolina as far as I know. While one method may work in one state, there is a reason that it’s used there and perhaps why it’s not used in another place. Because of this report I now understand why they are doing it that way.

Travis Brower: I’ll echo both Burt and Jaime. What I’m most impressed by is the diversity across all these states and that every state is different, but what stuck with me is that this diversity exists within a commonality across states. While every state is a little bit different, the areas where we are similar are greater than those areas where we are different. Across state DOTs there is a significant level of commonality where we all have similar structures and similar revenue sources and a bit of diversity around the edges of this.

Question: Can someone speak to some of the most unique or unusual mechanisms states have used to fund transportation? Jaime you had a slide on this earlier during your presentation.

Jaime Rall: The oil and gas production taxes in Texas, income taxes in Oklahoma, a handful of states using some portion of their general sales taxes, Georgia with hotel fees, cigarette taxes in Idaho, gaming taxes in Massachusetts and Mississippi, and of course Oregon's road usage charge program. Rest area sponsorship is something that a lot of questions have come up about and I know Iowa and Virginia have active programs. Those ones are some of the ones coming to mind right now, and again the indexing of some of those fares, fees, or tolls.

Burt Tasaico: One that caught my attention that is not used very much is a conveyance tax, meaning anytime there is a real estate transaction there is a fee that is devoted to transportation.

Travis Brower: Oregon has tried out a road usage charge, and we hope that in the near term that some of you also join us in that area as we've had some success, yet very significant challenges are ahead as we move towards implementing a mandatory one on a statewide basis.