

Strategic Planning Division

NDOT 2021 Strategic Communications Plan



Mission: To organize and focus NDOT's preparation for the future.

2020 HIGHLIGHTS

In 2020, the Strategic Planning Division continued building up and expanding its services to fulfill its identity. The Division became fully formed in March of 2019 when the new Local Assistance Division was created. After shuffling a few groups around, the Strategic Planning Division was left with its Continuous Improvement/Lean Six Sigma Section and the Planning Section. Since then, these teams have been adding or replacing key team members. Furthermore, the Performance Management Engineer position was newly added in 2019. However, the addition of the Freight and Economic Development Liaison was the most recent addition, being added in the Spring of 2020. The addition of this position served to round out the final piece of the Strategic Planning Division.

Aside from these things, the Department, along with the world, adjusted to new realities brought on by the pandemic in 2020. The pandemic caused everyone to question what is normal. The timing may have been perfect for the Strategic Planning Division given that it spent the majority of the year questioning the future as it developed and finalized the Department's Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP). The 2040 LRTP's purpose is to give NDOT, and its partners, end-to-end information about Nebraska's transportation system; how it is funded, and the influences that are most likely to propel changes between today and 2040. These things were guided by series of stakeholder interactions, many of which started off as in-person events. However, as the year progressed, the project team pivoted to web conferences, technical webinars, and virtual public meetings due to the pandemic. The feedback gained through these interactions were used to set 20-year goals and objectives for Nebraska's transportation system, along with performance metrics for gauging progress. Most importantly, the feedback was used to set a course for evaluating and implementing new policies and processes. All in all, the Plan will help the NDOT rise to the challenges and opportunities anticipated between now and 2040.

Other accomplishments include:

- **Economic Opportunities Program (EOP)** – Created through the Transportation Innovation Act, the EOP entered its 4th year in existence. In that time, the program has provided \$5.3M for transportation projects that have resulted in, or will result in, job creation for the State of Nebraska. Five new projects were approved in 2020, which will create \$109M in new private investment. Overall, the program aims to target "last mile" projects, meaning a transportation project that will connect a business to the larger transportation network, creating new or expanded access.
- **Nebraska Supply Chain Optimization Model (NESCOM)** – After three years of development, Nebraska's first ever supply chain model is being put to use. In 2020, the Strategic Planning division leveraged the model to engage with local stakeholders and the Nebraska Department of Economic Development to explore new or expanded supply chain "solutions." These included the expansion of an existing transloading site in Grand Island, and the development of a new greenfield logistics park near Fremont. These opportunities were afforded by the model, which applies proven private sector practices for improving efficiency and cutting costs in order to understand the cost of supply chains in Nebraska.

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2021 GOALS

Improve outcomes and services for our customers

Tactics:

- Modernize, streamline and create new products/services for the customers of the Strategic Planning Division.
- Support NDOT's strategic direction related to Connected and Automated Vehicles, Active Transportation, and Road User Charges.
- Strengthen the alignment between Continuous Improvement and Performance Management.

Improve outcomes through relationship building

Tactics:

- Strengthen engagement with planning partners and stakeholders.
- Maintain or elevate engagement with economic development partners.
- Increase engagement with internal NDOT staff to promote support tools.

Improve efficiency of the agency and division through LSS and other business intelligence activities

Tactics:

- Within the Strategic Planning Division, conduct one LLS project and find \$10,000 in executive decision savings.
- Prioritize the exploration of projects and frameworks that assist in decision making, especially those involving programming, project delivery and spending.
- Develop additional tools to support decision making around freight and economic development.

Invest in division staff by involving them in pertinent meetings and trainings.

Tactics:

- Invite division staff to both internal and external meetings to enable cross-training, redundancy, and development of relationships.
- Support efforts to participate in national peer exchange opportunities, trainings and conferences.

2020 HIGHLIGHTS *(cont'd.)*

- **Lean Six Sigma/Continuous Improvement** – In 2020, the team completed a total of 50 projects. The team also trained 100 yellow belt leaders and supported 61 daily huddles. The Department also trained 26 Lean Leaders who will be ambassadors helping drive change in their respective divisions and districts. It also added its first certified Black Belt to the program. Lastly, \$5.8M was identified in executive savings throughout the department.
- **Traffic Counting and Forecasting** – The Traffic Analysis Unit was asked early on in the pandemic to create new means of capturing traffic fluctuations brought on by directed health measures (DHM). Within days of the request, the team was able to process and publish data for key facilities around the state. The newly created dashboard was used during the pandemic to inform policy makers around the effects of DHMs on travel patterns and behaviors.

2021 PRIORITIES

This section identifies priorities that need additional emphasis in order to complete the division's goals. The following is the approach Strategic Planning Division is taking to fulfill its 2021 goals.

Improving the Culture of Performance – In 2020, the Performance Management Engineer, worked hard to develop a series of measures for each Division and District. In addition, the Continuous Improvement team was able to hit all its performance targets and create increased demand for their services. Despite these successes, dashboard owners aren't always using performance feedback to target process improvement efforts. Likewise, the continuous improvement projects we run don't always tie back into dashboards used by managers. Finding ways to align these activities in 2021 will be a focus for both the Continuous Improvement team and the Performance Management engineer. They will start by regularly coordinating their activities and looking for tangible connections between operational performance with process improvement.

Expand the Reach of Continuous Improvement – The Continuous Improvement Team, or Lean Six Sigma Team, is looking to build on its 2020 success and expand its reach in 2021. One focus of the team will be the Districts. So far, the team has mainly focused on projects in the central complex. However, we are finding that Districts have a multitude of opportunities and are eager for assistance.

Build and Maintain Partnerships – The Strategic Planning Division interacts with a variety of stakeholders, customers and peers. Understanding their needs and values is critical in the delivery of accurate and timely services. It also builds trust and mutual understanding of needs and expectations. In 2021, the Division will continue to build its external relationships through things like the Freight Plan Update project, the Active Transportation Committee, and Economic Opportunities Program. Internally, it will focus its expansion of engagement through continuous improvement efforts, dashboard development, and data analytics.

Invest in the Workforce – Relatively speaking, a fair number of the Division staff are new to the Department or new to their role. In either case, it's essential that team members have the opportunity to develop their skills and broaden their understanding of NDOT. Support for these things will take shape through trainings, conferences, committee participation and most importantly, hands-on experience. Specific opportunities to develop the team include participation in NCHRP studies, AASHTO committees, and attending peer exchange conferences.

KEY PROJECTS

Key projects the Division will be focusing on include:

- **Capturing Impacts on Revenue** – Based on stakeholder concerns, the Planning Section will be launching an annual investigation into the effects of Electric Vehicle adoption to predict when NDOT revenues will be significantly impacted. In addition, NDOT is partnering with RUC West to study the fees drivers in rural states pay under the traditional gas-tax model, along with emerging road user charge models.
- **Improved Use of Freight Data** – With our supply chain optimization model in hand, the Freight and Economic Development Liaison will be working closely with Nebraska Department of Economic Development to further develop actual supply chain improvement projects. Furthermore, he will work to create accessible freight data sets to assist in project planning and development.
- **Traffic Forecasting Tools and Updates** – The Traffic Forecasting team will be working to supplement its growing number of traffic resource tools and services. We are looking forward to new online resources as well as a low growth/low ADT tool for Roadway Design. In addition, it will continue working with BTSD to modernize many of its forecasting applications and move off the mainframe.

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KEY PROJECTS *(cont'd.)*

- **Freight Plan Update** – NDOT’s first State Freight Plan was published in late 2017. The study is now approaching its federally mandated refresh date of December of 2022. With this in mind, the Freight and Economic Development Liaison will begin work on the State Freight Plan update in 2021.
- **LINC-D 2.0** – The Performance Management Section will be well into its second iteration of the Linking Infrastructure Challenges with Data (LINC-D) project. The newest iteration will continue the data analytics and business intelligence investigations from before; but will also look for ways to support and track implementation of the findings from each study.
- **New Growth in Continuous Improvement** – Building on its success in 2020, the team is focused on growing its influence in the districts through 5S and other operational improvement projects. It also wants to train 50 new yellow belts and find another \$5M in executive savings. Lastly, the team will be promoting projects through social media, videos, DOTSPOT, etc.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTERNAL COLLABORATION

This section includes internal opportunities for divisions and districts to collaborate and work together to accomplish their goals.

Communications – Advertise services and craft messaging for key projects.

HR – Organize and identify training needs for our staff.

BTSD – Creating greater accessibility to traffic volume information through GIS mapping. BTSD is a key partner in the development of dashboards and making data accessible.

Roadway Design – Active transportation and improved access to traffic data.

Traffic Engineering – Active transportation issues.

Local Assistance – Ensure that the MPO projects listed in their TIPs and LRTPs have accurate estimates and schedules.