

MINUTES
SENATE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

DATE: Tuesday, March 11, 2014

TIME: 1:30 P.M.

PLACE: Room WW53

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairman Brackett, Vice Chairman Johnson, Senators Keough, Winder, Rice, Nonini, Hagedorn, Bock and Buckner-Webb

ABSENT/ EXCUSED: None

NOTE: The sign-in sheet, testimonies and other related materials will be retained with the minutes in the committee's office until the end of the session and will then be located on file with the minutes in the Legislative Services Library.

CONVENED: **Chairman Brackett** called the meeting of the Senate Transportation Committee (Committee) to order at 1:35 p.m. and asked the secretary to take a silent role. **Chairman Brackett** welcomed all in attendance to the Committee.

MINUTES: **Chairman Brackett** said that the first order of business was to approve the Minutes of the February 13, 2014 meeting.

MOTION: **Senator Keough** moved that the Minutes of the February 13, 2014 meeting be approved. **Senator Hagedorn** seconded the motion. The motion passed by unanimous **voice vote**.

H 491: **Chairman Brackett** welcomed David Claiborne, President of the Idaho State ATV Association, to the Committee and asked him to present **H 491**. **Mr. Claiborne** said that this bill amends the definition of a snowmobile by increasing its weight from 'under 1,000 pounds' to 'under 2,000 pounds.' The weight is increased by allowing tracks to be added to the snowmobile. Counties have the option to let snowmobiles with tracks operate on their groomed trails. **Mr. Claiborne** said he would stand for questions.

Senator Bock said he was curious as to why these are used on trails and what changes they made to the snowmobile. **Mr. Claiborne** said that people put tracks on snowmobiles to access remote cabins. By using side-by-sides they can carry more people and camping necessities into their cabins.

Vice Chairman Johnson asked if counties wanted to issue permits for this additional weight. **Mr. Claiborne** said that counties control these trails and keep them clear. **Vice Chairman Johnson** asked Mr. Claiborne to expand on the weight restrictions given that wider tracks would evenly distribute the weight. **Mr. Claiborne** said that the increased weight changed the snowmobile's classification. There were no further questions for Mr. Claiborne.

MOTION: **Senator Hagedorn** moved that **H 491** be sent to the floor with a **do pass** recommendation. **Senator Bock** seconded the motion. The motion passed by a unanimous **voice vote**. **Senator Hagedorn** said he would carry the bill on the Senate floor.

PRESENTATION: **Chairman Brackett** thanked Mr. Claiborne and welcomed Dr. Larry Stauffer, Dean of the College of Engineering at the University of Idaho, to the Committee and asked him to come to the podium to tell the Committee about the National Institute for Advanced Transportation Technology. **Dr. Stauffer** said his presentation was titled 'Transportation Research at the University of Idaho and Its Impact on the State.' As background, **Dr. Stauffer** said he had moved to Idaho in 1979 where he worked at the Idaho National Laboratory in Idaho Falls and then spent 15 years in Boise where he ran the graduate program for the College of Engineering.

The College of Engineering has 2,000 students and has a \$15 million budget. They have three campuses around the State: Moscow (the main campus); Boise (graduate programs); and Idaho Falls (graduate programs and industrial technology). They also have an online Engineering Outreach Program mostly for graduate degrees and certificate programs. The College of Engineering has received many awards, they have many Merit Scholars and 40 percent of their students have a 3.8 grade point average (GPA) or higher.

The College of Engineering has four research centers: (1) Center for Secure and Dependable Systems; (2) Center for Ecohydraulics; (3) Idaho Space Grant Consortium; and (4) National Institute for Advanced Transportation Technology (NIATT), which he said was going to be the main topic of his presentation.

There are four primary areas the NIATT center focuses on: (1) traffic operations and control; (2) clean vehicle technology; (3) engine and combustion development; and (4) applied research for the Idaho Transportation Department (ITD). The ITD/University of Idaho (UI) cooperative has a long standing partnership. It addresses ITD's short-term and long-term research needs. It is funded primarily through State Planning and Research (SPR) funds, and covers all areas of ITD programs (safety, operation, pavements, bridges, maintenance and others).

Workforce development and education includes workshops, seminars and training manuals as components in most projects. There is a Technical Advisory Committee that develops projects that include federal, state and local officials, and the College of Engineering collaborates with ITD in several senior design projects. One of those projects is to improve the safety and efficiency of transportation systems, like safety at signaled intersections during inclement weather conditions for a real-time weather responsive system. Project examples include the city of Moscow integrated traffic signal system, potential safety effects of lane width and shoulder width on two-lane rural state highways, evaluation of the impacts of differential speed limits on interstate highways, potential crash reduction benefits of safety improvement projects based on Idaho's crash data, improving passing lane safety and efficiency, and evaluation of safety impacts of the IdaShield signs at Idaho railroad crossing.

The partnership with ITD also improves critical infrastructure operation and management like developing bridge rating factors for the Perrine Bridge over the Snake River Canyon in Twin Falls. In addition, there are the improvements and research on pavement design, management and monitoring systems. They investigate how bridge deck design methodologies address crack control, native plants for roadside vegetation and rock fall hazard classification mitigation.

NIATT also has a regional partnership. It is part of the United States Department of Transportation's (USDOT) region 10 University Transportation Center led by the University of Washington. Those research projects that address Idaho and regional needs include: (1) educating teenage drivers about the dangers of distracted driving; (2) developing a performance based asset management tool for rural freight mobility in the Pacific Northwest; and (3) the production of renewable biodiesel fuel from biologically based feed stocks.

There is work done by other states with outcomes implemented in Idaho, like the passing lane safety and efficiency project funded by Alaska' Department of Transportation with field testing and implementation in Idaho.

Nationally, NIATT leads one of ten USDOT Tier-1 University Transportation Centers that focuses on environmental sustainability of transportation operations. The potential implementations in Idaho are action-based control parameters to reduce vehicle emissions and fuel consumption at isolated intersections in small and medium sized cities.

Having the NIATT center at the UI provides many opportunities, such as: (1) world class multidisciplinary research teams; (2) effective regional and national partnerships with leading research institutions; (3) workforce development involving undergraduate and graduate students in Idaho-focused research; and (4) partnerships with industry to commercialize research outcomes. There are also challenges like needed investment in research infrastructure and needed expansion of faculty and staff capabilities. **Dr. Stauffer** thanked the Committee and said he would be happy to answer any questions.

Chairman Brackett asked what brought NIATT to the UI College of Engineering. **Dr. Stauffer** said that the initial earmarked funding came through Idaho's United States Senator Steve Symms' efforts to establish the center back in the early 1990's. The UI has supported it since then through funds from research grants through the University Transportation Centers program.

Senator Winder asked what the annual budget was. **Dr. Stauffer** said that it depends, but it balances between \$5 and \$6 million per year. **Senator Winder** asked how many advanced transportation centers there were in the United States. **Dr. Stauffer** said he was not sure, but that every state has some kind of transportation center with different levels of expertise. **Senator Winder** asked about the Perrine Bridge and asked if the research indicated what the lifespan of the bridge was. **Dr. Stauffer** said he would get that information to the Committee. It was built in the 1970s and the lifespan changes as the use changes

Chairman Brackett said that last year the Committee approved the 129,000 pound load truck routes. He wanted to know if the route over the Perrine Bridge was nominated, would ITD ask NIATT to do the research or would ITD perform that research in-house. **Dr. Stauffer** said ITD issues proposals on their projects. NIATT could perform this research but they would need to have the expertise. Washington State has done some work for ITD because they have a larger capacity.

Senator Hagedorn said that 50 percent of ITD's engineers are approaching retirement age, is there an effort to get new ITD employees from the UI College of Engineering. **Dr. Stauffer** said he has met with ITD's human resources on that very issue, and 40 percent of their entire workforce is retirement eligible, but without competitive salaries it is difficult to make someone take a position. The College of Engineering's students maintain a good relationship and make connections by working on ITD projects. Another option is companies partnering in the education process to create a pathway. ITD recognizes the importance of relationships and what it means to work at ITD. But salaries are lower than what graduates can get from other employers. Firms like the skills students develop at ITD and then they hire them away.

Vice Chairman Johnson asked Dr. Stauffer to share examples of ITD-UI cooperative research projects. **Dr. Stauffer** said the long-term projects focus on pavements and their future. They test material and how it behaves over time. The Asphalt Conference brings in experts from all over the country who share their research. Operational issues are more long-term, especially with national operations. Another example is traffic simulations on intersections and how the data collected may be utilized in the future. **Vice Chairman Johnson** asked if the Asphalt Conference was on mixed design and if there was any new information that may be of interest to the Committee. **Dr. Stauffer** said he would be happy to report to the Committee on any new developments.

Senator Winder asked if hybrid vehicle development at the UI was still an active program. **Dr. Stauffer** said it was and that one project that was using rape seeds was the feed stock for making biodiesel. They also work on noise pollution with snowmobiles in areas like Yellowstone National Park. There were no further questions for Dr. Stauffer.

Chairman Brackett thanked Dr. Stauffer for taking the time to present at today's Committee. He invited Dr. Stauffer to share future developments that may be useful to the Committee's work.

ADJOURNED:

With no further business before the Committee, **Chairman Brackett** adjourned the meeting at 2:15 p.m.

Senator Brackett
Chair

Gaye Bennett
Secretary