

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **Togwotee Pass project receives national quality award**

The American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials will present the Wyoming Department of Transportation with the President's Transportation Award for Quality later this month for its employees' efforts on the Togwotee Trail to Yellowstone Highway Improvement Project.

The Togwotee Pass award will be accepted Sept. 30 during the 93rd Annual AASHTO Annual Meeting in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, by WYDOT District 5 Engineer Shelby Carlson, P.E., of Basin.

"The President's Transportation Awards recognize an individual or team who has performed exemplary service furthering the transportation activities of their member department which has or potentially could have a salutary impact on transportation nationwide, or on a regional basis," said AASHTO Executive Director John Horsley. "This is an honor not only for The Togwotee Trail to Yellowstone Highway Improvement Team: Brooks Lake Section, but for your department as well."

"It is by far the most difficult to win and the most prestigious," said WYDOT facilitator Mel Anderson of Cheyenne, who along with WYDOT Policy Analyst John Davis, prepared and submitted WYDOT's award application to AASHTO.

The award application was sponsored by WYDOT's Executive Staff.

The \$23.5 million contract for reconstruction of the 10-plus-mile Brooks Lake Section of US 26-287 is nearing completion by prime contractor Oftedal Construction. Contract completion date is Nov. 30, 2007.

The highway serves as a major eastern access route to Grand Teton and Yellowstone national parks.

When complete, the Brooks Lake project will include turning lanes at Falls Campground and Brooks Lake Road, and three sections of passing lanes - two for westbound traffic and one for eastbound vehicles.

"The team's purpose was to design and build a safe, cost-effective, and aesthetically pleasing roadway that meets the needs of users while protecting the natural environment of the Togwotee Trail to Yellowstone, an area renowned for its pristine beauty and recreational opportunities," Anderson said.

The team's "impact" achievements, according to Anderson, included:

Designing a safe highway that minimizes impacts to the scenic and ecological qualities of the environment while being aesthetically compatible with the surroundings.

- Establishing partnerships with stakeholders.
- Ensuring the involvement of outside agencies, recreationists, landowners, local businesses, and the surrounding communities.

- Improving the level of trust and understanding among WYDOT, the Federal Highway Administration, Grand Teton National Park, Shoshone and Bridger-Teton national forests, Wyoming Game and Fish Department, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and citizens.
- Ensuring the effective and efficient completion for highway design and reconstruction.
- Minimizing traffic disruption and delays to the traveling public during project construction.

Anderson said the team's application identified "key customers" of the area, including roadway users and residents of the area, winter and summer recreationists, and surrounding communities and area businesses.

A Constructability Group was formed to collect information from customers. The group was formed with members from local businesses, contractors, tourism groups, wildlife groups, and land management agencies. In addition, a marketing group was formed with membership limited to citizens from local businesses and tourism groups.

"These groups developed parameters to address mobility and socioeconomic issues during construction," Anderson said. "Citizens were invited to attend a series of public meetings, and customers' concerns recorded from these meetings included reducing delays and keeping travelers informed during construction, and reducing socioeconomic impacts."

Customer, recreationist and surrounding communities' satisfaction and dissatisfaction were measured by using average daily traffic counts, letters to the editor of area newspapers and opinion/editorial articles, contractor's time to finish the road, results from WYDOT's annual customer satisfaction survey, trail use information from the Wyoming State Trails Program, sales tax figures, lodging tax figures, and visitor spending figures.

"A key process used to minimize delays was implementing construction specifications specifically designed to reduce delay time and maintain mobility," Anderson said. "The expectation was that total accumulated delays through the project would be kept to 15 minutes or less."

A website ([GoTogwoteeTrail.com](http://GoTogwoteeTrail.com)) and toll-free phone line (877-WYO-TRAIL) was developed to help minimize delays, as well as daily monitoring of delay times and limiting delays to not more than 15 minutes per project, and incorporating recommendations on how to reduce the duration of construction made by the Accelerated Construction Technology Transfer Group (a jointly sponsored AASHTO and Federal Highway Administration multi-disciplinary team comprised of national and local transportation experts).

"Steps taken to keep travelers informed included a "trail map" brochure and other marketing materials, sending weekly e-blasts, radio spots and news releases, creating an audio CD for distribution to travelers entering construction zones, and using dynamic message signs," Anderson said. "Steps taken to reduce socioeconomic impacts included developing partnerships with the American Automobile Association, rental car companies, gas stations, and visitor/tourism councils, and creating and using a whimsical spokesperson for the project (Roamin' Wyomin') for appearances at community events."

Anderson said another key process to keep travelers informed was to hire a public involvement specialist dedicated full-time to keeping travelers informed of Togwotee Pass highway improvement efforts. Sheri Howe of Dubois has worked as the Togwotee Pass projects' public involvement specialist since spring of 2006.

The third key process, Anderson added, is reducing socioeconomic impacts was to develop and implement a marketing plan for the Togwotee Pass corridor and its reconstruction. "The

expectation was that the plan would help maintain the socioeconomic stability of the surrounding communities," Anderson said.

The marketing company Cameron Christopher Thomas Advertising of Denver, Colo., has been under contract since 2005 to develop and implement the marketing plan.

The results are impressive," Anderson said. "Daily traffic counts have increased during construction, total stop delay time (11 minutes) on the Brooks Lake project is below the stated goal of 15 minutes, sales tax and lodging tax for Fremont County increased between 2004 and 2006, and negative comments have decreased.

"It can be concluded that the trust level increased among stakeholders, and that the level of tourism and business actually has improved during construction," Anderson said.

**MEDIA: For questions about this news release, contact Cody Beers, WYDOT District 5 Public Involvement Specialist, at 856-1341.**