

.gov Reform Initiative

Department of Transportation Web Improvement Plan

Working Draft as of 10/11/2011

Background

In the [August 12, 2011 Agency Instructions for Completing Web Inventories and Web Improvement Plans](#), Agency CIOs were asked to work with their Agency Web Manager and Office of Public Affairs to submit an Interim Progress Report on their efforts to streamline Agency-managed .gov domains (due September 6, 2011) and to begin development of an Agency-wide Web Improvement Plan.

“By October 11, Agencies shall develop a Web Improvement Plan that communicates their **strategy for managing web resources more efficiently, improving online content, and enhancing the customer experience of Agency websites.**” This comprehensive plan will “address the broader objectives of **streamlining content, infrastructure, and ultimately improving customer service.**”

The purpose of this Web Improvement Plan is to identify the strategy, actions, measurements, and timelines that the Agency is using to streamline website infrastructure, improve web content, and enhance the customer experience with Executive Branch websites.

Agencies are being asked to create a Web Improvement Plan that will be developed iteratively over the next few months. In this plan, Agencies will describe Agency-wide efforts to effectively manage publicly accessible websites in the .gov domain. Only agencies in the Executive Branch are required to submit a Web Improvement Plan. The initial plan for the Department of Transportation, due to OMB by October 11, 2011, is in the following section.

Step 1: Current State of Agency-wide Web Improvement Efforts

Over the past few months, Agencies have been reviewing their .gov domains, web operations, and other web-related efforts in response to OMB .gov Reform data collection efforts (individual domain inventories, web governance survey, interim progress reports, etc.). The following describes the state of current web improvement efforts at the Department of Transportation.

1) Does your Agency currently have an Agency-wide web strategy?

No.

2) How does your agency currently ensure that Agency-wide web resources are managed efficiently (e.g. governance, technology/infrastructure, hosting, staffing, operations, etc.)?

Historically, we have had a decentralized approach to web management across the department. Our 12 Operating Administrations (OAs) or “modes” each develop, update, and maintain their own unique web presence. The effects of this decentralized approach include:

- widely varying designs and templates
- disorganized and out-of-date content
- a lack of tracking and reporting of web addresses
- a disconnected web infrastructure
- inconsistent web resources

In support of a more collaborative model, we have taken steps to ensure efficient management of web resources across the Department. For example, we have traditionally employed a fragmented procurement process, with each mode pursuing its own web resources in isolation from other modes. We have begun to address this by consolidating enterprise-wide contracts. We have also launched centralized contract vehicles that are available to all of the modes for use. One example is the DOT Web Agility contract. This contract is a DOT-wide Intermodal, Indefinite Delivery Indefinite Quantity (IDIQ) contract with multiple awardees to encourage competition and acquire the best products, services and costs for the government. This benefits us by:

1. Enabling more consistent enforcement of DOT standards with contract work.
2. Streamlining access to contract support for ongoing, small-scale web projects.

We are also working with the procurement office to institute new processes surrounding web contracts that require contracting officers to alert the Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO) of any new web procurements. This will ensure that OCIO has a holistic view of all web procurements and activity across the department, thereby better aligning resources or leveraging existing contracts.

In support of the Federal Data Center Consolidation Initiative, we are working to implement three web-based enterprise initiatives. We will initiate all three projects in the cloud and design them to support the enterprise from the first instance. The three projects include:

- A Geospatial Information System platform geared towards standardizing and consolidating GIS data and visualizations
- A internal collaboration portal that will establish an agile development platform and enhance internal networking and content sharing
- A Content Management System (CMS) to help standardize content delivery and the skill sets required to deploy content. By centralizing the technologies surrounding the Web, DOT will be able to achieve economies of scale and a more consistent environment.

One of the major goals of the Web COI and the Social Media Management Council is to establish web governance. While some OAs have governance bodies, ranging from small and informal to large and complex, DOT does not have a department-wide style guide, maintenance schedule, or review process in place for offices, divisions and administrations. The OCIO Web Team has reviewed content, based upon request and available resources, but is not equipped to review all content. We will need to adopt a formal process that distributes this responsibility.

3) How does your Agency currently ensure that website content is readily accessible, updated, accurate, and routinely improved?

Our goal is to maximize the accessibility, accuracy and relevance of our content. Toward that end, we have implemented automated tools to assist with the assessment of our sites. For example, we use the HiSoftware Compliance Sheriff tool to assess privacy and Section 508 compliance on our websites.

We're also implementing tools and developing processes that will help ensure our pages are up to date. As part of the Content Management System (CMS) migration, the DOT.gov site will undergo a full "content scrub". We will work with content owners from around the department to migrate static content after reviewing it to ensure accuracy and relevance. We'll use several automated features of the CMS to help keep content current. For example, content will be associated with automatic alerts to remind content owners to review web pages and make any needed updates.

In terms of content development, we recognize plain language as a critical standard for clear communication. Awareness of plain language principles has been historically low, but it's accelerating due to the Plain Writing Act. In compliance with this legislation, our senior official for Plain Language has been identifying plain language representatives for each office within DOT. Web staff will be available to work with those representatives to promote plain language on the web. The governance portion of our web strategy will also include support plain writing for the Web.

The OCIO currently has a 53-point checklist of recommended compliance requirements for Department web developers, designers and content creators to follow. The checklist, along with applicable policies and regulations, is a step toward providing detailed guidance for website maintenance and activity.

However, the checklist is infrequently used and in need of an update. We will be able to automate and enforce many of these best practice and compliance elements through a combination of the CMS and Web governance.

4) How does your Agency currently ensure that websites are meeting user expectations and needs and that the customer experience with websites is continually enhanced?

Improving the web experience for users is a top priority of the web strategy project that is underway. To establish a baseline, we have implemented the Foresee Survey tool and Google Analytics, both internally and externally, to assess how well our websites meet user expectations and needs. We use those results to guide our improvements to the customer experience.

As part of the customer service plan, in support of Executive Order 13571, we are working to review websites to ensure compliance with policies in OMB Memorandum M-05-04 (Policies for Federal Agency Public Websites) as well as the best practices on HowTo.gov. Content providers are actively involved in the site review. We have asked them to:

- provide contact information for each program
- assess the importance of keeping the site live
- confirm methods for measuring and analyzing web traffic.

We are reviewing their feedback to evaluate potential improvements and to share best practices.

Our Web team has also begun to collaborate more closely with our telephony team to determine top requests. Some of our call centers have been providing this information, while others have not. We have asked the telephony group to assist in gathering this data from all call centers. Closer collaboration between the web and telephony groups will help us present high-value information on our website in a user-friendly way.

Through deployment of a centralized CMS, we will have more flexibility to test and deploy emerging technologies. For example, we are planning to test a CMS module that assists with content translation to improve our service for the Limited English Proficient community. Automated content translation is never a perfect solution, but it is a step in the right direction, and an improvement over the status quo.

We have already implemented some tools to enhance the customer experience on DOT websites. GovDelivery, for example, is a subscription-based service that allows users to register on the website and receive alerts when we update content. This kind of proactive users engagement can save our users time and ensure they receive the information they need. We'll be looking for additional ways to integrate social media.

We are placing an increased emphasis on usability for new web development. We have taken advantage of GSA's "First Fridays" program, which has been a useful resource for usability testing. We are also investing in expanding the skill set of our staff through training and certification.