

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Wisconsin County Highway Association (WCHA) President's Task Force was established by the WCHA Board of Directors at their August 15th, 2011 meeting. The goal of the Task Force was to examine the controversy surrounding the recent State budget deliberations and the conflicts and disunity arising from it within the WCHA. Each WCHA District was represented on the Task Force. A total of five full day meetings were held to develop the Task Force report. While the Task Force membership is diverse and brought a wide range of perspectives to the deliberations, the members were unified in their commitment to make the WCHA a stronger, unified and effective organization.

The Executive Summary is a very brief overview of the Task Force report. It is strongly recommended that all members thoroughly read the document.

CONSENSUS BUILDING

The Task Force has developed a recommended guideline for consensus building. An organizational weakness exposed, as a result of the recent state budget deliberations, was the inability of the WCHA to form a consensus. The one page document developed gives recommendations for establishing positions and platforms; roles of leadership; and handling dissent. The Task Force believes that more has to be done to broker communication between our leadership and the membership.

CORE VALUES

The Task Force has given recommendations for the creation of a list of Core Values. The Association's vision; mission; platforms; and priorities should be a reflection of the core values of the membership. The recommendations identify core values for individual County Highway Departments, as well as core values for the WCHA.

2011 STATE BUDGET

The Task Force was asked to respond to this question concerning the 2011 State Budget: "Was the outcome a victory or defeat for County interests?" The unanimous response by the Task Force membership was that the outcome was a defeat for County interests and the WCHA. The defeat cannot be measured just in a legislative outcome favoring or adversely effecting Counties, but also in the disunity created within the WCHA; the perceived loss of WCHA credibility by transportation stakeholders; and the failures within our organization to respond decisively to a challenging legislative initiative. The 2011 State Budget process has exposed weaknesses within the WCHA that must be addressed. The failures that occurred during budget process cannot be blamed solely on individuals within our organization, but are a corporate, systematic failure of the Association itself. A breakdown of the WCHA's ability to engage in the political process occurred, due to organizational weaknesses that can be readily recognized. In order to recommend changes that must be made, the Task Force identified a lengthy list of failures at every level, from leadership to the membership itself.

The Task Force recognized four broad areas where change is needed:

- Communication
- Education
- Structure
- Process

MOTION 352

The focus of controversy in the 2011 State Budget was Joint Finance Committee Motion 352. Motion 352 contained numerous provisions, which would have made significant changes to County Highway Department operations. While Motion 352 called for increases in County General Transportation Aids, the County Highway Improvement Program and State Highway Maintenance, these were offsets for the loss of Local Force Account work, limitations on intergovernmental work and other constraints on Counties performing improvement work. The value of the offsets and the impact of the non-fiscal language written into a budget motion, led to opposition by a significant portion of WCHA's membership. While Motion 352 was supported by the Wisconsin Counties Association (WCA), the WCHA took no official position. A position of no WCHA endorsement for Motion 352 was eventually registered by the President of the WCHA, after which the WCA modified its position. The Motion was eventually pulled by the Legislature, but several provisions constraining County Highway Departments was contained in the final enrolled bill.

There has been much misinformation spread about the WCHA's conduct in the creation of Motion 352. Because of the WCHA's Summit discussions with WTBA and the Public and Private Union representative's, there had been an assumption by many that the WCHA had a role in developing Motion 352. There have also been additional rumors, that the development of Motion 352 occurred in "secret", "closed door meetings".

The Task Force has reviewed this matter and found, that while Motion 352 did incorporate some concepts explored in the Summit discussions, no one at WCHA had any involvement in the writing of Motion 352. It would appear that either WTBA or the Local 139 Operating Engineers had some input in cooperation with one or more Legislators in the authorship of Motion 352. The lack of WCHA involvement, in essence, led to a flawed legislative proposal, which, in turn, led to the confusion and conflict at the County level.

POLITICAL CLIMATE ASSESSMENT

The Task Force recognizes that there are political forces at work at the local, state and federal levels that for better or worse, impact the WCHA. The Task Force examined all aspects of the political landscape and all parties affecting the political climate.

The current economic distress has put an increased emphasis on private sector job creation, even if it is to the detriment of the public sector. Couple this with the power of the private sector to lobby for their positions and the public sector finds itself in a significant disadvantage in the political arena.

The Task Force believes that the WCHA must quickly regain its footing after the problems with a 2011 Budget and prepare for a very dynamic and active political environment. The Task Force has developed a list of steps the WCHA needs to take to prepare for future legislative and fiscal challenges. These

recommendations call for an organization wide effort from the leadership to the membership. The recommendations also call for the WCHA to engage transportation stakeholders.

SUMMIT DISCUSSIONS

Given that Motion 352 was seen by many in the WCHA membership to be an extension of the Summit Discussions, the Task Force considered whether a reengagement of the Wisconsin Transportation Builders Association (WTBA) was appropriate. The Task Force believes that the WTBA is an important stakeholder with considerable political influence. To ignore the WTBA or its influence would leave the WCHA in a very vulnerable position and would more than likely be very unsuccessful from a legislative standpoint.

The WCHA needs to be able to defend its interests and reach common ground with the WTBA, where possible. Stakeholders that cannot be considered partners must still be engaged.

The resistance to Motion 352 was to a great extent the perception that it did not live up to the concepts explored in the Summit Discussions and also because of the confusing language contained within it. If the WCHA had been allowed to contribute to the development of Motion 352, these problems might, very well have been avoided. The Task Force has developed a list of recommendations based on the Summit Discussions concepts that should be incorporated into future meetings with the WTBA.

OPERATIONAL PLANS

A factor leading to division and conflict within the WCHA has been the operational orientation of member counties. All Wisconsin counties do system preservation (maintenance). In addition to system preservation, many counties perform improvement work and provide services to local governments. County operational plans can range from predominately maintenance to predominately improvement with most counties somewhere in between. All counties provide maintenance services to the state and many counties provide both maintenance and/or improvement services to local units of government.

The perceived impacts to county operational structure from Motion 352 and the concepts proposed in the Summit Discussions have led to counties viewing themselves as winners or losers. Generally, those counties with a primarily maintenance orientation see the proposals as beneficial while those with a heavy improvement emphasis see them as detrimental.

The Task Force believes a political trend is pushing the public sector towards a "system preservation" (maintenance) model with a corresponding trend of promoting the private sector as the provider of "improvement" work. This can be seen in the 2011 Enrolled State Budget Bill, which put constraints on Counties working together on improvement projects and elimination of any County to work on municipal improvement projects (over a population of 5,000). Pressure to eliminate Local Force Account (LFA) work and constrain County improvement work will, no doubt, continue. It is very likely that LFA work could end through Legislative action or through agency policy changes.

Counties will be facing a number of challenges at the operational level and must be prepared to change their operational plans. The emphasis on system preservation will have little impact on counties that are presently maintenance oriented. Counties that have a significant improvement orientation will face more challenges to their operations and can anticipate more change.

Many "improvement" oriented counties view changing their operation to a more "maintenance" orientation as being destructive. Yet, there are many stable, functioning counties utilizing a maintenance orientation.

In order to meet this challenge, the WCHA must work to maintain as much flexibility as possible in the operational options for counties. Failure to stay engaged in the legislative process could open the door to imposition of operational changes by misguided or uninformed decision-makers.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The Task Force has developed a number of general recommendations for the WCHA to consider:

Recommendations for Immediate action include some of the following:

- Convene a statewide Commissioner's Meeting to review the Task Force report and recommendations
- Develop a plan for Legislative correction of several provisions contained in the 2011 Budget Bill
- WCHA Board of Directors and Executive Committee adoption of Task Force Consensus Building Agreement
- Meet with WISDOT leadership in effort to forge new partnership

Recommendations for Short Term and Long Term action include the following:

- Establish list of duties and responsibilities for Board of Directors and Executive Committee members consistent with Task Force Consensus Building Agreement
- Establish mechanism for effective communication with membership
- Establish a WCHA platform and written positions statements
- Establish rules for BOD action and procedures including the following:
 - Process for approving WCHA positions
 - Process for press release and media contacts
 - Process for establishing agendas and action items
 - Rules for confidentiality
 - Rules of conduct for officers and board members
 - Quick response plan to Legislative or Regulatory action
- Gather data on county operations that can be used to demonstrate County cost-effectiveness, responsiveness and changes made to accommodate current funding limitations
- Create educational campaign for Legislators, Public and Stakeholders concerning what County Highway Departments do
- Establishing dialogues with WTBA and other "non-partisan" stakeholders (reengage Summit Discussions)