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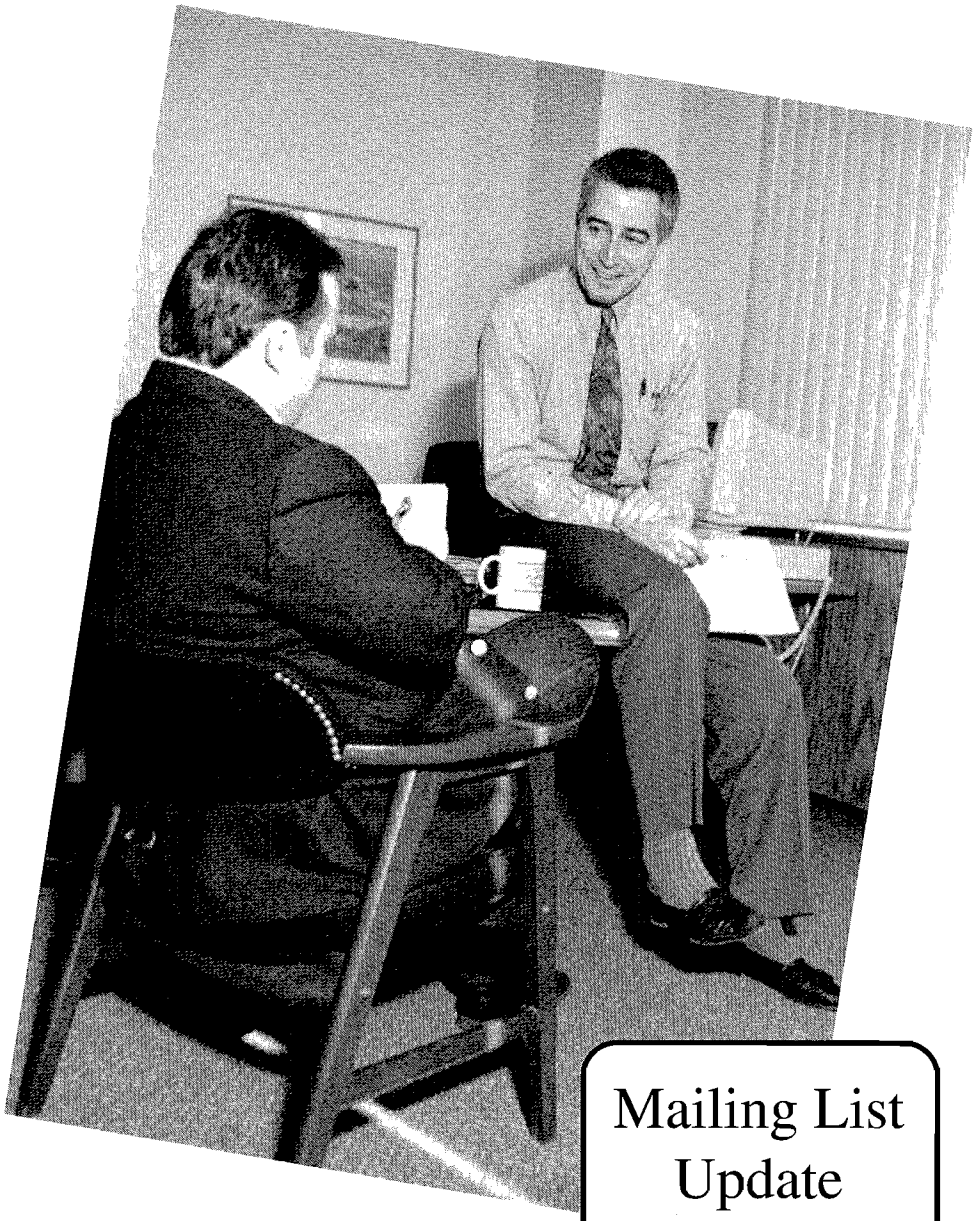
*Working **With** The Media, Not Against It*

by Rockie Blunt



It's tough enough doing your job and dealing with a public that doesn't always understand what that job is. The last thing you need is a reporter who misquotes you or gets the facts wrong on a project you're involved with. But it happens, and to hear state and municipal employees talk about it, it happens all the time.

When you *are* misrepresented in the media, what do you do? If it is a regular occurrence, the temptation is to assume the newspaper (or radio or television station) has it in for you and to refuse to cooperate with reporters ever again.

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Mailing List Update Card Inside!

Local Technical Assistance/Technology Transfer Center
(800) 374-ROAD or (413) 545-2604

***Media**...Continued from Page 1*

That's an understandable reaction, but it's not the best way to handle the situation - especially if you ever hope to get solid, accurate coverage of your department and its projects. Instead of shutting down the lines of communication between you and the reporters, try doing just the opposite: open those lines. Widely. Let me suggest three ways of improving relations with your local media.

◆ **Be proactive.** Manage the media. Instead of reacting to reporters, make them react to *you.* Take the initiative and build friendships with them. Go out of your way to introduce yourself to the reporter who has the "municipal beat" (a "beat" is a news territory, such as "police and fire," or "business," or "general assignment"). It's common at many newspapers for reporters to be rotated among different kinds of assignments. They can't be expected to know everything about every beat, especially when they're new. When you see an unfamiliar news representative, give the person your card. Invite him or her on a tour of your department. Offer to become a source of information. Reporters are like everyone else: they appreciate being helped when they are in unfamiliar territory.

◆ **Be accessible.** Make yourself available - in person or on the phone - when the media needs to speak with you. Don't ignore their phone calls, don't hang up on them, and don't be slow getting them the information they ask for. They are trying to do their jobs. If you don't talk with them, you lessen the chance they will get the story straight. And to help them get things straight, make sure you communicate clearly and fully. If you give them some technical information, for example, define or explain any specialized language. "Blue topping" may be familiar to you, but what does it mean to the typical reporter, especially a new one?

◆ **Be honest.** Tell the reporters what they need to know. Don't stall, and don't deprive them of information they should have access to. Reporters become upset when sources try to suppress bad news. It's only fair: if you expect positive coverage of your department's accomplishments, you have to be just as open and forthcoming about the negative things that happen. You can phrase it in such a way that you "soften" the bad news, but reporters expect you to be honest with them.

Once you have established yourself as a friend of the media, you increase the chance that newspaper, radio and television coverage of your activities will improve. Making the effort to open the lines of communication between your department and your local reporters will pay dividends in terms of accurate information and professional satisfaction. Help the media get the word out about your important and difficult job. It's one way of making that job easier.

Rockie Blunt, a Worcester-based consultant, is president of *Rockie Blunt Communications.*

Front cover photo:

Rockie Blunt (our reporter) interviews Robert Moylan, Commissioner of the City of Worcester, Department of Public Works.

Photo credit: Karen Dodge

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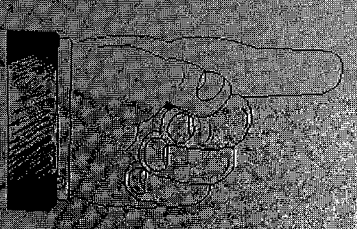


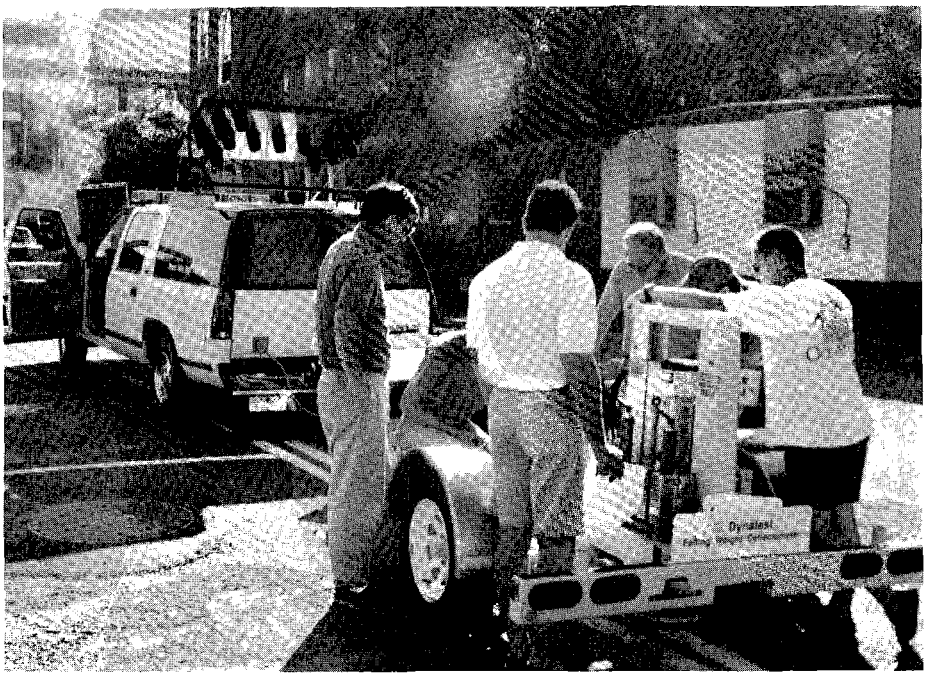
Massachusetts Highway Department/UMass purchase a Falling Weight Deflectometer

This past fall, the Massachusetts Highway Department contracted the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering at the University of Massachusetts/Amherst to assist in the implementation of new AASHTO Pavement Design requirements. The contract required the university to purchase a falling weight deflectometer (FWD) and to conduct three years of research using the FWD. At the end of this contract, the FWD and the research results will be turned over to the Massachusetts Highway Department.

The FWD represents the latest and most popular method for non-destructive pavement testing (NDT). The NDT is used to evaluate the structural integrity of existing pavements and is quickly becoming accepted as essential for proper structural overlayment design.

The FWD mimics the effect of a moving wheel load (i.e. a truck tire) on road pavement by dropping a set of weights onto a load plate set on the pavement. When the load is imposed, a deflection basin, similar to the instantaneous basin caused by a set of dual truck tires moving over that point on the road, is created. The FWD measures the depth and shape of this deflection basin with seven sensors (geophones) set at various distances from the load, including one directly under the load.

If, in addition to the depth and shape of the deflection basin, the thickness of the existing pavement and underlying granular layers are known, values for the elastic moduli for each layer can be determined using a method known as "backcalculation". These elastic moduli can then be used in the overlay design for the highway section being tested.



Charles Moore (seated) of Dynatest explains some details of the Falling Weight Deflectometer to (counterclockwise from left): Dr. William Highter, Ed Naras (Mass. Highway Dept.), Scott Michalak and Bob Leet (Graduate students in Civil and Environmental Engineering/UMass), and Walt Clark (Technician, Dept. of Civil and Environmental Engineering/ UMass).

Mr. Matthew Turo, Pavement Management Engineer for the Massachusetts Highway Department, is responsible for the project. Dr. William Highter, head of the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, leads the UMass team conducting the research.

Among the specific research topics the group will study are:

- The effects of both daily and seasonal temperature fluctuations on pavements.
- The performance of laboratory tests on soil samples to determine resilient moduli and thus improve the accuracy of the asphaltic concrete moduli backcalculation.

Sounds like fun!

Our thanks to UMass graduate student Robert Leet who contributed this article.

Quality Materials:

Key to Better Pothole Patches

Patching potholes is a routine, yet crucial, task for most highway departments. Left unfilled, potholes threaten motorist safety, and they damage vehicles and tires. Too often, maintenance crews, working dangerously close to traffic, seem to be fighting a losing battle: they repair a pothole, only to find it in need of repair a short while later. Yet patches at other times hold up well. What accounts for this difference?

One of the Strategic Highway Research Program's research projects evaluated the performance of various cold-mix asphalt patching materials and techniques. The study, part of a larger project that also included crack sealing, joint resealing, and spall repairs, took place over an 18-month period. During that time, 108 evaluations were conducted at 22 test sites throughout the continental United States. All told, 1,250 pothole patches were placed and studied.

The results are a bit surprising. When quality materials were used, the throw-and-roll procedure (that is, just dumping the patch material in the hole, with no preparation, and then driving the truck over the patch several times) was found to be just as effective as the semi-permanent procedure (defined as "doing it right," by squaring up the sides of the hole and cleaning and drying the hole before filling it). What seemed to matter more was the quality of materials and workmanship, not the procedure used to fill the hole.

The preliminary findings of the study, which also evaluated spray-injection and edge-seal procedures, underscore the importance of quality materials and workmanship:

- The only four experimental patches to perform significantly poorer than the control patches were those consisting of inexpensive cold-mix materials. In those instances, raveling — the loss of aggregate — caused the pothole to reappear in less than 1 month.

- The higher labor and equipment costs and lower productivity of the semi-permanent technique usually make the throw-and-roll technique more cost effective, provided quality materials are used.

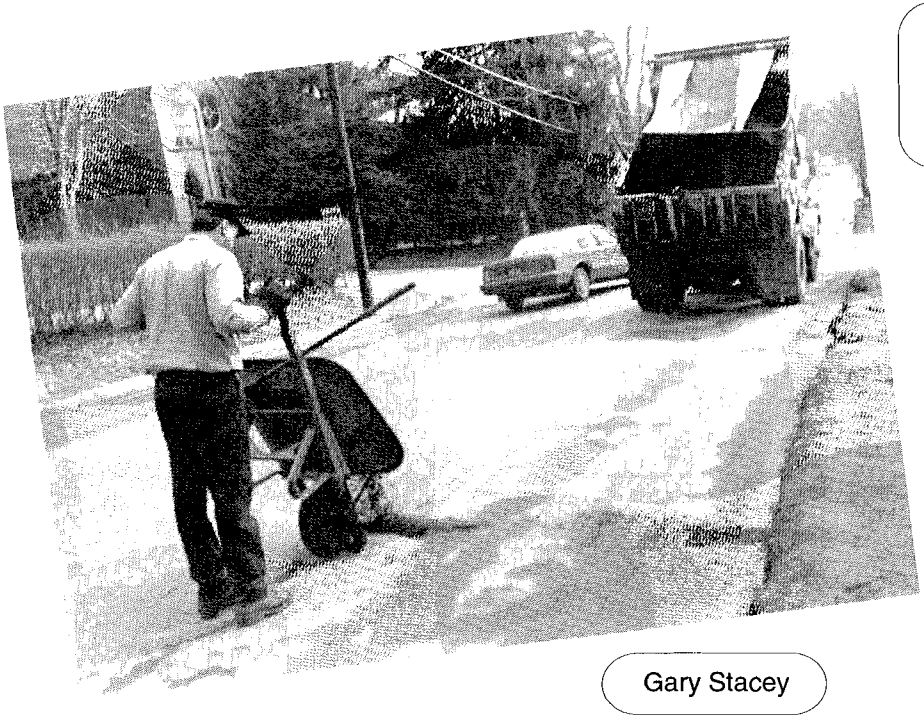
- Although pothole patches are usually intended to be temporary repairs, use of a high-quality material can extend the patch's life to more than a year.

- Potholes filled by the spray-injection technique held up as well as the control patches, but the performance of this technique is largely dependent on the skill of the operator.

These findings led three of the eight participating agencies to discontinue the use of inexpensive, but poorly performing, local cold mixes; they switched to one of the materials that performed well in the study.

The proprietary UPM High-Performance Cold Mix served as the control material at all sites. Experimental materials included: PennDOT (Pennsylvania Department of Transportation) 485 and 486; proprietary mixes Perma-Patch and QPR 2000; modified high-float medium-set emulsion (HFMS-2) with Styrelf; spray-injection materials; and local materials.

To determine the cost effectiveness of various repair materials and techniques, the installation cost and the expected life of the repairs were calculated. Factored into the installation cost were the price of materials, equipment, and labor, plus the time to prepare and fill the hole. Field tests collected data on how well the repairs held up, based on evidence of shoving, raveling, dishing, and debonding. A patch was deemed a failure if the pothole reappeared.



Gary Stacey

These three photos picture employees from the Amherst Public Works Department working hard to keep up with this year's potholes.

The second component of the study — the expected life of the repairs — is not yet available, as a large number of the patches are still functioning. FHWA will continue to monitor the sites to see just how well these patches continue to hold up.

In the meantime, here's some advice from the research team:

◆ In adverse weather, use throw-and-roll or spray-injection procedures to fix potholes. These high-productivity procedures produce high-quality repairs, and will spare the maintenance crew from spending a lot of time out in the elements. Use quality materials, and if you use a spray-injection device, make sure it is operated by a skilled technician.

◆ Use the best materials possible. You might save some money by purchasing a poorer quality material, but those savings will be quickly eaten up by the cost of patching the same potholes over and over. Moreover, the initial purchase cost of material is insignificant compared with the costs of labor, equipment, and motorist delays associated with patching operations.

◆ Don't expect patches placed under severe weather conditions to perform as well as those placed under more temperate conditions. The most critical period in the service life of a pothole patch appears to be the first few weeks, when the patch is setting. Wet weather and cold temperatures mean the patch will take longer to set, which will provide more opportunities for failure.

◆ When considering the cost of a more expensive cold mix, be sure to take into account the time that motorists will save because of fewer maintenance-caused delays. Work crews will also spend less time on the street, making their working conditions safer.

◆ Test the material to ensure compatibility between the aggregate and the binder.

Matt Loven and Gary Stacey

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Hazmat Training Packet

(includes video)

The U.S. Department of Transportation regulations now require training and recurrent training (every two years) for hazmat drivers. If you transport density and moisture gauges, these regulations apply to you.

Baystate Roads Program now has a Hazmat Training Packet which satisfies DOT requirements. The packet includes a general awareness videotape plus job specific training materials.

To borrow this videotape and materials, simply call, fax or write to us.

and another new videotape

PA-144 Idea Store IX

Backing accidents due to blind spots while operating heavy equipment are all too common. This video highlights a safety key ring, which provides a visual reminder of the blind spots for a specific vehicle.

calendar

Seventh Annual Mountain of Demonstrations
June 10, 1994
Sponsor: New Hampshire Road Agents
Location: Waterville Estates, N.H.
Contact: T2 Center, Univ. of N.H.
(603) 862-2826

Don't miss this day filled with static displays and working demonstrations of equipment, materials, and construction methods related to municipal road programs. Over 900 people involved with local road maintenance, repair, and construction are expected. Lunch is free, too! (Registration in advance is requested. You must register in advance for lunch).

The 1994 National Traffic Data Acquisition Conference
September 18-22, 1994
Sponsor: CT DOT/FHWA
Location: Hartford Marriot, Rocky Hill, CT
Contact: (203) 258-0300

Community Transit Expo '94 Reinventing Transit: Accessing America's Communities
May 23-27, 1994
Sponsor: Community Transp. Assoc. of America
Location: Pittsburgh, PA
Contact: (800) 527-8279

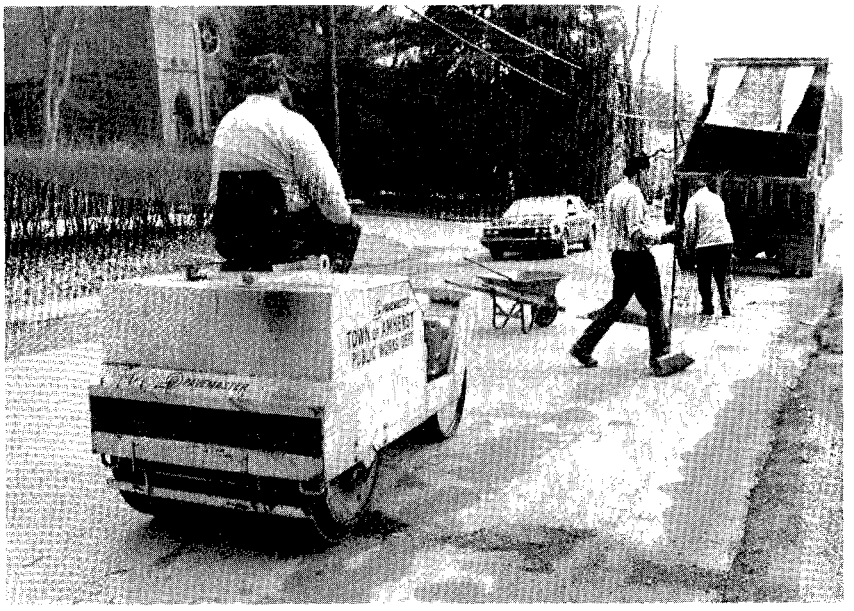
Transportation Solutions for "Today, Tomorrow and Beyond" 4th National Conference for Small and Medium-Sized Areas
May 25-27, 1994
Sponsor: Transportation Research Board, U.S. DOT, MN/DOT
Location: Duluth, MN
Contact: Kathy Briscoe, MN DOT, (612) 296-1614

Estimating Highway Maintenance Work, 4th Edition, Bureau of Maintenance, DOT, State of Ohio, April 1991. This easy-to-read, handy publication provides examples of how to calculate all types of measurements. Asphalt patches, crack sealer, grass seeding, mowing, road salt application, tank capacity, and volume-backfil are just a few examples of what is covered. An appendix gives helpful information on lengths, areas, volumes, rates, equivalents, and rules.

Entrepreneurial Services Program Financing Handbook, U.S. DOT/ Federal Transit Administration, June 1993. This publication is designed to assist companies in the Entrepreneurial Services Program (ESP) to obtain financing adequate to their needs. ESP provides niche companies with planning and capital investment dollars and technical assistance to foster the development of financially self-sufficient, market-responsive transportation services. Chapter One describes the basic methods of financial analysis. In Chapter Two, financial planning techniques are outlined. Chapter Three describes the different sources of funding, and Chapter Four provides four different models.

For a complete listing of our publications, request our Baystate Roads Program **Publications Listing**, September 1993.

Pothole*....continued from Page 5*



Tim O'Brien, Gary Stacey, and Matt Loven

◆ Keep in mind that the study evaluated only a limited number of materials. They are by no means the only cost-effective materials. Consider setting up regional centers for continued testing.

◆ Share your experiences and findings with others. Save them from reinventing the wheel.

For details on the study and its conclusions, order Innovative Materials Development and Testing, Volume 2: Pothole Repair (Publ. No. SHRP-H-353; $15) from the Transportation Research Board's Business Office (Box 289, Washington, DC 20055; fax 202-334-2519). For more information about the pothole study, contact Shashikant Shah at 202-334-3774. For information about FHWA's implementation activities, contact John Sullivan at 202-366-1554.

This article was reprinted with permission from the December 1993 issue of FOCUS, a publication of the Strategic Highway Research Program.

Video Training Programs Available!

We've just received two Start Smart Video Training Programs from VISTA:

Safely Controlling the Power of the Backhoe/Loader, which features:

- A walk around the backhoe/loader
- On-the-job operating safety awareness
- Maintenance/transportation

Safely Controlling the Power of the Wheel Loader, which features:

- Real-life experiences and close calls
- Proper transport method
- Usable safety information for experienced and inexperienced operators

Each program lasts about two hours, and makes a perfect miniworkshop for your operators. Call Chris to arrange a time and date (or a loan).

The Baystate Roads Program, which publishes *Mass Interchange* each quarter, is a Technology Transfer (T2) Center created under the Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) Local Technical Assistance Program (LTAP). FHWA is joined by the Massachusetts Highway Department, the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering at the University of Massachusetts/Amherst, and local public works departments in an effort to share and apply the best in transportation technologies.

In addition to publishing *Mass Interchange*, the Baystate Roads Program facilitates information exchange by conducting workshops, providing reports and publications and videotapes on request, and offering one-to-one technical assistance on specific roadway issues. Because the program relies on input from many sources, inquiries, articles, and ideas are encouraged.

To contact the Baystate Roads Program, call (800) 374-ROAD (in state) or (413) 545-2604.

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