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INTERCHANGE

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Faced with a
Complaining
Customer?

"Take a Loss ...and Make it a Win."

By
Rockie Blunt



Photo by Karen Dodge

John Bean, the DPW Superintendent for the Town of Greenfield, works out an issue with "angry customer," James Garanin, Assistant Engineer.

Recently I was sitting in the office of the director of the Department of Public Works in a medium-sized city. He was musing about how his department deserved a more positive image in the public's eye than it was getting. "There are a lot of misconceptions about us out there," he said. "We need to get the word out about the good things we're doing. What we have to do is 'take a loss and make it a win.'"

Of all the statements I've heard about handling criticisms, that's the best one. *Take a loss and make it a win.* As unpleasant or undeserved as they may be, complaints can be turned into positive experiences - but only if you know how to handle them.

Chances are, if you work for a city or town, you have encountered citizens who take issue with something concerning their municipal government. They didn't think the snow plowing went well during the last storm, or the potholes are even worse this year. The water quality could be better, traffic is being bottlenecked by too many road projects, or the trash pickup was a little late last week. It's always something.

This might sound strange to you, but you should *want* to hear complaints. They alert you to the public's concerns, especially the ones you're not aware of. According to research into customer service, for every person who voices a criticism, twenty-five others feel the same way but don't say anything. Without that one person, you may never have known the problem existed. It is only after learning of a problem that you can begin to correct it. Here are some techniques for handling these uncomfortable situations.

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

The Clemson Beaver Pond Leveler

Beavers may be mother nature's civil engineers, but to local officials whose job it is to maintain drainage at bridges, through culverts and ditches, and along roads, the beaver is North America's largest rodent and a human civil engineer's biggest pest.

But beavers aren't all bad; there are beneficial aspects to the work that they do. When built in the right place, beaver dams create wetlands that provide habitat for plant life and other animals. The ideal situation would be to work with the beaver to keep those benefits of the dam, but avoid the damages of the flooding that are associated with it.

New Design May Do the Trick

Over the years a variety of methods have been used to try to solve the flooding problems caused by beavers, but the animals often find ways to use the remedy as another place to build a dam.

Recently, researchers at Clemson University's Department of Aquaculture, Fisheries and Wildlife developed and tested the Clemson Beaver Pond Leveler. The design provides a solution to a host of beaver problems.

The leveler does not negate the need for direct control (trapping) of beaver populations where problems are extensive; however, it reduces this need and provides an opportunity to get along with the existence of a few beavers.

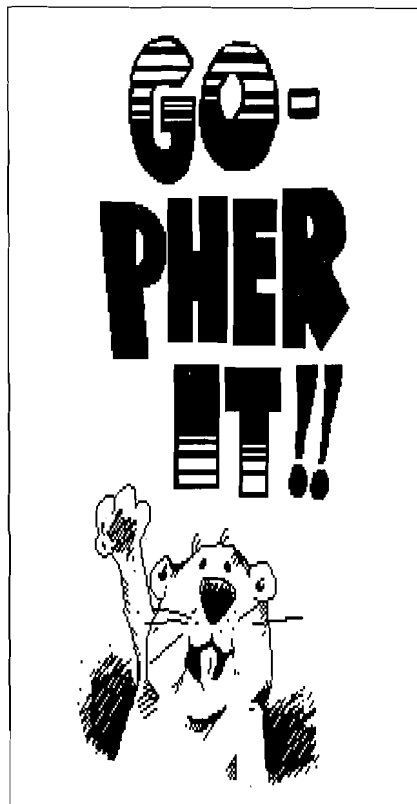
Beavers Working Overtime on Clare County Culverts

A common problem in Clare County, MI has been beavers that dam

culvert ends. According to Steve Stocking, Engineer/Manager, "They plug the in-flow end of the culverts so well that at times the water flows over the road." The county has tried placing screens over the inlets, but this technique doesn't stop the beavers, even though it does make routine cleaning easier. Although the Clemson Leveler is designed primarily for use in ponds, Stocking hopes that they will be able to adapt the leveler to work with a culvert in certain situations.

Leveler Outsmarts the Beaver

Beavers have the ability to detect current flow and this is one motivation for building dams. The



leveler intake device is designed to minimize current flow so beavers cannot detect it.

The intake needs to be installed so that it is always below the water surface, even when the pond level is at a minimum. Testing at 30 sites in South Carolina has shown that beavers were unable to detect a submerged intake de-

vice as the source of pond water loss.

A second stimulus that causes beavers to build dams and fill culverts and standpipes is the sound of falling or trickling water. Ideally the outlet end of the leveler is installed below the water level on the downstream side of the dam; however, when standpipes are used and the water flows out in a fountain-like fashion, beavers have made no attempt to stop water flow. Standpipes regulate the water levels in the ponds and are essential where periodic drawdown and reflooding are desirable.

Common Materials and Easy Assembly

The leveler is constructed of common materials:

- 10" PVC (Sch. 40)
- 3/4" plastic roll pipe (160 psi)
- 2" x 4" 12.5 gauge galv. welded wire
- Assorted connectors

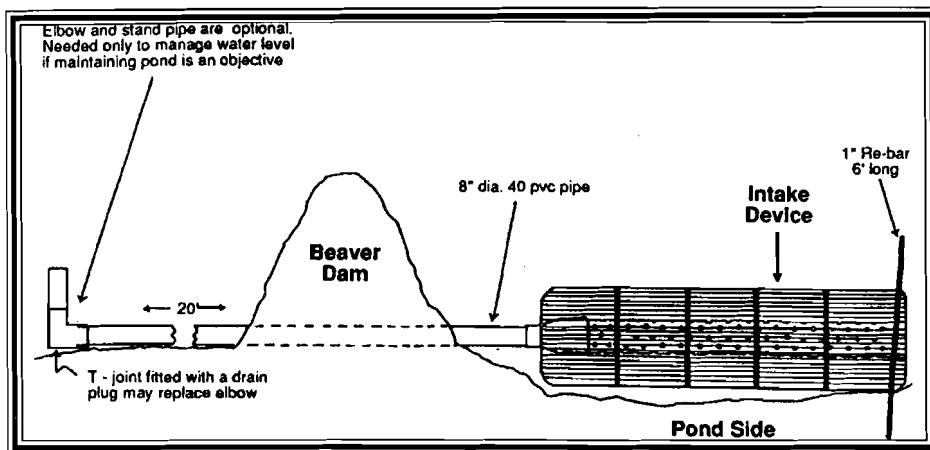
It can be assembled by shop personnel in a couple of hours. Installation time is dependent on site location.

New Video Shows You How

A new videotape from Clemson University details the concept behind the leveler and includes step-by-step instructions for its construction and installation. A publication is also available.

To borrow a copy of the video and accompanying leveler information, contact the Georgia LTAP office in Atlanta, GA.

Original source: "The Bridge", Spring 1994, Michigan Technology Transfer Center. Adapted for "Georgia Roads", Winter 1994.



The Clemson Beaver Pond Leveler

COMPLAINING CUSTOMER?

(continued from page 1)

1. **Deal with the conflict right away**, preferably within twenty-four hours. By delaying a few days before responding to a complaint, you let the problem fester, which makes the citizen internalize a bad opinion about you or your department.

2. **Don't take the complaint personally**. The complainer is probably upset at a situation, not at you as an individual. Remain calm and professional.

3. If you are confronted by a person who is clearly upset, **don't try to deal with him or her intellectually**. The person is thinking emotionally, not logically, and will not react well to an analytical conversation. Beware, too, of saying "calm down." In all probability, the person will shoot back, "Don't tell me what to do!"

4. **Listen to the complaint**. In fact, practice reflective listening skills, which means paraphrasing back what the person is saying to you. Use expressions like, "If I hear you correctly, what happened was . . ." or "What you're saying is . . ." Furthermore, back up your listening by using positive "body language." Smile, and nod your head to show that you consider the complaint important.

5. **Use an "assertiveness" technique**. Think of a short, definitive

statement, such as (depending on the situation) "Your street will be plowed by noon." Every time the person questions you or tries to pressure you into saying something different, keep repeating in a confident but unemotional manner, "Your street will be plowed by noon."

6. Give the citizen direct answers, even if it's to say that you're not able to do anything about the situation. On the other hand, if you are able, **keep the customer informed of your progress**.

Remember, a complaint is an opportunity to do some *positive* public relations. It may not seem easy or fun, especially if the person is argumentative or stubborn, but think of the long-term image of

Bicycle Safety Program

Each year more than half a million cyclists suffer injuries that send them to hospital emergency rooms. Nearly two thirds are children from ages 5 to 14. A third of those injuries involve the head and face -- twice the fraction of head injuries that result from football, baseball and hockey.

The Lexington Bicycle Safety Program has developed two products that will help your organization promote bicycle safety in your community: A guide on How to Fund Your Bicycle Safety Program uses "Bike Safely and Have Fun" presentation folders with safety tips. This guide is available for \$20 plus \$3 for shipping and handling.

An all-inclusive Two-Lesson Elementary School Bicycle Safety Curriculum Kit contains four videos, lesson plans, overhead transparencies, and "egg helmet" and sample materials. This kit is available for \$125 plus \$5 shipping and handling in the U.S.

If you would like to preview the guide or the kit, call (617) 863-6318.

your department. The public will change their negative perceptions if you surprise them with a fair, friendly tone and follow-up actions that back up your words. With practice, it does get easier to "take a loss and make it a win."

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

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Tool Helps Lone Surveyor

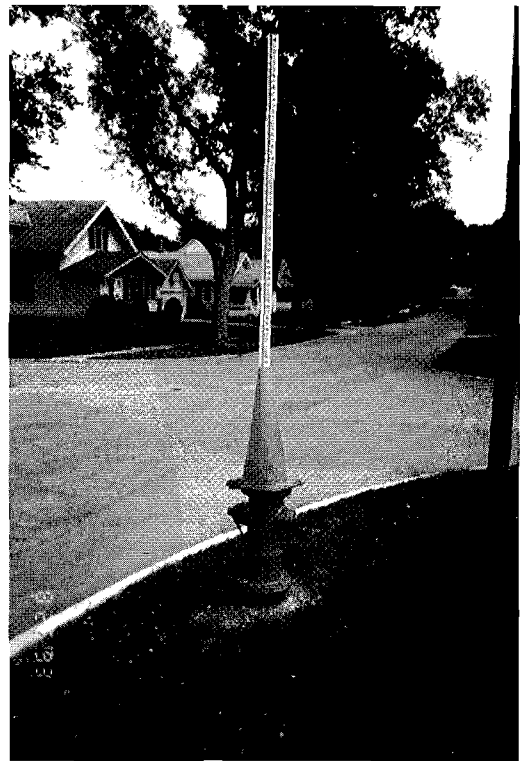
If you ever find yourself alone when you need to do some surveying, you might appreciate the services of this "surveyor helper." Made by cutting the top reinforcement out of a 28-inch traffic cone and inserting a leveling rod into the cone, the device is easy to carry with you.

Myron Daringer, engineering technician for the City of Carroll, IA developed this simple but effective tool and dubbed it the surveyor helper. He uses a fiberglass leveling rod, removing the rod sections he doesn't need so it won't be too top heavy. On a still day, the cone will support an eight to ten foot fiberglass rod.

While the surveyor helper is not the most effective way to survey, it does eliminate the need for another individual when you have to do a "two-shot survey."

For more information contact Myron Daringer, engineering technician, City of Carroll, phone (712) 792-1000.

This article is reprinted from the July 1994 issue of Technology News with the permission of the Iowa Transportation Center.



Surveyor Helper

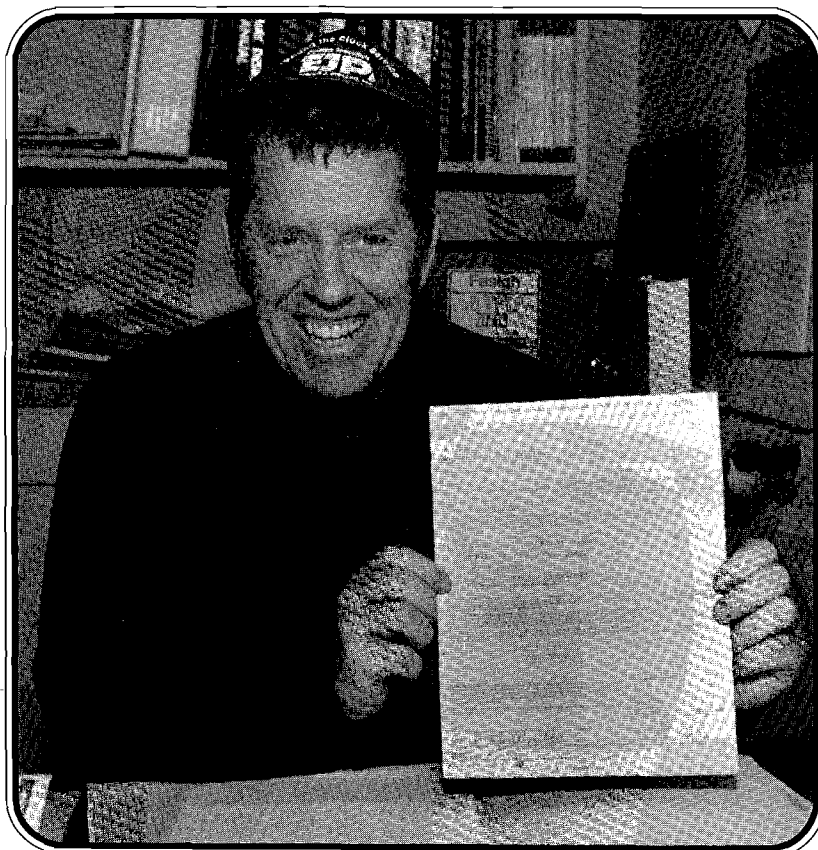
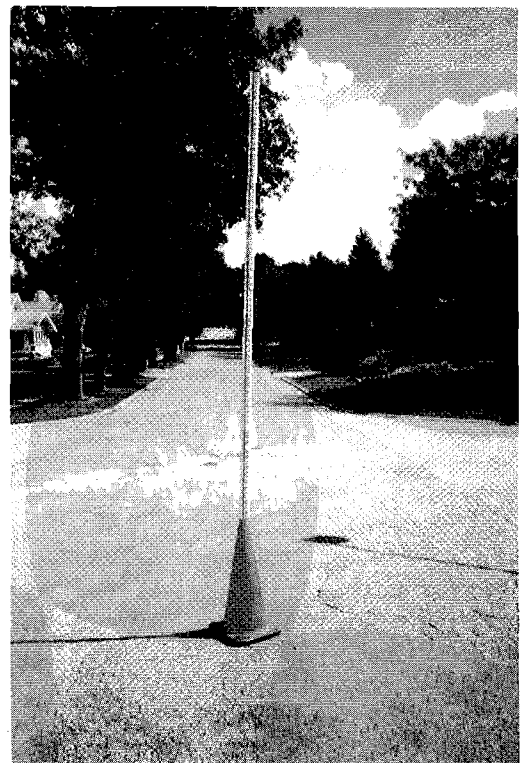


Photo by Karen Dodge

Erwin Reynolds, Highway Superintendent for the Town of Buckland poses with the invoice for his new (slightly used) road grader. For those of you who don't remember Erwin, we showed his horse-drawn road grader, actually being pulled by a payloador in our picture, on the back cover of our last issue and commented on how old it was. Congratulations to Erwin and the rest of the highway crew in Buckland.



Surveyor Helper

NEW PUBLICATIONS

Concrete Pavement Repair/ Manuals of Practice: *Materials and Procedures for the Repair of Joint Seals in Concrete Pavements; Materials and Procedures for Rapid Repair of Partial-Depth Spalls in Concrete Pavements*, Strategic Highway Research Program, National Research Council, 1993. This book contains two pavement maintenance manuals intended for use by highway maintenance agencies and contracted maintenance firms in the field and in the office. Each is a compendium of good practices for portland cement concrete (PCC) joint resealing and partial-depth spall repair, respectively, stemming from two Strategic Highway Research Program (SHRP) studies.

Asphalt Pavement Repair/Manuals of Practice: *Materials and Procedures for Sealing and Filling Cracks in Asphalt-Surfaced Pavements; Materials and Procedures for the Repair of Potholes in Asphalt-Surfaced Pavements*, Strategic Highway Research Program, National Research Council, 1993. This book contains two pavement maintenance manuals intended for use by highway maintenance agencies and contracted maintenance firms in the field and in the office. Each is a compendium of good practices for asphalt concrete (AC) crack sealing and filling and pothole repair, respectively, stemming from two Strategic Highway Research Program (SHRP) studies.

Snow Fence Guide, Strategic Highway Research Program, 1991.

This guide was produced to encourage more widespread use of cost-effective snow fence technology. It covers everything maintenance personnel need to know in order to design and locate snow fences correctly. It also summarizes the results of research conducted over the last two decades.

Guide for Improving Highway Department Operations: A Workbook for Municipal Managers, Prepared by: Talisman/Factor Management and the Town of Sunderland, MA, June, 1993. In this workbook, the authors have outlined their methods with the needs of small towns (population under 10,000) in mind. The goal of the workbook is to outline the method they have used to improve the operations of municipal departments throughout the Commonwealth, and to provide a set of examples that will show how managers of small communities can apply this framework to their own organizations.

ST-148 Work Area Protection

Northeast Utilities, 13 minutes. Our expanding highway system and increased volume of traffic has brought about a greater need for good traffic control methods. The Work Area Protection Program described in this video has been developed to provide guidelines for the safe and orderly movement of traffic around a workzone, and to provide a safe zone in which to perform your work.

DC-144 Special Hot Mixes

Video University Productions, 46 minutes (copyright 1993). Using the results of a research study which sent 21 American asphalt paving experts to Europe, a history and description of SMA (Stone

Mastic Asphalt); using a case study in an airport environment, ATPB (Asphalt Treated Permeable Base) is examined; also: Rubberized Hot Mix Asphalt is discussed.

DC-145 Selective Pavement Rehabilitation

Video University Productions, 34 minutes (copyright 1993). One of the Asphalt Contractor's Video Series with Pete Barber of CMI Corporation. He talks about milling, which he considers to be the most economic rehabilitation system.

DC-146 Asphalt Maintenance Techniques

Video University Productions, 85 minutes (copyright 1993). Various types of damage require various methods of pavement

NEW VIDEOTAPES

repair: This video focuses on cutouts and repairs, crack filling, asphalt overlay, seal coating, striping, as well as geotextiles and targets important considerations such as weather conditions, equipment, crew, procedures and traffic control.

DC-150 Paving Techniques

Video University Productions, 37 minutes (copyright 1993). Focusing on the lay down equipment, Don Brock of Astec Industries investigates the improvement of pavement quality through equipment innovation. Also: the impact of initial pavement smoothness on the life of a road.

HOW NOISE AFFECTS HEARING

Understanding Hearing Loss

Hearing loss is a normal part of the aging process. Throughout our lives we are exposed to loud noises and physical conditions that add up to gradual loss of hearing. But many of us lose our hearing prematurely by failing to protect ourselves from excess noise both at home and at the workplace. Understanding how hearing works can help you realize the importance of protecting your hearing now, before it's too late.

How Hearing Works

The ear is composed of numerous delicate structures designed to carry sound waves to the brain. The hair cells in the inner ear are particularly important because they stimulate the auditory nerve which transmits impulses to the brain. The brain translates auditory impulses into the sounds that we hear. When the ear's hair cells become damaged due to excess noise exposure, the auditory nerve is not sufficiently stimulated, the brain does not receive the appropriate sound signal, and we fail to hear correctly. And, when hair cells are damaged by prolonged overexposure to loud noise, they "die" and cannot be replaced, resulting in permanent hearing loss.

Excess Noise Exposure

Noise is measured in units called decibels (dBs or dBA's). Excess noise is generally considered to be exposure to 85-90 decibels or more over an 8-hour period. A typical automobile horn can be as loud as 120 decibels, but hearing a horn honk for 10 seconds

is unlikely to cause hearing loss. If you had to listen to the horn blast for 8 hours straight, though, you could very well experience gradual, permanent loss of hearing. Or, if you work in a factory and are exposed to 80 decibels of noise over a 4-hour period, you might not be at risk. But, if you then went home and operated a power mower or tools, listened to high-volume music, or perhaps practiced at the shooting range, you could very well exceed your safe noise exposure limit.

Protecting Your Hearing

On or off the job, you can protect your hearing by wearing the

appropriate personal protective equipment recommended for your tasks. Ear muffs, plugs, and canal caps can all reduce the amount of noise your ears are exposed to. It also helps to know the decibel range or noise level of some common activities and situations to see if you may be exposing yourself to too much noise. Remember that even loud vacuum cleaners, dishwashers, and home power tools can create excessive noise, so protect your hearing wherever you are.

Common Noise Levels	
Activity/Situation:	Decibels
Normal Conversation	60
Auto traffic	75
Sanding	85
Subway	90
Woodworking	100
Drilling (pneumatic)	100
Power saw	110
Gunfire	120

VIDEO COMMUNICATION

Most street and highway superintendents have had to face the frustration of trying to describe a difficult road situation to their board or council. It is difficult to accurately portray a problem while sitting in the boardroom. The frustration becomes even greater when taxpayers may have complained to the board or council and described the problem differently.

Mr. Hiene Junge, Coding County Highway Superintendent (of South Dakota), came up with this interesting idea. He borrowed a camcorder and used it to capture some difficult snow conditions on video.

These conditions were unique to just one area of the county. He edited his video footage and did a short presentation for his commissioners at a board meeting the following week. His commission was very receptive and it cleared up some of the confusion over how bad the snow conditions really were.

In fact, his board authorized the purchase of a video recorder for the highway department. They would like to use this method of communication in the future when questions arise over things like unique road conditions and maintenance procedures. This eliminates time consuming "field trips" for the board.

You may want to consider this method of communicating with your board. One tip though — edit your field footage down to a short, concise presentation — usually no more than ten minutes. Don't bore them with a lengthy "home movie"; just show the facts and then discuss the situation.

Mr. Junge also offered another suggestion for use of the video camera. The county's insurance company recommends a yearly survey of the county road system. By mounting a video camera in a vehicle and driving the nearly four hundred miles of the Codington County road system, Mr. Junge will have a visual record of his survey. In this case editing the footage would be a mistake. The unedited tape should be kept on file. It provides the documentation the insurance company needs, and it will also be available in case a liability suit is filed against the county.

Video recording may not appeal to everyone, but Mr. Junge has had real success with it.

Written by Ken Skorseth, South Dakota Transportation Technology Transfer Service; reprinted from Summer 1994 issue with their permission.



UPCOMING BAYSTATE ROADS WORKSHOPS

MAINTAINING TRAFFIC SIGNAL SYSTEMS

One Day Seminar
May 25: Southborough
June 6: Andover
June 13: Northampton

SURVEYING AND PLAN READING

One Day Seminar
May 3: Southborough
May 10: Taunton
May 17: Northampton
May 24: Andover
May 31: Pittsfield

WALKABLE COMMUNITIES

One Day Seminar
June 26: Northampton
June 27: Southborough
June 28: Plymouth

New England Chapter American Public Works Association:

Luncheon

May 24, 1995
Location: Anthony's Pier 4
Contact: Jackie Connors
(617) 635-4900

Summer Workshop

June 21, 22 & 23, 1995
Location: Chatham Bars Inn
Contact: Lon Hultgren
(203) 429-3332

International Erosion Control Association - Professional Development Training Courses

May 16-18, 1995
Location: Andover, MA
Contact: Tracy
(800) 455-4322
fax: (303) 879-8563
for registration or information

calendar

Photo by Karen Dodge



Shortly after our last newsletter was mailed, we received a call from Bill Nixon, Highway Superintendent in Yarmouth, who told us to come to Yarmouth to see a truly classic grader. We went to Yarmouth; Bill was right. Pictured are: John Sears, Jr.; Dan Sears; John Sears, III; Ken Sears; Bill Nixon; Jim Henderson; (kneeling) Steve Sears and Rick Sears with their Adams Learning Wheel Grader #1C. Indiana. This grader was fully restored and now stands proudly outside of the Yarmouth Highway Department. Many thanks to Bill for his contribution and input. NB: Jim Henderson's great uncle was Highway Surveyor when the grader was in use by the town.

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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