Northeast Transportation Workforce Center
Summary of January 13, 2015 Stakeholder Session

The first stakeholder meeting of the Northeast Regional Transportation Workforce Center resulted in the successful gathering of strategies to address key needs in the transportation workforce in the Northeast. Participants from every state in the region helped define the problems and voiced concerns about the future workforce in transportation while bringing important resources and examples of successful approaches to the discussion. All modes of transportation were represented except for the pipeline sector.

A short survey was sent out to both in-person and remote participants to further capture perspectives from participants as they reflected on the discussion, and gather additional data that would help identify challenges facing the transportation industry. Transcripts were also produced from the discussions of both in-person and online participants and analyzed for recurring themes. The word cloud below represents the 30 most commonly used words in both discussion formats.

Overwhelmingly, the comments indicated that greatest challenge facing the transportation workforce in the future was the current aging work force, followed closely by both the lack of qualified applicants to replace retirees and the need to achieve ethnic and racial diversity in the workforce that better reflected the population served in the Northeast. To address the retirement issue, many stakeholders volunteered stories from their own experiences where there was little incentive to continue working in their organization past early retirement ages (mostly public sector perspective). Indeed, this finding on the regional survey was indicated on a national survey conducted by the consortium of Transportation Workforce Centers as well, with the aging workforce rated well above the rest of the possible challenges to address. Other recurring themes were competition from other industries, and various barriers to professional development.
With these issues in mind, participants were asked to consider proposed tasks of the Regional Center and also recommend a series of beneficial activities from their own experiences that they felt could be helpful. The most important tasks included:

1. Developing a central clearing house containing information on existing training and education programs, a “one-stop-shop” for transportation workforce information via the Center websites
2. Creating partnerships to address gaps in available training and education programs
3. Provide alerts of new information, the availability of grants/funds, and training opportunities
4. Create visible resources that will help employers and those wishing to join the workforce to find each other

Participants (both during the discussion and in the survey) outlined several programs that were underway in their own states that could be expanded or used as models.

- The large number of stakeholders representing educational institutions posited that actual collaborations with colleges (either continuing education or academic certificate/degree programs) would be a useful strategy that could be expanded for the transportation sector.
- Other partners from public agencies pointed to winter and summer seasonal programs, internships for technical and non-technical college students, and co-op programs for high school seniors and veterans.
- On the difficulty of recruiting those in K-12 programs, the participants agreed that it was important to expose the next generation to the myriad of opportunities that exist within the transportation discipline and the different routes one can take to get there. Construction career day-like events should be expanded, as well as opportunities for students to do field work over summers.
- Specific note was also made of the centers’ efforts to put the retention and access of women at the forefront of the discussion. Participants acknowledged that gender diversity could be encouraged through scholarships and outreach opportunities, where professional women in transportation visit high schools and colleges to discuss potential careers.

In an attempt to further capture all spectrums of the workforce, there was also a call to include information for potential employers on how best to reach out and accommodate employees with disabilities and what the benefits of employing those individuals would be. To accomplish outreach to all these groups, participants discussed the benefits of an online resource with lists of organizations and entities that may be best coordinated by the center to find each other efficiently.

The reception to the meeting was overwhelmingly positive, with the participants agreeing that the region would be best served by having future round tables with key stakeholders several times a year to discuss workforce development topics and exchange best practices. There was consensus that the potential workforce is out there, and the Regional Center’s main goal should be trying to fit together all the different players in the program by leveraging resources and improving communication between all the partners. Building a “passion for transportation” as a career field with a strong public service aspect was noted as being key to recruiting diverse candidates into the sector.

NTWC website is available at http://www.uvm.edu/trc/ntwc/. The survey link is also on this site and will remain open for continuing stakeholder input as we do outreach to the many additional stakeholders who expressed interest but who were unable to attend this first session.