

# **WHAT WAS HEARD!**

**A Report Documenting the Results of Consultation on the  
Transportation Association of Canada's Business Plan**

*November 2002*

**Transportation Association of Canada**

## **Context**

In April 2001, the Transportation Association of Canada's Board approved a business plan that builds on TAC's strengths as a forum, an educational force, an information clearinghouse and a guideline development center. Many of the recommendations contained in the business plan were implemented following the April 2001 meeting; others required that bylaws be amended at the Annual General Meeting held in September 2001 in Halifax. The two-year business plan allowed TAC to strengthen its technical focus, with policy issues being more appropriately dealt with by the Council of Deputy Ministers Responsible for Transportation and Highway Safety.

Since the Board approved the 2001/02 & 2002/03 business plan in April 2001, it has made minor revisions to the plan, primarily to address issues that have arisen during its application.

Given the level of uncertainty surrounding the impacts of the major changes in TAC's funding and governance models and its new product lines, the current business plan, which expires in April 2003, was limited to a two-year time frame. However, it was recognized by the Board at that time that the organization should be striving to achieve a three-year business plan, in the future, once it had successfully achieved its initial targets as set out in the 2001/02 & 2002/03 business plan.

In September 2002, the Board approved a process to allow for a three-year business plan to be developed under the stewardship of the Executive Committee in time for discussion at its April 2003 meeting. In developing the plan, members were to be consulted in order to seek input on ways to build on past successes and to continue to seek increased value for current and prospective members of the association.

## **The Consultation Mechanism**

The Board-approved process was founded in large part on input that was to be sought from all categories and levels of membership. In order to obtain as much feedback as possible, the views on possible future directions for TAC from member representatives as well as from council and committee members were solicited by way of four web/teleconference meetings in November 2002. A total of 38 participants shared their thoughts with the TAC Secretariat who facilitated the discussions in a focus group like format. A distance-meeting medium was retained in order to reduce travel and time requirements for both Secretariat staff and participants. The use of the meeting technology received favourable reviews from participants.

The results of this consultation are contained in this *'What Was Heard! Report'*. They will be used to facilitate the development of guiding principles by the TAC Board at its meeting in December 2002. These guiding principles are expected to provide clear direction to the Executive Committee and TAC staff in formulating the new business plan. Review and adoption of the plan by the Board is expected in April 2003. Implementation of the three-year plan would commence immediately following Board approval and would be updated by the Board periodically as required during the three-year timeframe.

## **What Was Heard?**

Comments from participants were noted by subject matter related to the business plan. It should be recognized that, although some comments are 'one off' in nature and do not represent a consensus amongst participants, the comments are nevertheless extremely valuable input to the business planning process by allowing board members to think *'outside of the box'*. In reviewing the comments, particular attention should be paid to the key action items that were developed by participants at the conclusion of the consultation sessions.

## TAC's Mission

Reproduced in the box below, TAC's mission reaffirms the acknowledged road-related expertise of the association and also addresses two other key areas in which it has a special interest – linkages between roads and other modes of transportation, as well as urban transportation. ***For purposes of the consultation process, TAC's mission was offered as a given and input was not solicited on its formulation.***

### **MISSION**

*TAC is a national association with a mission to promote the provision of safe, efficient, effective and environmentally and financially sustainable transportation services in support of Canada's social and economic goals.*

*The Association is a neutral forum for gathering or exchanging ideas, information and knowledge on technical guidelines and best practices.*

*In Canada as a whole, TAC has a primary focus on roadways and their strategic linkages and inter-relationships with other components of the transportation system.*

*In urban areas, TAC's primary focus is on the movement of people, goods and services and its relationship with land use patterns.*

## The Business Plan's Strategic Objectives

The 2001 business plan was based on **four strategic objectives**:

- to provide a neutral forum for the exchange of ideas and the discussion of technical issues;
- to contribute to the availability and technical currency of transportation professionals in Canada;
- to gather and to disseminate current transportation-related materials; and
- to develop and to update guidelines and best practices primarily for road and road-related design, operations and maintenance.

The consultation process generated several comments during discussion. Suggestions included the need for TAC to:

- Encourage member retention, development and participation
- Promote and raise awareness of the importance of transportation
- Avoid duplication of efforts and work in partnership with other associations and institutions
- Strengthen partnerships with other modes and internationally
- Be forward looking
- Assume advocacy positions on municipal issues
- Develop a mechanism for continuously monitoring feedback on its business plan
- Promote membership to non-members and former members
- Promote the integration of roadway, electrical power and communications systems
- Become Canada's international voice on technical transportation matters
- Expand its technical mandate to include management issues
- Add 'construction' to 'design, operations and maintenance' in the fourth objective
- Reinforce its role in the context of globalization
- Modify its fourth objective to include other modes (less road specific)
- Revisit its neutral position in light of its modified strategic objectives
- Reinforce its role in education and training

## **The Business Plan's Overall strategy**

The current business plan's overall strategy was based on:

- *Continued strong support for the Chief Engineers' Council*
- *Increased role for the Urban Transportation Council*
- *Education and training*
- *Over-arching environmental and safety issues*
- *Sponsored projects*

The following comments were offered regarding the business plan's overall strategy:

- Add 'awareness' to 'education and training'
- Improve communications between Councils
- Strengthen international partnerships and linkages
- Explore possible roles as facilitator on federal programs/projects
- Encourage the participation of the federal government in all of TAC's fora
- Strengthen the wording of 'overarching environmental and safety issues'
- Add 'security' to 'safety'
- Strengthen the stated role of the Urban Transportation Council (UTC)
- Work towards full membership of the UTC
- Establish membership targets
- Make the statements 'forward looking'

## **TAC's Financial Model**

The current business plan called for federal, provincial and territorial government funding to go from variable annual assessments to a combination of fixed annual membership fees and voluntary sponsorships. It also provided for a range of fees in eight categories for municipal members, depending on population. Other members, including private sector, suppliers, and institutions were assessed a fee based on the nature and size of their operation.

Input from members during consultation confirmed that the new model was working well and that no major issues existed in its application.

## **TAC's products and services**

The current business plan called for a revamping of TAC's products and services. The following table provides a list of these accompanied by the business plan's targets, the results achieved and the comments received from the consultation sessions. ***General reaction to TAC's new ensemble of products and services was very positive.***

Product or service	2001/02 & 2002/03 business plan target	Status as of September 30, 2002	Comments from consultation
Annual Conference	The conference is one of the most valued services provided by TAC and, as such, will see no major changes.	Conference format maintained  Good attendance levels and positive comments from Halifax and Winnipeg delegates	Maintain the existing format  Add a half-day course for the benefit of junior and intermediate staff  Increase the role of the UTC in the program
Spring Technical Meetings	The meetings will be 'repositioned' to emphasize their technical importance.	Repositioned in April 2002 as technical meetings without registration fees  Attendance exceeded 200	Maintain face-to-face meetings with new format  Add a half-day course for the benefit of junior and intermediate staff
Technical courses, training programs, workshops and symposiums	Under the guidance of the proposed new Education Council, this major initiative will address member needs such as continuing education for engineers and technologists and operational training. Alternative sources of funding will be examined, new delivery vehicles like the Web will be explored and the "Canadianization" of foreign course content will be considered in order to meet requirements in this country.	Education Council created and populated in 2002  Education and training workshop conducted in April 2002  Business plan for a TAC Education Foundation developed and draft registration as charity submitted to CCRA in October 2002  Education Coalition of associations and academic institutions created. First meeting held in October 2002  Developing 3 new courses for introduction in 2002/03 (including the Urban Geometric Design Guide course)  Began offering CEUs	Provides one of the pillars of the organization  Increase distance-learning offerings  Offer CEUs for both courses and for attendance at the conference and spring meetings  Expand the salt training program and partner in its delivery
Scholarships	In 2001-02, the TAC office will continue to administer the existing scholarship program. Other approaches to the administration of the	Scholarships for 2001/02 and 2002/03 continue to be administered by TAC office	Grow the scholarship program through the Education Foundation while recognizing donors' recognition

Product or service	2001/02 & 2002/03 business plan target	Status as of September 30, 2002	Comments from consultation
	scholarships, including the creation of a foundation and operation under the auspices of the Education Council, are to be examined in the coming months.	by TAC office  Future administration model of the program pending CCRA approval of the Education Foundation	requirements  Encourage recipients to present a paper at the conference  Fund student travel to the conference or spring meetings
Web site	Following a recently conducted Internet strategy study that included e-business opportunities, TAC's Web site will likely be focused on providing information to a target audience of members and/or customers. The site may include a members' area, the ability to process credit card sales online and the capability to simplify Web information updating.	New site launched in September 2002. Site provides a new look and feel, a major rewrite of all the text, enhanced search capabilities, a more intuitive structure, a new 'What's New' section, an on-line poll, a career corner, the on-line bookstore and more.  Phase 2 (e.g., added functionality, transportation portal, full e-commerce capability) to be examined by April 2003	Expand use of the web as a transportation portal for technology transfer (T2) while recognizing potential for information overload  Create members-only area  Sell e-versions of documents via the web  Provide membership directory in a members-only area  Expand links to other organizations
<i>TAC News</i>	The newsletter will be produced in hard copy format for the first two issues of 2001-02. The remaining two issues in the fiscal year will be delivered in both paper and electronic versions (email and Web). If successful, the e-version will become the main means of disseminating <i>TAC News</i> .	Newsletter now produced in both paper and electronic versions  More feedback on the e-version required before moving exclusively to this medium	Maintain paper version to facilitate internal distribution and to provide visibility  Conduct a survey of members  Go to electronic version only, subject to favourable member survey  Maintain both paper and e-versions
Membership Directory	The directory will be delivered in both paper and electronic versions in 2001-02. In 2002-03, it will be available in an easily downloadable format provided that a member-only area can be created on the Web site.	Directory now produced in both paper and electronic (CD) versions  Directory not offered on the web, pending creation of a members-only area	Post the Directory on the web in a members-only area
Technical Information	In 2001-02, library acquisitions will be focused on meeting Transport Canada's requirements	Information services in the context of member information dissemination	See comments regarding the web

Product or service	2001/02 & 2002/03 business plan target	Status as of September 30, 2002	Comments from consultation
Service	under the International Transport Research and Documentation (ITRD) program (which requirements constitute a sponsored project not covered by the ministry's TAC membership fee). Basic publication loan services and the preparation of collection abstracts for online consultation will continue with related support provided by Transport Canada for ITRD. Other funding will be sought to replace part of the ministry's contribution in subsequent years.	and technology transfer under review  Decision on Transport Canada funding for ITRD pending	Expand T2 services  Expand services to include technical and management issues  Refer also to comments regarding the web
International programs	This service, which covers liaison with foreign organizations, will continue to be provided as a sponsored program on behalf of the senior governments. The bodies in question are the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the U.S. Transportation Research Board and the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials.	On-going coordination provided	
Partnerships and special initiatives	Efforts are being made to develop partnerships with other groups including the Intelligent Transportation Systems Society of Canada (ITS Canada), Canadian Urban Transit Association, Federation of Canadian Municipalities and the Association québécoise du transport et des routes. The possibility of expanding international partnerships beyond the previously mentioned current programs will also be considered.	Negotiated and currently renegotiating partnership agreements with ITS Canada, CSCE and CUTA  Participated on the Boards of NTW and the CNC of PIARC  Negotiated translation agreement with AQTR, currently exploring broadening the agreement  Discussing possible partnerships with CITE and FCM  Exploring international partnerships in the US (AASHTO) and the EU (STELLA), as well as through the	Explore a partnership with the Canadian Institute of Planners  Expand international partnerships recognizing the need to build on synergies  Expand T2 services

Product or service	2001/02 & 2002/03 business plan target	Status as of September 30, 2002	Comments from consultation
		CNC of PIARC	
World Interchange Network (WIN)	TAC to monitor the evolution of the benefits of being a WIN node – a technical referral service for Canadian expertise in transportation – on behalf of the World Road Association, also known as PIARC.	On-going monitoring of developments  Decision pending final service model retained by PIARC	
Canadian Strategic Highway Research Program (C-SHRP)	C-SHRP, which has advanced the understanding of asphalt properties and long-term pavement performance, will continue to be administered by TAC on behalf of the Council of Deputy Ministers Responsible for Transportation and Highway Safety for the next two years.	On-going administration	
Publications	Publishing will continue to be a significant revenue source for the association with at least five new publications expected to be released over each of the next two years. The current market-based approach to pricing will continue to be applied. The sale of online documents will be explored while awaiting development of TAC's Web site and marketing arrangements to offer third-party publications to the membership will be examined. As well, TAC publications will be partially supported by advertising where practical and feasible.	Publications continue to be released  Sales in 2001/02 reached \$270K, 20% greater than budget  Sales in 02/03 currently below budget due to delayed release of French Salt Management Guide and the MUTCD update. Course-related sales should pick up when the 3 planned courses are delivered  Began distributing Ice and Snow training documents on behalf of IST, PLC	Select advertisers in technical publications with care
New sponsored projects	Building on recent successes, a significant volume of sponsored project activity is anticipated in the next two fiscal years. Sponsored projects will be subject to criteria approved by the Board of Directors. The criteria are available from TAC council chairs and staff.	Sponsored project guidelines developed  Ten sponsored projects completed or being conducted by the Chief Engineers' Council  One major sponsored project being conducted by the Urban	Maintain process given its successful application  Select advertisers in technical publications with care  Ensure project sponsors are compatible with TAC's mandate



Product or service	2001/02 & 2002/03 business plan target	Status as of September 30, 2002	Comments from consultation
		Transportation Council Topics for sponsored projects being explored by the Environment Council	
Maintenance of existing manuals	The sale of certain publications such as the <i>Geometric Design Guide for Canadian Roads</i> will provide limited resources for the maintenance of existing guidelines.	The reserve fund for the Geometric Design Guide offers prospect of an on-going source of funds for care and maintenance of the manual	

## **TAC's Governance Model and Council Structure**

The current business plan called for a decrease in the size of the Board with approximately 50% representation from F/P/T members, with the remainder coming from the municipal and members-at-large categories, based on the principle of 'equal pay equal say'. The business plan also called for the operation of four councils: Chief Engineers' (CEC), Urban Transportation (UTC), Environment (EC) and Education (EdC). Each of the Councils, with the exception of the EC has previously submitted a business plan to the Board for approval. The EC is completing its business plan and will be submitting it to the Board for approval in April 2003.

Comments on governance and council structure received during the consultation process include the following:

- Logical governance model and council structure – no need to change
- Other than reducing the number of members required to reach quorum, there is no need to change the format of the Annual General Meeting
- Improve communications and coordination between councils
- Encourage student participation on councils
- Complete UTC's assessment of small municipalities' needs
- Improve linkages between Education Council and other council standing committees

## **The use of TAC's reserves and/or surplus s**

In terms of financial targets, the current business plan called for TAC to breakeven for FY 2001/02 and to make a small contribution of \$86K to reserves for 2002/03. The organization was able to make a sizable contribution to reserves, in the order of \$385K, in FY 2001/02 due primarily to early successes in its training program and a tight control of expenditures. Forecast contributions to reserves for FY 2002/03 are expected to be approximately \$30K due to protracted contract negotiations involved with the new funding model for the Urban Geometric Design Course, thereby delaying the start-up of course delivery and its resulting income stream for six months, until late fall of 2002.

The current unrestricted reserves (excluding the Geometric Design Guide fund and a Board imposed amount of \$1M to cover the costs of a theoretical voluntary shutdown of the organization) are in excess of \$400K. This has led the Board to make available seed money of \$50K to the Chief Engineers' Council as well as \$25K to each of the Urban, Environment and Education Councils for sponsored projects. No requests to access these funds have been received to-date. The available reserves also contributed to the Board's decision to make approximately \$100K available as seed money for the creation of the Education Foundation.

Discussions on the possible uses for TAC's unrestricted reserves and/or on-going annual operational surpluses generated a number of suggestions:

- Automatically assign a percentage of operational surpluses to the Education Foundation
- Make funds available for the training and education of young transportation professionals
- Fund the electronic archiving of TAC documents
- Invest in support of the strategic objectives: in-service training; scholarships; information dissemination and developing and caring for new guidelines/best practices
- Provide limited secretariat services to standing committees
- Expand the product base available on the web site
- Cover the costs of translation for small sponsored projects
- Expand course offerings
- Provide partial funding for demonstration projects
- Fund youth awareness programs on transportation as a career

## **The key areas for action**

During the consultation sessions, participants were asked to identify from among all of the topics discussed, the key areas for action for TAC in its new three-year business plan. These key areas include:

- Encourage the development and participation of junior professional staff through various mechanisms
- Increase the public's awareness of the importance of transportation
- Strengthen the linkages with other modes and the international role of TAC by supporting TAC's T2 initiative, international partnerships and TAC's role as facilitator in federal transportation initiatives
- Improve internal communications links between councils
- Focus on membership retention and recall of former members
- Develop initiatives for integrating electrical power, communications and road systems
- Focus on electronic communications (web site, TAC News, etc.) and education programs
- Add management (i.e., asset, construction, quality, and project management) to TAC's areas of focus
- Add construction to TAC's areas of focus
- Give a high priority to education and training