

## **5.0. INTRA- AND INTER-AGENCY COORDINATION AND OUTREACH**

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Intra- and inter-agency information and outreach serves as a means to obtain consensus on how ramp meters will operate and how they will fit into the overall transportation management program. The success of a ramp metering campaign often hinges on the ability to provide information to, and gain the support of individuals inside and outside the agency responsible for implementing ramp meters. The key is to break down barriers that exist within and between agencies and institutionalize working together as a way of doing business. Internally, the staff must coordinate with those responsible for performing day-to-day activities as well as upper management. Externally, staff must coordinate with the public, the media, local businesses, law enforcement, transit agencies, as well as local-elected officials. Input from and the support of these groups will ensure that ramp meters are adequately funded, designed according to local needs, operated efficiently, and perceived as positive investments throughout their respective life-cycles. Outreach activities associated with each of these groups are discussed in Sections 5.1 and 5.2 and presented in Table 5-1. Table 5-1 outlines specific coordination and outreach activities recommended from the early planning stages of ramp metering (3 to 5 years before ramp metering starts) through implementation and operation. The table shows activities for:

- ▶ Internal (NDOT)
- ▶ Public
- ▶ Other agencies
- ▶ Measurement and modeling

### **5.1. Intra-agency Coordination and Outreach – Internal Activities**

Ramp meters should not be implemented until NDOT and its partner operating agencies (such as RTC) are ready to implement, operate and maintain them. Those responsible for ramp meter implementation should provide information to those who need it, when they need it. Staff should communicate the goals and objectives of ramp meters and the benefits these strategies will provide to personnel at all levels within the agency, beginning first with upper management, and later with department managers and operators. In doing so, employees will take on the role of ambassadors for ramp meters and can speak intelligently about them when called upon by outside parties. The specific coordination and outreach activities for each group are outlined in the following sections.

#### **5.1.1. Upper Management**

Upper management must understand the reasons why ramp meters are being considered, and how they uphold the agency's overall goals and objectives. Similarly, it is important that upper management be kept abreast of ramp metering activities. Doing so will ensure that the ramp metering program will receive the support needed to ensure successful operations and that it will remain an integral aspect of regional transportation directives.

#### **5.1.2. Managers and Operators**

Information and outreach should extend internally to department managers to verify that ramp meters fit into current operations and that they can be seamlessly integrated.

Department managers may identify challenges before ramp meters are installed, which helps reduce unanticipated costs and delays. Reaching out and providing information to department managers and operators also helps to indirectly convey the benefits of ramp meters to those within and outside NDOT. Well informed managers and operators take on the role of ambassadors for ramp metering and can speak intelligently about aspects pertaining to their implementation when called upon by outside parties.

## **5.2. Inter-agency Information and Public Outreach**

The implementation and operation of ramp meters will also require that NDOT coordinate with and provide information to outside agencies and the public in general. Coordination with agencies is needed to establish region-wide policies that guide how ramp meters will be implemented and how associated issues are will be resolved. Several types of agencies with differing agendas will likely be involved with or affected by the operation of ramp meters. Therefore, NDOT may need to draft polices to ensure equity among agencies located across jurisdictional borders. Policies may also be needed to ensure equity among motorists, as it is possible that some may benefit more than others (see Section 4.3.2). In either case, coordination should continue beyond the planning stages and into the operations stages of ramp metering. Coordination and outreach activities for the different inter-agency groups and the public are discussed below.

### **5.2.1. The Public and Local Businesses**

Public information and outreach should be used to help familiarize and convey the benefits of ramp meters before they are implemented. At a minimum, NDOT should emphasize how ramp meters work, the reasons why they are being considered, the locations where they will be implemented and what impacts can be expected. By doing so, motorists' negative perceptions of ramp meters may be mitigated. For instance, motorists often fail to visualize the benefits of ramp meters and instead tend to focus on the few, but more noticeable impacts (i.e., diversions, wait times, etc) of these systems. Public information and outreach can be used to address public concerns, and promote benefits that the public would not recognize otherwise.

If public information and outreach is ignored, public or agency opposition to the implementation of ramp meters may pose a challenge that can significantly delay ramp meter implementation. In severe cases, public opposition may even force NDOT to cease implementation of proposed ramp meters, resulting in missed opportunities to further agency goals and objectives, wasted effort and the inefficient use of NDOT limited funds and resources. Due to severe impacts like these, NDOT staff should take all the steps necessary to inform the public, including local businesses, of the benefits of selected strategies and the reasons why they are being deployed. This includes soliciting support from other agencies as well as from individuals internally. Public information campaigns are also important from the aspect of obtaining public input. Public input is needed and valuable in evaluating and selecting locations for ramp meter deployment. Public input is also helpful in establishing program goals and objectives.

The size and scope of the public outreach effort should be commensurate with the size and scope of the ramp meter deployment. In other words, a large information and outreach campaign that requires significant financial and staff resources would not be appropriate for the implementation of a single ramp meter or a group of a few ramp

meters, but rather is more appropriate for a large scale deployment of many ramp meters along a corridor or several corridors.

In general, public notification should occur as far as 1 year in advance of when meters will be turned on, and is typically repeated several times before meters are turned on. This helps to smooth the implementation of ramp meters by reducing public dissatisfaction while at the same time achieving public acceptance and compliance.

### 5.2.2. Local and County Traffic Operations

NDOT should coordinate with municipal and county traffic operations departments to ensure that ramp metering fits in well with existing or proposed arterial operations. During the planning and implementation phases, NDOT coordination with other traffic operations departments should focus on the selection, implementation and design of ramp meters. Memoranda of understanding may need to be drafted during the planning or implementation phases, to confirm agency commitments to ramp metering. If not, they should be considered early in the operational phase. It is important that agreements consider agency roles and responsibilities, including how traffic signals near metered ramps are operated. Memorandum of Understanding (MOU's) should also include provisions on data sharing, especially if control strategies like ramp metering will interconnect with the traffic signal system and other traffic management elements (e.g., closed circuit television) operated by either the NDOT or local agency.

### 5.2.3. Enforcement

Ramp metering will require active enforcement to ensure that motorists do not disregard meters and to maximize the potential benefits of these investments. NDOT should coordinate with local, county and state law enforcement agencies for two reasons. First, coordination between NDOT and law enforcement agencies is needed to inform these agencies of proposed ramp metering efforts so they can take steps to begin active enforcement. It is also important to provide law enforcement with information on why ramp meters are being implemented and why the help of law enforcement is needed. Second, NDOT coordination with enforcement agencies is needed to gain input and perspective from these agencies when deciding a best approach for enforcing ramp meter use. For instance, NDOT and law enforcement need to make decisions regarding, or come to an agreement on, the following issues:

- ▶ Extent to which compliance should be enforced,
- ▶ Times and conditions when ramp operations should and should not be enforced,
- ▶ Locations and where law enforcement can monitor and enforce operations and where additional monitoring locations need to be built,
- ▶ Staffing needs for enforcement activities, and
- ▶ Legal concerns

Coordination with these agencies is particularly important at ramp meter turn-on and the weeks that follow. High visibility of officers during this timeframe will help ensure compliance with the new traffic control devices and will help to reduce the number of crashes attributed to these systems and driver confusion. With this said, however, excessive enforcement may negatively affect driver behavior and may directly affect operations on the ramp as officers pull vehicles over on the shoulder. City ordinances

may need to be amended to ensure that ramp meter operations can be enforced and to dictate penalties for non-compliance. Last but not least, coordination between local and state enforcement agencies may expedite incident response and clearance.

#### **5.2.4. Transit**

Coordination between NDOT and local transit agencies may need to occur if the decision is made to implement transit-related incentives on the ramp. Such incentives may include those that give preferential treatment to transit vehicles, such as dedicated HOV or Transit-only lanes. These incentives may improve transit operations and encourage ridership. In order for these incentives to be effective NDOT and local transit agencies must coordinate to identify their impacts, discuss whether or not these impacts are acceptable, and develop an approach for their implementation. Transit agencies should be included in project discussions to resolve issues as they arise and to coordinate project activities with transit operations.

#### **5.2.5. Local Leaders**

Local leaders (e.g., elected and appointed officials) can be valuable advocates of, or powerful opponents to ramp metering. NDOT should determine whether local leaders are predisposed to either advocacy or opposition to ramp meters and develop an outreach program that targets both the advocates and the opponents.

It is important to reach out to advocates to mobilize their support for the efforts. It is equally important to reach out to opponents or potential opponents to understand their concerns. Some of these concerns may be ones that can be addressed through ramp meter implementation. Others may be the product of misconception or misunderstanding that can be lessened by providing accurate information that addresses those concerns.

It is also important to reach out to local leaders to confirm that they have no unresolved issues with the strategies. If no unresolved issues exist, then significant follow through with local leaders would not be necessary and resources could be expended on other aspects of the outreach efforts or other aspects of strategy implementation.

#### **5.2.6. Media**

The media can provide NDOT a means to gain positive support for ramp meters from motorists and local leaders. Electronic and print media can be used to express the benefits and reasons for ramp meters before and after they are deployed. Before ramp meter systems are implemented or expanded it is important that the local media be notified of program goals, objectives, and benefits well in advance of when meters are expected to be turned on.

Although the media can aid in acquiring public support, the media can also be obstructive if not handled properly. If the benefits of ramp meters are oversold and unrealistic, credibility of the implementing agency can be questioned.

### **5.3. Outreach Tools and Techniques**

Several tools and techniques are available to use to disseminate information to the public, outside agencies and/or individuals within an agency. The selection of techniques and tools will depend on the intent of the public information campaign or audience targeted.

- ▶ Brochures/Flyers/Newsletters – Brochures, flyers and/or newsletters may be used to describe ramp management strategies and activities. Brochures, flyers and/or newsletters can be mailed to local residents and business owners located near affected ramps or distributed manually in locations near ramps or left for people to take at nearby businesses, public facilities or open house meetings. Mailing lists should be updated to include additional individuals that come forward to provide feedback to keep them abreast of project activities, timelines and future meetings. Typically information contained within the brochure, flyers, or newsletter may pertain to:
  - ▶ Description of ramp metering.
  - ▶ Expected date and/or time of day metering will be in effect.
  - ▶ Expected benefits and cost effectiveness.
  - ▶ Reasons why metering is being considered.
  - ▶ Public information and outreach activities and details.
  - ▶ Locations where metering is slated to be implemented.
  - ▶ Contacts or websites where additional information can be obtained or public comments can be collected.
- ▶ Websites – The public can be referred to websites specifically set up to provide information on projects where ramp metering will be implemented. RTC and NDOT both had ramp metering information on their websites before the US 95 ramp meters were turned on.
- ▶ Open House Meetings – Meetings may be held prior to or after major milestones to gather input from and/or disseminate information to the public. Open house meetings are often used to inform the public and local businesses of project progress, and to provide a platform for residents, business owners, and motorists to voice their concerns to project staff.
- ▶ Inter-agency meetings - Meetings in the form of workshops or round table discussions may be held with local agencies to gather and solicit information regarding the implementation of ramp metering. Workshops also give agencies the opportunity to coordinate operations and activities and express needs related to these activities. Supplementary meetings may be needed to address lingering issues and to assign priorities.
- ▶ Media releases and advertising – Newspapers and other print media can be used to advertise the location, times and intent of public information meetings. NDOT representatives may release written statements or hold press conferences to release information to the media and to answer questions. In some cases it may be beneficial to prepare short video or graphic presentations that strengthen understanding of ramp management strategies. Copies of the presentations can be issued to media agencies as requested, the level of effort and time needed to disseminate information and meet with each media outlet. It may also be appropriate to purchase media advertising to publicize ramp metering or the dates and locations of ramp meter initiation.
- ▶ Signs – A public notice sign may be posted at or near ramps to advise motorists of impending improvements that will be made. If available, the public notice sign should display a phone number that motorists can call to get more information on the impending activity or to provide feedback.

**Table 5-1: Sample Ramp Metering Coordination and Outreach Schedule**

	Internal Activities	Public Activities	Partner Agency Activities	Measure/Modeling	
1-3 Years Before Metering (Today)	FDOT Policy Maker Briefings	Public Attitude Survey	Deliver Initial Project Plans	Develop Measures of Effectiveness	
	Educate Staff	Develop Public Involvement Plan			
	Concept of Operations Plan and Design	Conduct Open House Meeting		Pre-Deployment Traffic and Crash Baseline	
	Develop Public Improvement Plan				
	Incorporate Public Input to Design				
6-12 Months Before Metering	Policy Maker Briefings	Conduct Public Meetings	Disseminate Letters to Affected Agencies	Model	
		Disseminate Project Information to Media	Operational Agreements		
2-6 Months Before Metering	Train Operators		Conduct Additional Presentations		
	Policy Maker Briefings				
1 Month Before Metering		Install Traffic Signs Near Affected Areas	Media Campaign		
<b>Begin Ramp Metering</b>					
2 Weeks After Metering	Policy Maker Briefings	Distribute Information to Public and Media		Fine Tune Metering Equipment	
2-6 Months After Metering			Public Attitude Surveys		Conduct First Evaluation
6-12 Months After Metering					Conduct Second Evaluation

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