

Section 6.0: Lessons Learned

Subsection 6.1: Existing Processes, Plans, and Systems are Sound.

Understanding that previous administrations, public officials, and various stakeholders spent many years identifying specific projects through the development the LSTP, established and refined the Highway Priority Program, oversaw DOTD reach its highest levels of efficiency, and studied the many mechanisms for investing in transportation, the Task Force studied these exhaustive efforts of the past and deemed them to be the foundation on which to advance its work. After reaching this conclusion, the Task Force narrowed its focus to determining how best to finance the maintenance of the existing system and the Category A and B Megaprojects outlined in the LSTP.

Subsection 6.2: Frustration Over Condition, Limitations of Transportation System

As the Task Force traveled around the State and heard from communities, the frustration surrounding the deteriorating condition and limited scope of the current transportation system was profound. Each region and community have specific, important transportation needs that, if not met, prevent the realization of respective economic opportunity and enhanced quality of life. Countless discussions with hundreds of citizens led the Task Force to determine that meaningful solutions to transportation issues are expected from the public.

Subsection 6.3: Misconceptions Caused by Incomplete Information

Throughout the past six months, the term “trust” has been a recurring issue of concern regarding an increased investment in transportation. Through the travels and discussions across the State, there is a common misconception that transportation revenue in the State has been misused in the past and that “trust” must be regained before increasing the investment to address the State’s needs. This is a complex issue and a deep-rooted misconception that is based on incomplete information.

Among the most commonly discussed perceived misuse of funds is the appropriation from the TTF to the LSP that has occurred periodically since 1990 with more frequency during the latter years of the Jindal administration. It has been clear that most citizens do not recall that a vote of the people created the TTF in 1990 and specifically authorized allocations to the LSP. This means that past uses of the TTF for the LSP were a legislative and administrative policy decision authorized by the constitution. That is not to say this was the correct policy decision but certainly not a misuse of funds in violation of public trust. Nonetheless, this Task Force wholeheartedly supports the policy decision of the current legislature and administration to provide no TTF revenue to LSP.

Separately, the project selection and delivery processes are often perceived to be ineffective in quickly delivering the most important projects statewide. As articulated in Subsection 3.2 and stated in Subsection 6.1, existing processes, plans, and systems are sound. The misconception exists because the HPP can only deliver what available resources can fund. Because the HPP is financially limited, important costly projects are delayed as the State attempts to responsibly and sufficiently maintain existing infrastructure with available funds. Another reason this misconception exists is because over the last few decades several major capacity projects across the State were funded with dedicated sources of one-time revenue such as federal earmarks and bonds.

Another recurring misconception is that DOTD is inefficient and, if operated properly, could generate enough savings to address transportation needs. First, increasing efficiency is an enduring principle of DOTD. As an example of this, DOTD has generated approximately \$36 million in savings over the last five years through a combination of legislative and administrative efficiency efforts, which include privatization efforts. Adding to this, DOTD's staffing level is at an all-time low and its workload is at an all-time high.

To validate DOTD's efficiency, there are approximately 1,132 citizens for every DOTD employee. At least 23 states have more state department of transportation employees per capita than Louisiana. Despite Louisiana's low population, we have more state road miles to maintain than 39 other states. That means only 9 states have more road miles to maintain than DOTD. Eight of those 9 states have more employees than DOTD and a higher population than Louisiana. Finally, 7 states have fewer road miles to maintain than Louisiana but employ more staff. While all state departments of transportation have different scopes of responsibility making a true comparison difficult, DOTD does well when compared to other states.

Lastly, it was often stated by citizens that the State's transportation issues could be addressed through innovation, such as tolling and public private partnerships. This notion is also based on incomplete information about how tolling and P3s function. Due to Louisiana's population and traffic volumes, there are no transportation projects in the State that can be funded by tolling alone. That means the State must have the revenue to fund the other portion of the project. While P3s are different in that a private entity will finance and construct a transportation project, the private entity will only do so if the State has revenue to contribute over time.

Subsection 6.4: Consensus that More Must be Invested in Transportation

There is widespread agreement in Louisiana that an increased investment in transportation is needed if we are to bring about meaningful improvements. The Task Force's impression of this sentiment is that it is contingent on the previously mentioned finding relating to public trust. The public rightly expects any increases in transportation funding to be spent delivering transportation enhancements and on nothing else. Attendees of regional meetings encouraged the Task Force to study all potential sources of revenue and recommend those that can provide meaningful improvements.