

## Director's Board Report October 2019

Thank you Chairman Moad, and good morning members of the Idaho Transportation Board. I would like to begin this month's board report with a major announcement.

The American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials has selected the winners of the President's Awards for 2019. And I am proud to announce that two of ITD's projects earned a President's Award, out of only five President's Awards presented nationwide.

The **Lochsa Revival Project** on U.S. 12 earned the 2019 President's Award for the Environment, for replacing two bridges and 50 miles of pavement along the Lochsa, which is designated as a Wild and Scenic River.

During the Lochsa Revival Project, we worked closely with the Idaho Fish and Game Department to allow fish to be carefully counted and relocated from the water under the bridges.

We rinsed all equipment, and had it checked for noxious weeds before entering the work corridor and scheduled the paving operations for late in the summer to avoid the peak

rafting season. We also partnered with the shuttle operator who moved pedestrians and bicyclists through the corridor during paving operations.

The second President's Award was for Research. It went to District 3's **Elephant Butte Project** on U.S. 95, south of Marsing. This District 3 project pioneered the use of Geocell mats in the United States to address issues with swelling clay. During wet weather, the clay was causing portions of U.S. 95 to lift by as much as seven inches. Causing a very bumpy ride for drivers. But the Geocell mats, which prior to this project had only been used in Israel to address swelling clay, proved to be an effective solution that will be likely be copied across the country. All thanks to ITD.

I cannot stress enough how much of an honor it is for our department to receive these national awards, which I see as the academy awards for transportation.

Prior to 2010, the department had earned nine AASHTO awards in the 36 years since we became the Idaho Transportation Department in 1974. Since 2010, we have earned a total of 15 presidents awards.

Which is an absolutely amazing accomplishment, because we are competing against all 50 states, the District of

Columbia, and Puerto Rico. Statistically, if all things were equal, and all of the stars aligned, our department could expect to win two awards in a 10 year period.

But all things are not equal. We are competing against states with much larger transportation agencies and budgets, such as New York, Florida, Texas, and California. Yet even against those strong odds, ITD has earned 15 presidents awards in the last 10 years.

This year, we earned not one, but two Presidents' Awards. And we were the only state to do so. This marks the fifth time ITD has earned more than one Presidents award in a single year. These are important national honors, and District 2 and District 3 employees can hold their heads high, for having two of the finest construction projects in the entire nation.

I have even more good news to report. On August 29, U.S. Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao announced a **\$6.2 Million** federal grant to fund bridge Improvements in Idaho.

Access to this type of federal funding is extremely competitive. Only 17 other states received similar grants. These funds are for a specific purpose. They can only be

used for bridge replacement or rehabilitation projects on public roads in rural areas. And the projects must leverage the efficiencies associated with bundling at least two bridge projects into a single contract.

Secretary Chao addressed the importance of these grants, saying, and I quote:

**“This \$225 million in federal funding will enable 18 states to make vital upgrades to select bridges in rural areas.”**

The grant money will improve eight bridges in poor condition, support economic activity, and improve connectivity on local roads in southern Idaho.

Federal Highway Administrator Nicole Nason also addressed the grants, saying, and I quote:

**“The projects funded under the program will serve as models for similar bridge improvement projects throughout the nation. They are examples of how to achieve time and cost savings through innovation.”**

Last week at the Annual AASHTO Meeting, Secretary Chao made an announcement that could be good news for Idaho.

She took the stage to announce the creation of a new initiative to support transportation needs in rural America.

**The Rural Opportunities to Use Transportation for Economic Success** Initiative, also known by the acronym “Routes” will analyze federal discretionary transportation funding and financing opportunities to ensure outcomes for transportation in rural areas.

During her announcement, Secretary Chao said, and I quote:

**“Rural America, which has a disproportionately high rate of fatalities and is historically neglected, needs to have its transportation needs addressed.”**

Rural transportation infrastructure has some major challenges.

More than 70 percent of the nation’s lane miles are in rural areas—in Idaho, that number is 89 percent. Ninety percent of the nation’s weight-restricted bridges are located in rural areas. In 2018, 46 percent of U.S. traffic fatalities occurred in rural areas.

The purpose of the new ROUTES Initiative is to help rural stakeholders understand how to obtain DOT grants and financing, and help them use data to better assess the needs and benefits of rural transportation projects.

USDOT personnel will meet with rural transportation stakeholders at events over the coming year to educate project sponsors about federal funding and finance opportunities.

Secretary Chao also announced the formation of a rural transportation infrastructure council, known as the ROUTES Council, to lead the way on this initiative. The council will identify critical rural transportation concerns, and coordinate efforts among the USDOT's different modal administrations.

The Council will hold its first meeting in November. The USDOT will release a proposed rule on the initiative in the near future, which will include comment period. We do not yet know how the ROUTES initiative may affect Idaho. We will keep the board advised as information becomes available.

Last month, Governor Little declared the week of September 15th through the 21st. to be **“Child Passenger**

**Safety Awareness Week.”** To go along with his proclamation, ITD hosted safety events in Moscow, Meridian, Boise, Pocatello, and Malad. Governor Little stated, and I quote:

**“Children represent the future of Idaho. We are committed to educating parents and caregivers about the best ways to keep kids safe while traveling in cars, no matter how short or long the trip.”**

Here is a video showing the importance of buckling up, from a child’s perspective. The governor’s proclamation was important, because vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death and serious injuries for children 14 years old and younger. When installed and used correctly, child safety seats decrease the risk of fatal injury by:

- 71 percent for infants
- 54 percent for toddlers, and
- 45 percent for children between the ages of four and eight.

Idaho has more than 350 trained and certified Child Passenger Safety Technicians who can help members of the

public select and install appropriate car seats and booster seats to protect their children. To make sure they have the right seat for each child's age and size.

Last month, Governor Little also issued a proclamation declaring September 17 to be **School Zone Safety Awareness Day in Idaho**. ITD has been partnering with AAA the for the last few years to promote school zone safety, especially during the beginning of the school year.

This year, we significantly increased the program, and were able to fund a grant to law enforcement agencies so they can participate in a school-zone high-visibility enforcement program.

A total of 26 agencies across the state participated in a school zone mobilization. The Office of Highway Safety also ran a media campaign encouraging drivers to be more engaged and focused during their commutes, because that is when school children are walking, bicycling, and exiting school buses in the mornings and afternoons.

As part of these efforts, ITD coordinated with our law enforcement partners and the AAA to host media events in Districts 3, 4, and 5. During the media event at Maple Grove Elementary in Boise, a crash occurred just down the street,



even though there was an increased police presence, with many extra patrol cars in the school zone to get the attention of drivers. Luckily the kids were already in class when the crash happened. It didn't appear that anyone was seriously injured, but the crash in the school zone underscores the importance of being an engaged driver.

As does this short video. (video plays)

On September 16th and 17th, the Division of Motor vehicles hosted the **2019 DMV County Leadership Conference**. Thirty eight of Idaho's 44 counties were represented at the conference, which was held in Meridian.

The day-and-a-half event provided an opportunity for the DMV and county personnel to actively engage and share ideas on how we can improve services to each other, and our customers. DMV Administrator Alberto Gonzalez addressed the attendees, saying, and I quote:

**“We must commit to implementing the lessons learned at this conference to create a winning culture of communication, collaboration, and best practices between not only the DMV and the counties, but AMONG the counties.”**

There were several break-out session addressing topics such as:

- Conflict Resolution
- The Star Card
- Leading Change, and
- Performance Management

Action plans developed as a result of the conference will be presented later this year to the Statewide County Engagement Team and the Regional County Engagement Teams.

On September 25th, we hosted the 2019 ITD Leadership Summit. More than 200 employees participated in the event. Chaiman Moad and board member DeLorenzo were also in attendance. The theme was “**Inspiring New Generations.**”

Governor Little helped kick things off in the morning. Later in the day, Boise State Head Basketball Coach Leon Rice addressed team-building and preparing for success.

Here is a short video showing some of the day's events.  
(video plays)

Governor Little also joined us for a media event on October 1st at the Boise Airport to promote the Idaho Star Card. That event marked the start of a one-week media tour in Idaho's seven largest counties. The mascots from Boise State and the University of Idaho also made an appearance and almost stole the show from our DMV Administrator. Actually, our own mascot, Alberto, did a great job.

The week-long media tour through Idaho's seven largest counties created several good news stories about the star card. The tour was the result of a partnership with the DMV and the Idaho Sheriff offices. Here is a news story KIDK developed as a result of the tour. (video plays)

On Tuesday at 9 a.m., District 3 opened the new Karcher Road Overpass on Interstate 84 to traffic, two months ahead of schedule.

This was the result of a seven-month project that began in March to demolish and replace the previous overpass, which was constructed in 1966. The new overpass has one lane in each direction, wider shoulders, and a sidewalk on the north side, and will make room below to construct four

lanes in each direction on Interstate 84. The Karcher Road Overpass is part of the INFRA-Grant corridor Project on Interstate 84 in Canyon County.

Future improvements through 2020 will include:

- Adding lanes to the interstate
- Rebuilding several bridges
- Improving the Franklin Boulevard Interchange
- And replacing the Northside Interchange with a single-point urban interchange

The 84 Corridor project has provided us with an opportunity to pioneer innovative ways to engage the public, including the use of social media and live streaming, which allows us to reach a wider audience, and share behind-the-scenes action on construction sites with the public.

As a result of developing a robust website and live streaming public meetings, the project team has informed and received comments from thousands of residents, business owners, and freight operators who are interested

in the project. These efforts have been so successful that the Office of Communication has been invited to share these innovative communication practices with the Utah Department of Transportation at their annual conference.

Much of what we do at ITD is intended to benefit all Idahoans. But sometimes our actions can help one particular family, or even a single individual. Last winter, 13-year-old Raith Wehner needed to be driven from his home in Victor to Idaho Falls for dialysis. Unfortunately, a snowstorm had closed Highway 33 to Rexburg, as well as the road over Pine Creek Pass.

Raith has to travel to Idaho Falls for dialysis three times a week, because his kidneys have failed. The procedure is critical to his health. His father, Tim Wehner, was not going to let a snowstorm keep him from taking his son to Idaho Falls, so he found a way to leave the snow-bound Teton Valley and get his son the kidney dialysis he needed.

He contacted the Idaho Transportation Department, explained the situation, and one of our plow drivers saved the day for Raith and his dad by clearing the highway, with Raith and his father safely following the plow truck all the way to Idaho Falls. This is a good example of how our district crews continue to go above and beyond the call of

duty to assure the safety of their communities and neighbors.

The snow has already started falling this year, signaling the beginning of ITD's annual winter-driving awareness campaign. Our maintenance crews are beginning to gearing up for another busy season, and to help them out, ITD's Geographic Information System, or GIS Section, has developed a new tool that will improve the safety of their operations. It is an online map showing snowplow Hazards.

Here is a sample, showing a section of District 3. The blue dots signify hazards.

Clicking on a dot, such as the one in the center of the screen, opens a box with a detailed explanation of the hazard. This location has curbing in the center of the highway that plow drivers need to be aware of.

Providing this kind of hazard information to plow drivers in a simple online application will help reduce plowing incidents associated with roadside hazards on their routes. The information will also be very helpful for plow drivers who may be working outside of their normal areas., or assisting other maintenance crews during a storm.

I have an interesting update for you on the sticker-covered Welcome to Idaho sign you saw at the District 4 board meeting this summer. Rather than simply discard the old sign, District 4 decided to try something new.

So they put the sign up for public auction, which turned out to be a great idea.

The district anticipated intense public interest, and they were not disappointed. Social-media and attention from local news stations helped fuel the interest.

It started with a bid of **\$100** on September 12. By September 26, the high bid had increased to **\$430**. At that time, there were still six days of bidding left. District 4 Program Specialist Shara Stowell said it was slow going at first.

But after a Facebook post and some tweets, the media took notice, and bidding started to pick up as the public became more aware. She was happy when the bidding hit **\$500**. Then KTVB in Boise ran a story on it, and overnight the bidding grew to **\$1,600**. The Associated Press picked up the KTVB story and put it on the wire, meaning any member newspaper in the country could grab it and run the story.

KTMV and the Times-News newspaper in Twin Falls also ran their own stories on the auction. By the final morning of the auction, the bidding had reached **\$4,500**. At that point, it became a bidding war between two parties, who pushed the final bid to **\$11,200**. ITD's Senior Leadership Team is thinking about applying the money toward a safety project in District 4, or toward innovation, since it resulted from a new idea.

Now I would like to shift gears and share a few of the letters we have recently received from the public.

The first letter is from Becky Craig-Johnson in north Idaho, who wrote, and I quote:

**“I want to compliment ITD for the new video for the SPUI interchange at highway 95 and highway 53. I will be sharing this video for the first time to our students at A&A Driving School in Coeur d'Alene tomorrow. This video visually and verbally explains the interchange exceptionally well. Thank you for making it easier for instructors to explain this to our newest drivers on Idaho roadways.”**



Let's take a look at the video she was writing about.

This is not the only new intersection in north Idaho. District 2 has a successful project at the junction of U.S. 12 and 21<sup>st</sup> Street in Lewiston. They completed the project and opened the new intersection to traffic six weeks ahead of schedule, which was very popular with the public. The Lewiston Tribune ran a poll on their web page.

You can see by the results on the screen that the public has a pretty good opinion of the new intersection, with more than 52 percent rating it as an "A" and more than 23 percent rating it a "B." That is a combined 75 percent.

District 2 Public Information Specialist Megan Sausser says the opinion poll is making the engineers pretty happy.

The next letter I would like to share is from Andrew Bick in McCall. He wrote, and I quote:

**"I just wanted to take a moment and thank you for all of your help on our Sewer project at 313 West Lake Street in McCall. It has been a tedious process to go through in order to line everything up to make this sewer line happen on this property. Your help along the way has been efficient, prompt, and helpful. Thanks for steering us in**

**the right direction and helping me get through this process. I don't know if I will ever be able to flush the toilet enough to justify the price of this sewer line, but I am going to try. This project has been a dream for me and my sisters for quite some time.**

**The property has been in our family since the 1940s. I am not going to lie, sometimes I think things were easier when we just parked our RVs and tents on the property, but I am just a steward of this land. If you are ever traveling highway 55 and feel the need to relieve yourself, please do not hesitate to stop by. You are always welcomed to use our bathroom.**

**Thank you."**

Neal Murphy, ITD's Emergency Manager, recently sent a letter to District 1 and 2 staff, thanking them for presenting a class on Traffic Incident Management for Emergency Medical Service personnel and firefighters from across the state.

He wrote, and I quote:

**"Gentlemen,**

**Your employees did an outstanding job representing ITD while presenting the key points of Traffic Incident Management. Focusing on how it is a team effort to improve safety, communication, and restore the flow of traffic for all responders. I heard numerous positive comments on the training, plus the respect they have for ITD and the job we do. Thank you for supporting them as we move this vital training forward in Idaho. Please pass on to them my appreciation for a Job Well Done.”**

The next letter I would like to share is from the incident commander who managed the fire response for the Canyon Fire near Lowman.

He sent a thank-you letter to the Lowman maintenance crew, saying, and I quote:

**“ITD was instrumental in fire fighter and public safety with your excellent traffic management during the Canyon Fire. We are appreciative of your efforts.”**

ITD's partnership with the Forest Service is critical to maintaining Highway 21 year-round, and especially during wildfires.

ITD crews from the Lowman, Idaho City, Banks, Cascade,

and Orchard sheds responded to the fire, which lasted for two weeks. The lighting-caused fire burned 386 acres from July 14 to July 31.

The final letter I would like to share today is from Whitney Brewster, Executive Director of the Texas Department of Motor Vehicles, and Chair of the Board for the American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators, also known as AAMVA. She wrote a letter to Jennifer Gonzales in the Communication Office. Here are a few excerpts from the letter:

**“Dear Jennifer:**

**It is my pleasure to appoint you as the PACE Representative to the Driver Standing Committee. Our community constantly faces many rapid changes, which means that the way AAMVA members do business will also change. You will have the opportunity to influence policy, develop best practices, and make recommendations on the issues that are most important to AAMVA members as we work towards our vision of ‘safe drivers, safe vehicles, secure identities, saving lives!’ I want to thank you for providing your expertise as we tackle these and other challenges that may arise. Again,**

**thank you for serving on the Driver Standing Committee. I'm sure you will find it a rewarding experience."**

We know Jennifer will represent ITD well, and be an outstanding asset for AAMVA.

Mr. Chairman and members of the board, the employees at ITD are performing at a very high level, and I thank you for the opportunity to share some of their recent highlights and successes with you today.

This concludes my Director's report for October, 2019.