

Twitter, Facebook Growing As Effective Media Tools for State Departments of Transportation

The use of Twitter and Facebook by state departments of transportation has increased substantially in the last 12 months, according to a new survey released by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO). Thirty-one states now use Twitter and 25 states are using Facebook on a regular basis to distribute information on traffic, emergencies, road closings, job postings, and other transportation-related data to more than 200,000 people across the country. Thirty-seven states and the District of Columbia responded to the on-line survey, conducted in April and May of 2011.

Key findings and highlights:

Social Media Type	Social Media Used by State DOTs in 2011 <i>(38 state DOTs* responding)</i>	Social Media Used by State DOTs in 2010 <i>(32 state DOTs* responding)</i>
Twitter	31 States	26 states
Facebook	25 States	14 States
Video on Website	29 States	23 States
News Channel or Weekly Update	4 States	4 States
YouTube Channel	24 States	18 states
Flicker or Photo Sharing Site	14 States	
RSS Feeds	15 States	14 states
Podcasts	9 States	10 States
Blogs	10 States	7 States
MySpace	1 State	3 States
Member of LinkedIn	19 States	14 States
Mobile Apps	19 States	<i>Question not asked in 2010</i>

**For the purposes of this table, state DOTs include the District of Columbia*

States increase use and scope of Twitter and Facebook

All 31 states that use Twitter transmit information about road closings; 28 states use Twitter to relay information about traffic incidents; 27 send out information about emergencies such as hurricanes or tornados via their Twitter feed.

DOT Facebook pages offer more opportunities to connect with constituents, transportation users, and interest groups beyond the 140-character limit of Twitter. Job postings, photographs, corridor project information, teen driver safety information, hours of operation, public service announcements, and national policy issues are shared with audiences that range from the motoring public to specific transportation stakeholders.

Information released by state DOTs through both Facebook and Twitter include:

- Referrals to Tripcheck, links to YouTube and other video updates
- Accidents, detours, and winter road conditions
- Amber alerts, press releases
- Tolling information; construction projects, construction delays
- Air quality and transit information
- Upcoming events
- 511 information
- In California, real-time content for its www.showfortheconezone.com site
- Information about Amtrak California Intercity Passenger Rail Service
- In Oklahoma, information about its 100th anniversary celebration

Other web-based tools being used by state DOTs include Gov Delivery; 511Notify; Foursquare; congestion mapping; Scribd; Tumblr; BlipTv; and email and text subscription services.

Most effective social media tool in reaching prime DOT audiences from a time-management perspective:

- #1: Twitter: 49%
- #2: Facebook: 30%
- #3: RSS Feeds: 23%
- #4: Podcasts: 15%
- #5: LinkedIn: 14%
- #6: Web Video: 10%
- #7: Blogs 5%

Biggest obstacles to using social media?

Several respondents cited time as the biggest obstacle to using social media tools, followed by a lack of accessibility to many web-based platforms because of computer system restrictions; little support from leadership; the day-to-day challenges of managing the different tools; keeping fresh content; and keeping current with new and changing technology.

Related information from the survey:

- Blogs: 10 states have a blog; and 10 others are planning blogs; 23 states track blogs written by others; only one state posts a link on their website to the U.S. DOT Secretary's blog.
- Measurement: 29 states indicate they measure the audience reach and performance of these tools on a regular basis.
- Social Media Protocols: 26 states have established protocols for using social media.

Use of Traditional Media Still Critical to DOT Communications Professionals

- 100% of respondents said they still rely on traditional media to get their messages out, with news releases (34%) and one-on-one calls with reporters (36%) as most effective, followed closely by events/press conferences (25%), and radio and television outreach (19%).

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