

# Sixth Annual State DOT Social Media Survey

September 2015

## 6

### About the Survey

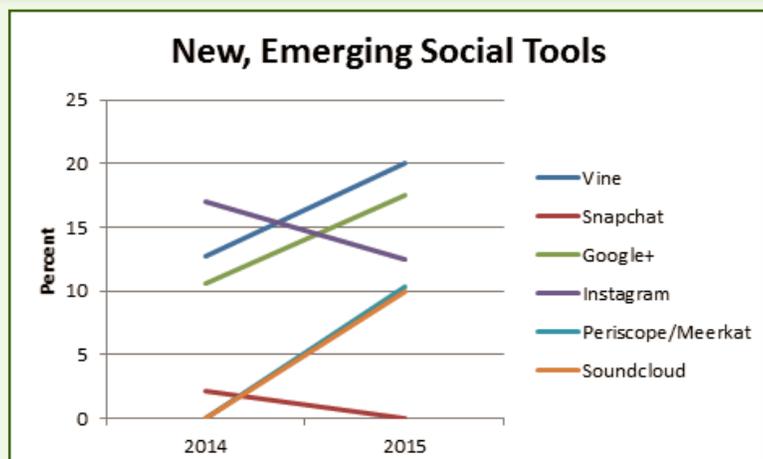
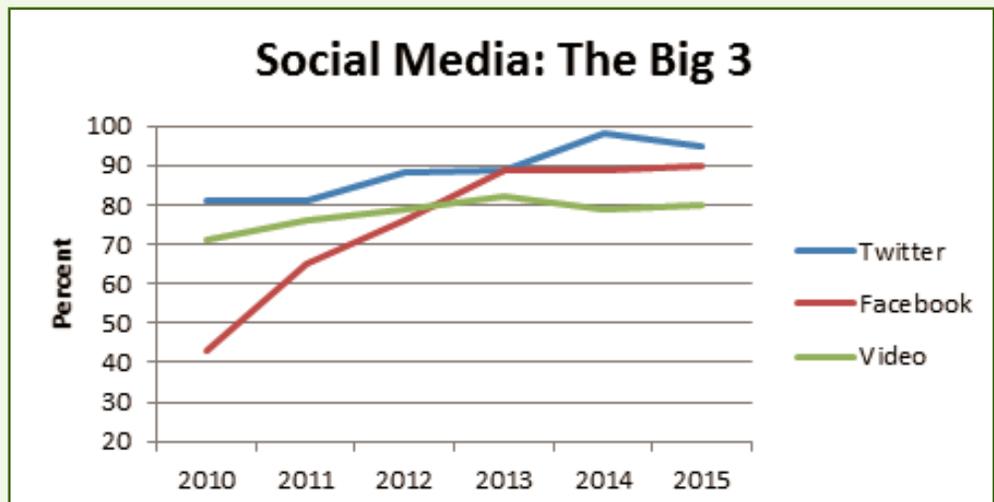
This is the sixth annual AASHTO survey of states' social media usage and implementation. Each June, state department of transportation communication staffs are asked to complete an online survey designed to track the adoption of social media tools, the impact of social media on the state agencies, and the influence social media has had on the relationship between the transportation department and its customers. This year, 40 states responded to the survey.

### Overview

As the use of social media gains further traction within the communications industry, three specific social media tools have become the tactics of choice for state departments of transportation.

In the sixth annual State DOT Social Media Survey conducted by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO), states reported that Facebook, Twitter, and online video (YouTube and Vimeo) are the most frequently used social media sites.

Certainly, states are exploring and experimenting with a variety of social media tools and techniques including relative newcomers Instagram, Vine, and Snapchat. And, 10 percent of respondents said their state was experimenting with two of this year's newest social media tools Periscope and Meerkat, which offer online streaming video to mobile phone users. However, tools such as podcast-



ing, Storify, Pinterest and Snapchat that showed promise in earlier annual surveys seem to show less support, reinforcing the idea that communication staffs are making hard choices about where and how to spend valuable time and energy.

## The Big Three

There is no doubt that Twitter, Facebook, and online video sites YouTube and Vimeo have become the standard tools that most states use regularly. When asked, "If your state could use only one social media service, which would it use?," 60 percent of respondents said Twitter, with 35 percent citing Facebook.

2

States that picked Twitter cited its broad audience and its built in immediacy, which is important for quickly sharing constantly updated roadway information.

*"It allows for the rapid dissemination of short bits of information, such as traffic alerts," said one survey respondent.*

Another respondent said that Twitter not only boasts an active audience with two-way interactions, it is important for media relations, as well.

*"It's our largest audience and our media pay attention to it more than e-mail. We sent a traffic advisory via e-mail and a reporter actually told us they didn't see it because we didn't tweet it."*

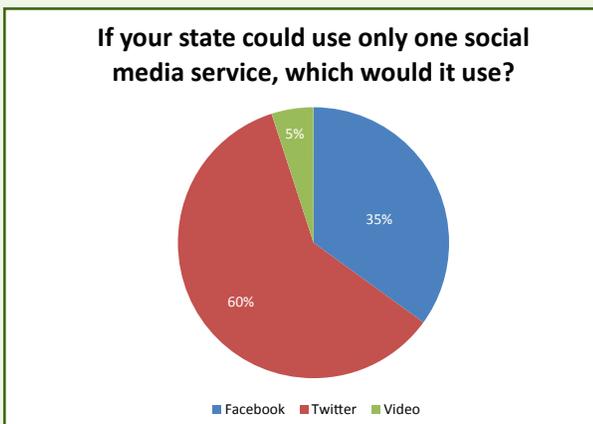
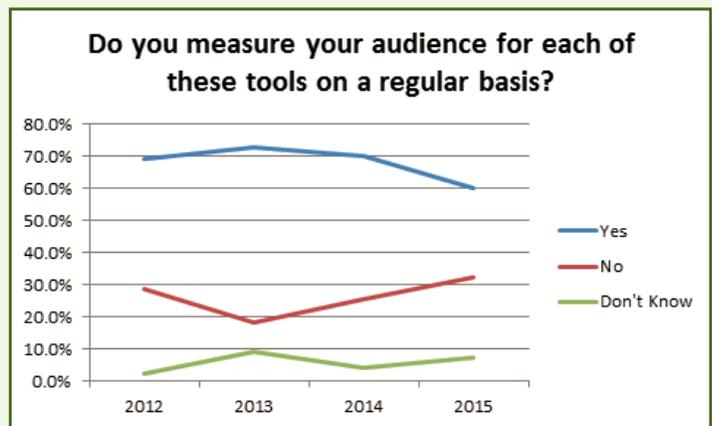
States that chose Facebook cited its ability to more effectively leverage images, video, and a longer narrative to help connect with audiences.

According to one state,

*"Facebook remains the social media giant with the largest overall audience. While the changes it makes (to newsfeed algorithms) hurt the free reach of brand pages like ours, we can pay to promote our content (and/or run ads) to reach specific audiences on this social network. It is also the best place to target niche groups with digital ads!"*

Another said it this way,

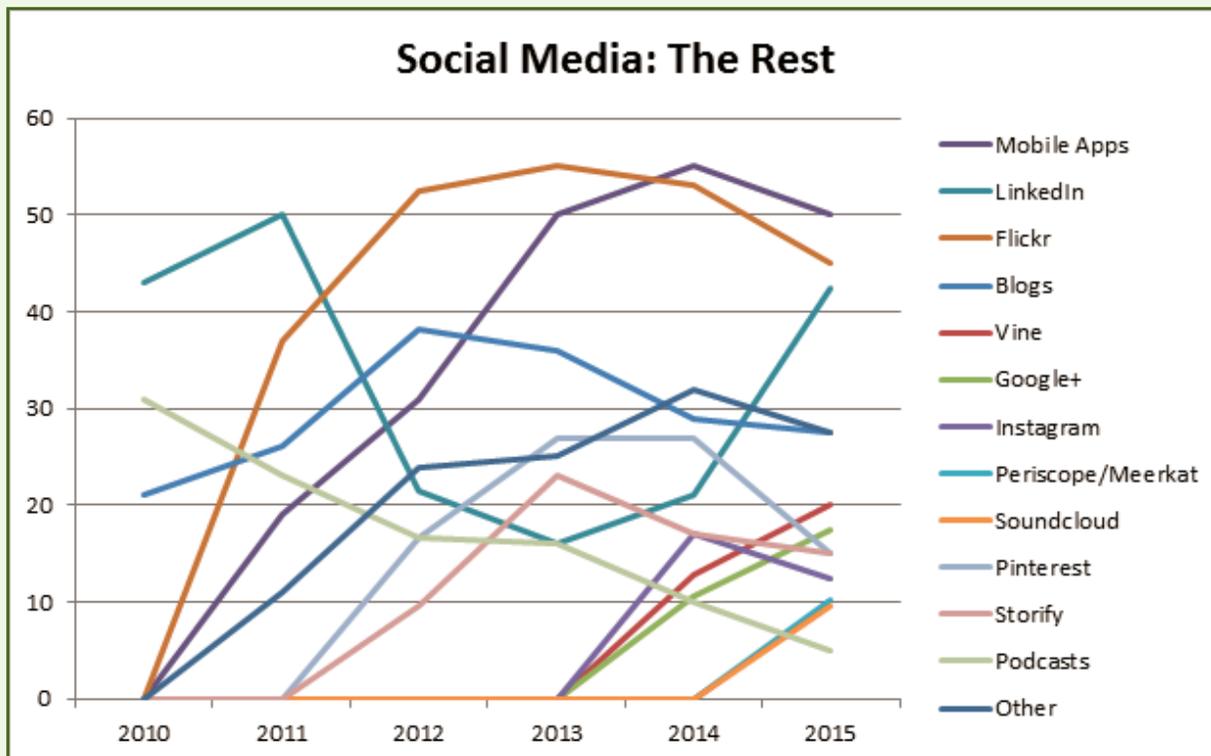
*"Our largest audience is on Facebook, where we have over 41k Likes and receive our highest rates of engagement. Facebook's functional tools including the ability to upload photos, videos, or links and posts that have no character restrictions help us tell (DOT's) transportation story to a broader audience than other platforms that have a niche demographic."*



## Measuring Success

With a growing acceptance of social media as a standard practice within state DOT communications offices, many states have reported an increased interest in showing a return on the investment of staff time and resources. However, the number of state DOTs actively tracking their social media performance is holding flat—at best—and may actually be declining.

Just 60 percent of state DOTs said they measure their audiences on a regular basis. However, when

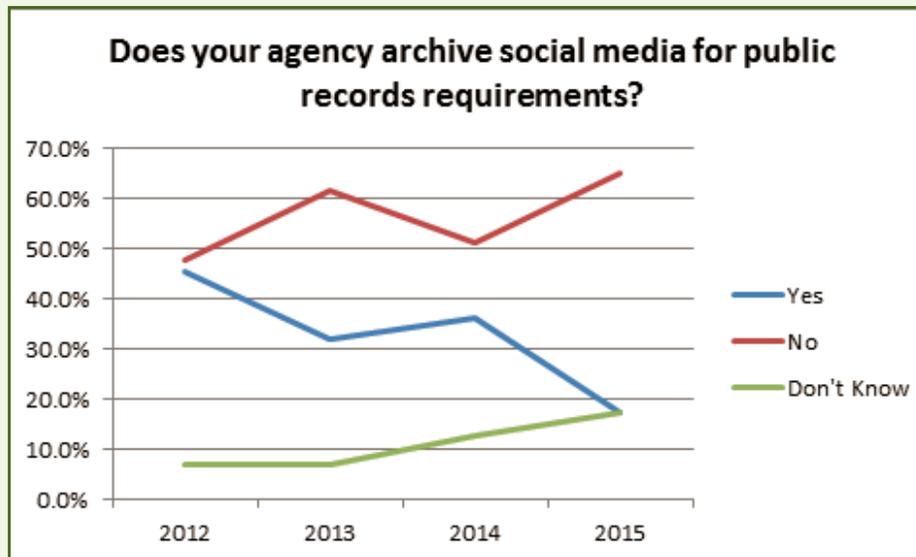


asked what they think the biggest challenge for social media will be, more than one state suggested appropriately identifying and training staff resources to effectively meet public interest in transportation information.

### Archiving Social Media

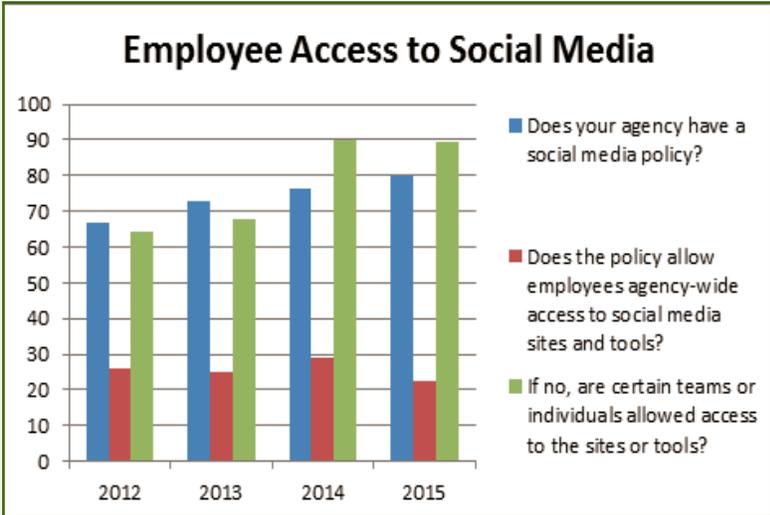
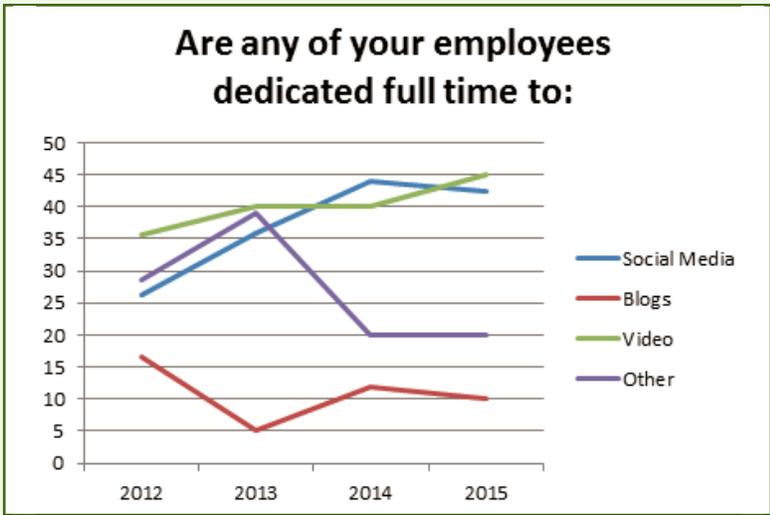
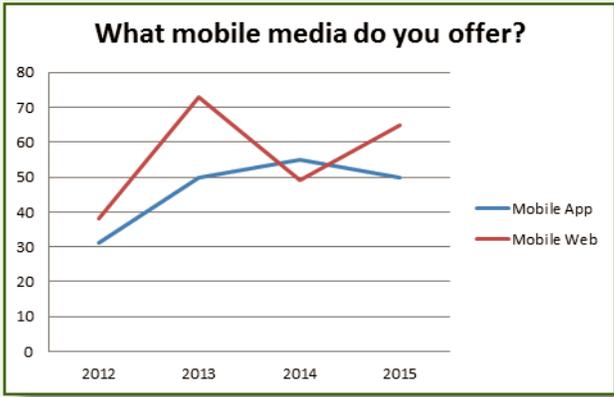
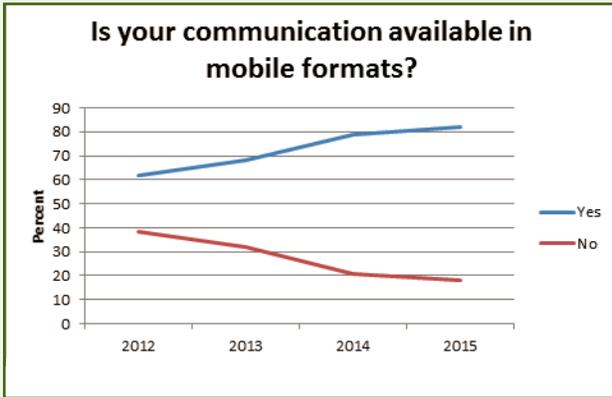
While the practice of using social media has normalized around a core set of best practices within state DOTs in just a few short years, there remains tremendous differences in how states preserve their information for archival purposes.

According to the survey respondents, less than 1 in 5 state DOTs said they archive social media messages to meet public records requirements. That's



down from 36 percent in the 2014 survey. Surprisingly, nearly half of 2012 survey respondents said they archived social media messages. This suggests a trending lack of interest in social media archival information, or a lack of understanding of state archiving regulations.

4



### Looking Ahead

The 2015 survey respondents seemed less concerned about internal agency processes related to information flow and accountability. The significant theme was instead related to most effectively using staff time and resources.

About 42 percent of state DOTs said they had staff dedicated full time to social media. But in most cases, front-line communication officers are also managing at least one—and sometimes more than one—social media account, either for their region or their specific transportation mode. That suggests social media responsibilities are dispersing throughout transportation organizations. The social media staff persons may have direct responsibility for social media tools, but additionally assist other staff with training and overall social branding and strategy.

Throughout the survey, respondents identified concerns about “keeping up” and training staff on new tools. One said they saw a challenge in

securing “resources for doing routine work plus the additional demands of social media.” Another said,

*“Staff time to properly maintain and respond to questions and comments at the level our followers and friends expect.”*

Still, states expect to add new social media tools to their arsenals in the coming year, even as the use of some tools—podcasting, Storify, and Pinterest, for example—declines.

The main theme tying together the new tools is the focus on mobile outreach and access. Of the most significant emerging social tools, all are primarily—or exclusively—smartphone-based tools.

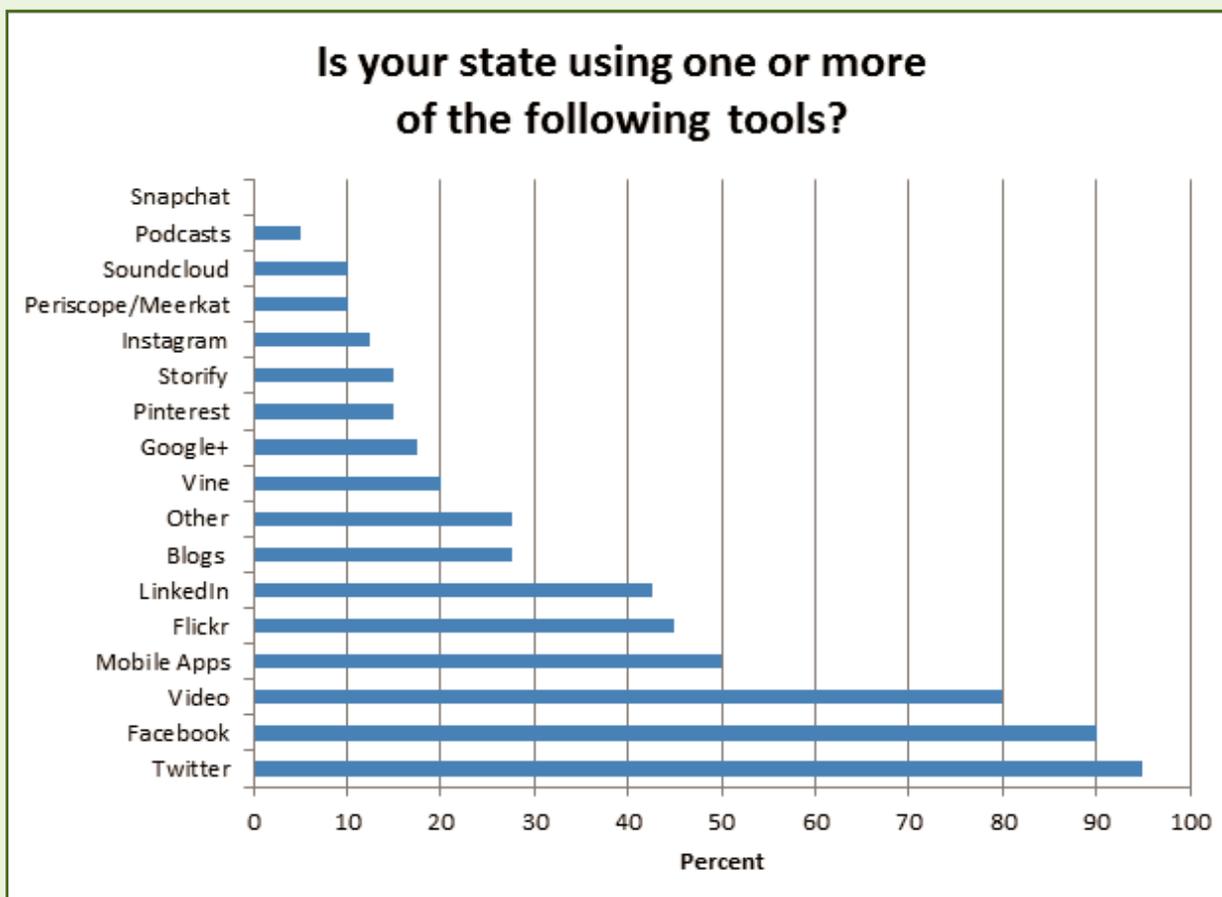
Instagram ticked down in 2015 with slightly more than 10 percent of state DOTs using the photo sharing service. But Vine, a similar service that loops short video clips, trended up. The video streaming

services, Periscope, and Meerkat, were used by 10 percent of state DOTs, with several more exploring their utility in the transportation space. One respondent captured the sentiment succinctly,

*“(We) definitely see more engagement on mobile platforms.”*

The trend toward mobile-focused communication has been growing for several years. In 2015, more than 80 percent of state DOTs said their communications were available in a mobile-friendly format—either a standalone mobile application, or a web site that is optimized for viewing in a mobile browser.

Half of the states said their agency offered a mobile app, down slightly from 2014, but up from just 30 percent in 2012. More than 3 in 5 states said their agency web site was optimized for mobile browsers.



## Continuing Discussion

State transportation departments clearly see social media as a standard practice for reaching the traveling public and key transportation constituencies. However, how to properly train staff and to appropriately allocate resources to most effectively meet public and agency expectations was a primary concern expressed during AASHTO's first survey in 2010 and will likely continue to be a concern into the foreseeable future.

While state DOTs will continue to experiment with new and emerging tools, three are clearly go-to standards—Twitter, Facebook, and online video services YouTube and Vimeo. In all likelihood, the preeminent and most sought-after tools of the future will be such exclusively mobile-based services as Instagram, Vine, or Meerkat and Periscope.

6

However, as interesting as the new tools might be, the ongoing refinement of social media practices will likely see state DOTs spend more time and resources on the administrative tasks related to measuring social media effectiveness, and archiving social media content to meet public records requirements.



*Prepared by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials Subcommittee on Transportation Communications (TransComm).*

*Previous survey results are available at <http://communications.transportation.org>.*

*For more information, contact Lloyd D. Brown, AASHTO Director of Communications, at (202) 624-5802 or via e-mail at [lbrown@aaashto.org](mailto:lbrown@aaashto.org), exploring new tools.*

## How many people are on your communications team?

2015	
Arizona	46
Arkansas	10
California	80
Connecticut	3
Delaware	10
Florida	32
Georgia	18
Hawaii	5
Idaho	12
Illinois	5
Indiana	-
Iowa	12
Kansas	11
Kentucky	16
Louisiana	7
Maine	6
Maryland	7
Michigan	14
Minnesota	11
Mississippi	14
Missouri	29
Montana	4
Nebraska	30
Nevada	10
New Hampshire	2
New Mexico	9
North Dakota	8
Oklahoma	7
Oregon	12
Pennsylvania	35
Rhode Island	4
South Carolina	10
South Dakota	1
Tennessee	11
Utah	9
Vermont	3
Washington	14
West Virginia	10
Wisconsin	23
Wyoming	7
Avg. Staff Size	8.4