



U.S. Department of Transportation

# Customer Service Plan

October 24, 2011





THE DEPUTY SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION  
WASHINGTON DC 20590

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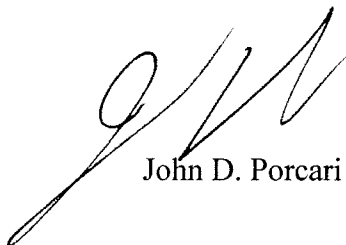
I am pleased to present the Customer Service Plan for the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT). We proudly publish this plan in accordance with Executive Order 13571, dated April 27, 2011, *Streamlining Service Delivery and Improving Customer Service*, and the Office of Management and Budget's June 13, 2011, implementing guidance.

The DOT is responsible for ensuring a safe and efficient transportation system that meets our vital national interests and enhances the quality of life for the American people. In order to achieve this core mission and to better serve our customers, we believe that it is essential to continually evaluate our performance and work to improve it.

Since its inception in 1967, DOT has emphasized open communication with States, municipalities, public officials, grantees, businesses, and other members of the public with whom we do business and to whom we provide information. The initiatives outlined in our Customer Service Plan are designed to continue and enhance this tradition by using technology to improve our services and keep pace with customer expectations.

Our Plan was developed by a diverse, multimodal group with support from both executive leadership and individual employees. The Plan serves as a blueprint for improving our customer service by applying open government principles in combination with advanced technologies to deliver vital information to consumers. It will also guide us as we redesign complex business processes to improve the customer experience while streamlining service delivery.

The issuance of this Plan is just the beginning. We are committed to ensuring that the DOT Customer Service Plan serves as a foundation for continued innovation in the way we deliver services to our customers, both now and in the future. We welcome your comments and encourage you to send your feedback on this Plan to [open@dot.gov](mailto:open@dot.gov).



John D. Porcari



## Executive Summary

The Federal Government has a responsibility to streamline service delivery and make it more efficient while at the same time improving the level of service it provides to the public. As a result, the President has issued an Executive Order requiring the Department of Transportation (DOT) and all other Executive Agencies to develop an improvement plan by October 24, 2011 to streamline service delivery and improve the customer experience.

We have analyzed the channels we use to communicate with our customers and have found ways to maximize the experience while driving down costs through various optimization opportunities. Our plan will also become an integral part of the Open Government initiatives that we have been spearheading, such as advances in electronic rulemaking, data release and visualization, and public comment. The plan is broken into three distinct parts:

- In the short-term, we are currently improving our strategic communication, telephony and Web presence. We will maintain our efforts to make continuous process improvements that we hope will have significant impacts for our customers. These efforts are in process and will be delivered within 6 months.
- In the mid-term, we will focus more on strategies to drive customers to self-serve options while also looking at the amount and types of phone traffic we receive every day. We will place more emphasis on gathering and analyzing metrics to help uncover additional efficiencies and point to possible technical solutions that will further enhance the customer experience. These efforts will be delivered within 18 months.
- In the long-term, we will build on our successes and focus on opportunities for technology improvements, application development, and system development and enhancements that tailor the DOT customer experience to an individual customer's wants and needs. These efforts will be delivered 18 months and beyond.

The initiatives we chose to highlight in the plan are as follows:

- Our Signature Initiative focuses on motorcoach safety information. DOT's Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) collects information to evaluate motor carrier safety as well as track consumer complaints. FMCSA will begin releasing this information in new ways, offering an Application Programming Interface (API) to encourage the development of mobile applications and make information more available on the Web. Further, FMCSA is developing a smartphone application that will give travelers quick, streamlined access to the agency's safety data as well as the complaint history for a given bus company. Access to this information will help travelers make informed decisions about choosing a safe motorcoach when booking a trip. The App will provide access to FMCSA's consumer complaint forms to enable the submission of complaints from a mobile device.
- Our Government Serving Government Initiative focuses on leveraging technology to make the Federal Government more efficient. Through increased program efficiency and efforts to reduce fraud, waste, and abuse, DOT will improve the transit benefits program by using electronic fare media and potentially improving commutes for thousands of Federal workers.
- Our Government Serving Consumers Initiative focuses on the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) vehicle safety information program. We will enhance the SaferCar.gov web site, provide new interfaces for mobile applications to get recall information, and use rulemaking to drive greater transparency in the recall process.
- Our Government Serving Business Initiatives are focused on modernizing and streamlining paperwork processes at the Saint Lawrence Seaway Development Corporation (SLSDC) and the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA). Streamlining these processes through the use of new technology will reduce burdens on business while maintaining safety and necessary oversight at the Saint Lawrence Seaway Development Corporation (SLSDC) and the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA). Streamlining these processes through the use of new technology will reduce burdens on business while maintaining safety and necessary oversight.





# Signature Initiative – FMCSA’s Application for Motorcoach Safety (Government Serving Consumers)



## Overview

Motorcoach travel is a very safe mode of highway transportation in the United States, carrying 750 million passengers per year. Despite this, over the past 10 years, crashes have resulted in an average of 19 occupant fatalities per year.

## Key Customer Groups

Passengers are a key component of our approach to increasing vigilance. We are taking steps to leverage technology to provide passengers with vital safety information while strengthening feedback loops with the Department.

## Challenges

Beginning in August 2011, the Department began holding roundtable discussions on the subject of motorcoach safety in four cities: Forth Worth, TX; Columbus, OH; New York, NY; and Anaheim, CA. At each of these events, a recurring theme emerged –a clear need for an “app” that would help consumers make informed decisions prior to traveling on a particular carrier.

## Impact and Benefits

FMCSA will release motor carrier safety information through an Application Programming Interface (API) to encourage the creative development of a variety of mobile applications by programmers around the country. Access to the API will encourage the development of a variety of creative applications that give information to consumers at the point of purchase; and by making the safety data available directly in search engine results, consumers will have up-to-date safety information about carriers when it matters the most.

In addition, FMCSA is developing a smartphone application, SaferBus, which will give travelers quick, streamlined access to the agency’s safety data to help them make informed decisions about choosing a safe motorcoach when booking a trip. To strengthen feedback loops, the App will link to FMCSA’s National Consumer Complaints (NCC) Database to enable the filing of complaints from a mobile device. The App will also display the number of complaints submitted to the NCC Database for a given carrier. This real-time feedback about safety violations or other substantive complaints will help FMCSA more effectively execute its oversight responsibilities.

The safety data, previously only available through FMCSA’s websites, is part of the Agency’s Compliance, Safety, and Accountability (CSA) program which operates the Safety Measurement System (SMS). This system provides an assessment of a motor carrier’s on-road performance and lists investigation results within the Behavior Analysis and Safety Improvement Categories (BASICs).

## Key Milestones and Timeline

- Provide smartphone/mobile device application available for download by the traveling public (Dec, 2011).
- Provide external access to CSA-SMS data through APIs. This will allow users to perform queries of available data and allow developers to build mobile apps (Dec, 2011).
- Enable NCC Database to accept complaints submitted through a mobile device (Dec, 2011).
- Implement a competition/challenge to develop apps related to one or more of FMCSA’s three priorities: raise bar to enter the motor carrier industry; maintain high safety standards to remain in industry; and remove high-risk carriers, drivers and service providers from operation (Feb, 2012). Generally, we expect the rules to be flexible, but:
  - o Submissions may be any kind of software application, be it for the Web, a personal computer, a mobile handheld device, console, short message service (SMS), or any software platform broadly available to the public.
  - o Submissions may also include the ability to review “crowdsource” ratings.
  - o Submissions should use one or more datasets that we make available to the public.





# Transit Benefits – OST’s Electronic Fare Media System to Provide Transit Benefits to Government Agencies (Government Serving Government)



## Overview

The TRANServe Program Office is a Federal service provider of transit benefits to 110 Federal agencies. Historically, TRANServe has provided these commuter benefits in the form of a transit voucher; in order to meet changing requirements and strengthen internal controls, TRANServe is shifting its distribution from paper fare media to electronic media.

## Key Customer Groups

There are over 280,000 participants in the program. Annual expenses for the program exceed \$350 million.

## Challenges

The Federal Transit Benefit Program has no executive agency designated to provide oversight and ensure consistency in complying with Internal Revenue Service and Treasury Financial Management Service laws and regulations.

## Increase Feedback from Customers and Adopt Best Practices for Improving Customer Experience

- The TRANServe Program Office will provide a single electronic device used to distribute fare media for use at approximately 556 transit authorities nationwide, eliminating an inefficient framework of voucher distribution (Sept, 2013).
- Both the participant and Federal agencies will benefit from a streamlined administrative process, quick replacement of lost cards and the transfer of unused funds to a replacement card. New benefits will be deposited on the same day each month, eliminating quarterly distributions with limited ability to adjust based on work schedules (Sept, 2013).

## Set, Communicate and Use Customer Service Metrics and Standards

- Provides 24/7 Interactive Voice Response (IVR) and service advisor toll-free Customer Service numbers for participants to call concerning any problems with their cards (Completed Jun, 2011).
- Allows participants to check their account information on their cards online (Completed Jun, 2011).
- Will provide online reporting tools that enable agencies to view/monitor a participant’s use of the debit card, such as card activation, individual transaction history and cardholder balances (Dec, 2012).

## Streamline Agency Processes to Reduce Costs and Accelerate Delivery

- Develop and schedule a national rollout plan. The plan will be shared with IRS Regulatory Counsel, Treasury Financial Management Service, and customer agencies prior to its deployment to increase use of stakeholder review and concurrence of plans (Aug, 2011 – Jan, 2012).
- Develop education materials including a set of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) highlighting how the program works and whom to contact with questions or issues. The FAQs and related materials will be posted to a centralized website accessible to participants and employers for ease of reference (Nov, 2011).
- Publish Transit Benefit bulletins that provide written documentation to agencies on the transition to electronic media which enable them to communicate the change to their leadership, labor/employee relations managers, transit benefit points of contact, and employees (Jun, 2011 – Jun, 2013).
- Survey customers of the transit authorities and other methods (vanpools, etc.) in each service area to ensure we deploy compatible electronic solutions that are easy to use (May, 2012).





# Vehicle Safety Information – NHTSA’s Access Improvement Initiative (Government Serving Consumers)



## Overview

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) provides the public with guidance on safety recalls through a number of channels: the SaferCar.gov Web site, the Recalls.gov Web site and mobile application, press releases and the Vehicle Safety Hotline ((888) 327-4236).

Each year, NHTSA oversees 400 to 500 safety defect recalls which impact nearly 14 million vehicles. Through these channels, vehicle owners can file complaints and determine whether they are impacted by a recall.

## Key Customer Groups

The primary group is motor vehicle owners and secondary groups include automotive manufacturers, dealers and repair facilities.

## Challenges

While NHTSA has taken steps to accept complaints online, nearly 25% of all complaints are submitted through the hotline or by mail. About 70% of all vehicles subject to a recall campaign are fixed within 18 months, but recall campaign completion rates vary.

## Increase Feedback from Customers and Adopt Best Practices for Improving Customer Experience

- Improve the SaferCar.gov complaint submission process by providing both a portable and simplified on-line complaint form which will reduce submission times and increase completion rates (Sept, 2011).
- Redesign the submission process for all complaint types, and begin collecting data from current sites to inform development plans (Sept, 2011).
- Analyze alternatives on ways to provide customers who “opt-in” with information about safety recalls, such as by text message alerts, and select the best approach(es) for subsequent implementation (Apr, 2012).
- Develop a Web application for vehicle complaints that will allow customers to scan their VIN via a mobile device, shortening submission time and improving accuracy and data content (Sept, 2012).
- Leverage the fast-track customer feedback process to collect caller satisfaction information as an additional measure of Vehicle Safety Hotline performance (Sept, 2012).
- Introduce the redesigned SaferCar.gov Web site which will offer options for submitting all complaint types as well as introduce several other enhancements for the public (Feb, 2013).
- Allow customers to search for safety recalls that are specific to their vehicle and to determine whether or not the recall action has been completed (Mar, 2013).

## Set, Communicate and Use Customer Service Metrics and Standards

- Analyze ways of collecting information on customer recall experience, such as existing recall alerts and confirmation emails, which could help identify recall inadequacies (e.g., scope, remedy) (Mar, 2013).
- Notify customers who have filed a complaint, opted –in, and provided a VIN and email address that the vehicle is involved in a recall action. Also provide a link to SaferCar.gov where they can find information on the recall (Mar, 2013).

## Streamline Agency Processes to Reduce Costs and Accelerate Delivery

- Provide enhanced search capabilities on the SaferCar.gov Web site that will allow customers to identify and review complaints and recalls by various methods, such as by multiple products (make, model, model year) and components, specific date ranges, or by key words used in the complaint description (Sept, 2012).
- Continue analysis of recall campaigns to determine the methods, trends and patterns that represent best practices/ approaches for use in future recall campaigns (Mar, 2013).





# Forms Reduction – SLSDC’s Documentation Streamlining Initiative (Government Serving Business)



## Overview

Each year, the St. Lawrence Seaway accommodates over 4,000 commercial vessel transits supporting a cargo volume of over 30 million tons. All Seaway vessels must complete numerous U.S. and Canadian forms to gain transit approval. Regulations call for the completion of these forms, including yearly updates. In addition, there are numerous other U.S. and Canadian agencies that require documentation. This initiative seeks to consolidate the nearly 30 different forms into one web-based location.

## Key Customer Groups

SLSDC, St. Lawrence Seaway Management Corporation (SLSMC), Transport Canada, U.S. Customs and Border Patrol, U.S. Coast Guard, and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

## Challenges

While transiting vessels have historically completed the required documentation accurately, the process is arduous and time-consuming. Several cross-governmental forms require duplicative entries. Consolidated forms and greater data warehousing will support increased accuracy and limit redundancy.

## Increase Feedback from Customers and Adopt Best Practices for Improving Customer Experience

- Identify stakeholders’ preferred method of form submission and online location (<http://www.greatlakes-seaway.com/en/>) through existing Seaway stakeholder survey methodologies (Dec, 2012).
- Hold documentation working group sessions as part of the annual Seaway stakeholder coordination meetings, including but not limited to Montreal Marine Day and the Highway H2O program (Dec, 2012).
- Increase Web site functionality on the St. Lawrence Seaway site to better inform stakeholders and to improve self-service (Dec, 2012).
- Establish a multi-agency working group to devise a customer service oriented approach for consolidating the number of forms, while still meeting mandatory regulatory requirements and sustaining the Seaway’s record of environmental and operational thoroughness (Dec, 2012).
- Redirect SLSDC resources to support a Cloud-based warehouse of transit information as collected concurrent to a progressive decrease in number of annually required transit forms (Dec, 2013).

## Set, Communicate, and Use Customer Service Metrics and Standards

- Assign and distribute information for SLSDC points of contact for stakeholder inquiries on transit documentation (Dec, 2011).
- Include pre-transit metrics in existing Seaway customer service surveys (Dec, 2012).
- Expand Web site information to better explain transit application processing timelines (Dec, 2012), including automated in-process completion updates (Dec, 2013).
- Create an incentive structure that encourages 100% compliance with documentation requirements in advance of the start of the navigation season each year (Dec, 2013).

## Streamline Agency Processes to Reduce Costs and Accelerate Delivery

- Revisit and analyze historic Seaway customer service data to identify existing trends and problems in the Seaway application experience (Dec, 2012).
- Complete analysis and target goals for specific form consolidation (Dec, 2012).
- Make Seaway transit documentation and applications available in smart-phone and tablet-ready formats (Dec, 2013).





# Hazardous Materials Permit Processes – PHMSA’s Modernization Program (Government serving Business)



## Overview

Special permits are documents issued to ensure the safe transportation of hazardous materials when not otherwise permitted in the Hazardous Materials Regulations (HMR; 49 CFR Parts 171-180), or when technology has advanced at such a rapid pace that transportation controls for the technology have not yet been incorporated into the regulations. Approximately 300 applications for permits are received monthly. Until recent improvements were implemented, all necessary analysis required to approve a permit application was done manually, resulting in a large backlog of applications. This backlog of applications directly impacts the U.S. economy due to disruption of freight commerce.

## Key Customer Groups

Hazardous materials manufacturers, shippers, and transporters.

## Challenges

In order to improve customer satisfaction and freight commerce, PHMSA needs to expedite the processing of special permit applications and reduce the number of applications rejected due to being incomplete.

## Increase Feedback from Customers and Adopt Best Practices for Improving Customer Experience

- The portal that holds permit processing applications will contain portlets that will improve communication with customers, e.g. a customer feedback tool and portlet that allows PHMSA staff to communicate with applicants to clarify or provide additional information, which should lower the number of declined requests. The Special Permits (SP) Wizard will provide an application process that presents only the panels and data fields needed and answers to questions during the application process, thus simplifying the customer experience (Jan, 2012).
- The SP Wizard will assist customers with submitting complete applications by flagging incomplete sections or individual questions, preventing the submission of incomplete applications. This will ensure that all necessary information needed to process a request is received and will also reduce the number of rejected applications (Jan, 2012).

## Set, Communicate, and Use Customer Service Metrics and Standards

- By law, PHMSA has 180 days to process special permit applications before they must be reported on a monthly basis in the Federal Register. PHMSA tracks service performance of the special permits program by evaluating the length of time applications have been in process (aging) and application status (where they are in the evaluation process). Dashboards have been created to track and communicate aging information across the agency.

## Streamline Agency Processes to Reduce Costs and Accelerate Delivery

- The new Special Permit Processing (SPP) module will expedite processing by automating the approval of renewals and “Party To” applications that meet specific criteria, e.g. minimum level of safety fitness. This will allow staff to focus their time on processing new requests or other requests that require a more in-depth review (Nov, 2011).
- The SPP Wizard will speed application processing by improving information collection, data quality, and data management, which will allow PHMSA to streamline communication among its divisions and modal partners to make better risk-based, data-driven decisions in a timely, efficient manner (Jan, 2012).
- The SPP application will allow customers to sign up for advanced notifications alerting them to when their permit is nearing expiration and allowing them to renew online quickly (Jun, 2012).







## Building a Strong Customer Service Foundation

While DOT's plan meets the requirements of the Executive Order, we recognize that without a solid base to work from, customers will not realize the full benefits of these initiatives. Being cognizant of that fact, this plan is about more than adopting new tools and emerging technologies; it is about affecting real policy and internal culture change to ensure that our Department relentlessly strives to streamline its processes and serve its customers effectively. So, this plan is a beginning, not an end.

To achieve these goals, our plan also addresses foundational initiatives necessary for a complete, well rounded approach for improving the customer experience. These initiatives, coupled with the best practices shared among DOT's Operating Administrations, will form a toolkit that all OAs will use going forward to achieve continuous improvement on their customer service initiatives.

This toolkit will include information about lessons learned from the initiatives in this plan, as well as improved processes and procedures that we have discovered. We believe that documenting and sharing our best practices across the Department will yield better results for our customers and improve our performance. In addition, we will look outside the agency and adopt tools and techniques as appropriate. We hope to share what we learned with the rest of the Federal community who are interested in our efforts.

### IdeaHub Challenge to Employees - What Things DOT Does Well

In formulating our plan, we took advantage of one of our signature Open Government programs: IdeaHub. Secretary LaHood asked employees for their ideas on how DOT can build a better service delivery system that is more customer-focused and high-performing that meets the President's objectives as well as the expectations of the public. Specifically, DOT employees were asked:

- What innovative tools, techniques, and processes are needed to accomplish this?
- Are there best practices already in place at DOT that model effective customer service, and if so, what are they, and how can we implement them Department-wide?
- Are there outdated policies and institutional barriers that keep us from serving our customers effectively?

Through IdeaHub, we specifically identified the SLSDC's customer service efforts, in addition to several other opportunities, to better leverage technology across the Department. As a result of the IdeaHub challenge, our employees identified important initiatives and gave the Department a list of other objectives we will be incorporating into our overall strategy. Specifically, this includes areas such as:

- Improving coordination between Web and phone access points as well as leveraging the customer relationship management (CRM) investment more widely. Our CRM investment already generates a publically available Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) list which we also use to prioritize Web site content and services. We will work to expand the use of this tool across DOT over the next 18 months.
- Making better use of mobile applications. We have already embarked on applications such as those featured in our signature initiative for motorcoach safety and our vehicle safety recalls, and we will apply the lessons learned from these initiatives to spur further innovation on an ongoing basis.

### Web Review and Reform

DOT's Web reform efforts are in support of the .gov Reform Task. The DOT Web team, in conjunction with the OA Web teams, was charged with reviewing their websites to ensure compliance with policies in Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Memorandum M-05-04 (Policies for Federal Agency Public Web sites) as well as the best practices on HowTo.gov.

Initially, content providers are being asked to provide contact information on their pages, and Web managers are providing additional detail on their methods for measuring and analyzing Web traffic. We use this information to evaluate potential improvements and share best practices. These foundational efforts are in support of the longer term vision, and will include detailed plans related to:

- Website Identification and Ownership (short-term opportunity)
- Content Management System (CMS) (mid-term opportunity)
- Main DOT.gov Redesign (mid-term opportunity)
- Governance (long-term opportunity)





- Search (mid-term opportunity)
- Analytics (mid-term opportunity)
- Information Architecture (mid-term opportunity)

## Telephony Program Review and Reform

DOT's Telephony Program is conducting an inventory to rationalize our toll-free access numbers and to give our customers a more consistent experience when they contact any DOT office. The Department's Telephony Coordinators were directed to:

- Review the inventory of toll-free numbers to verify that they were still valid and in use (short-term opportunity)
- Identify whether their numbers were attached to a call center or were directing to some other phone or pool of phones (mid-term opportunity)

In addition, the Telephony team is reviewing the decentralized call center approach that DOT currently maintains and is analyzing the cost and performance impacts of moving to a consolidated, centralized approach with skills based routing options to get customers where they need to be as efficiently as possible.

The Telephony and Web teams are coordinating and are conducting regular monthly working group to ensure they complement each other's approaches. The goal is to develop a seamless customer service experience.

## Data Collection Review and Reform

At DOT, we recognize that timely feedback from our customers is key to improving our services. To enable this type of feedback, DOT has taken full advantage of OMB's new "Fast Track" Information Collection Program, which provides for significantly greater agility in our efforts to receive and act upon timely feedback from our customers. 100% of the Department's Secretarial Offices and OAs have begun the required actions to take advantage of this process, and several have received approval from OMB. Our next steps include:

- Training Information Collection Officers and Program Managers around the Department on the "Fast Track" process, providing them with guidance and checklists that will speed adoption of this new process. (short-term opportunity)
- Studying our current qualitative information collections to determine how they can be migrated to the "Fast Track" process, reducing our administrative burden and administering our information collection and customer feedback programs more efficiently. (mid-term opportunity)
- Increasing our capability to share qualitative information collections across the Department, improving the quality of our feedback mechanisms through information sharing and reducing the time it takes to develop new collections. (long-term opportunity)

## Measurable Success

A key element of our approach will be to institute more consistent metrics across our service delivery and customer service processes. As we developed our plan, we found that we do not consistently implement data-driven approaches to customer services across the Department. We seek to build additional capacity and executive support for a quantitative approach that will drive specific changes, support budget requests, and link directly to the Department's performance goals. We feel it is important to look at both qualitative and quantitative measures of success to ensure we keep the focus on the customers, not on the budgets attached to the initiatives.

As noted in the introduction to our report, the Department's efforts to implement the Executive Order have provided us with new opportunities to rebuild and strengthen the connections that are critical to providing excellent customer service. Through the development of our plan, we have identified many cases where the interdisciplinary support of our Web, Telephony, and Information Collection teams would add value to our customer service efforts.

Many of the initiatives outlined in this plan are a combination of classic e-Government initiatives combined with an Open Government approach. At DOT, we believe that this approach will yield the greatest results in transforming our service delivery and customer service experience. We want to continue making improvements with the help of the IdeaHub tool and also have an annual challenge for the Department. Based on the great ideas from the broad challenge, we feel that targeted challenges will help the continuous improvement process.

## Senior Accountable Official

The DOT Senior Accountable Official for the Executive Order on Streamlining Service Delivery and Improving Customer Service is Robert Boehler, Director of Information Technology Compliance.

