

Federal Highway Administration Western Federal Lands Highway Division

2006 WFLHD Contractor Conference Spokane, Washington March 30, 2006

A group of 68 private contractors and representatives of WFLHD took the opportunity of the conference to discuss areas of concern and discuss potential solutions. An emphasis was placed on early and on-going communication among all the parties to set expectations and identify potential challenges. Early intervention was also noted as key to avoiding costly delays related to environmental clearances and quality control issues.

Conference topics

- A historical perspective on highway construction
- What context sensitive solutions means to the contractor
- Updates and explanations of the contracting process.
- Updates on project delivery: increase in funding – but increased costs, with many challenges
- Updates on materials, transition to Superpave and changes to IRI specifications.
- Avoiding cost and time delays related to environmental and cultural clearances
- Contractor Quality Control

Award

- An award was provided to Bruch and Bruch Construction as a token of appreciation for their efforts on working with FHWA on two projects in the Olympic National Park during the 2005 construction season.

The following ideas for improvement and challenges were shared:

General

- Communicate clearly and often!
- Clarify expectations from all parties in the beginning of the project. One way would be to include photos with plans.
- The contractor should discuss any challenges they are going to face in meeting the agencies expectations; develop solutions together.
- WFLHD would like the contractors to tell them about any unintended consequences they may see in the project – such as the increased cost of doing future work on a sculptured slope. Slope sculpting in rock cuts: be sure no future laybacks will be needed – “sculptured” slopes are hard to get back or to drill.
- Having a contractor consultant review the plans before going to bid may help WFLHD get a fresh perspective. This would prevent that contractor from bidding on the job, so perhaps a retired contractor could do it.
- Challenge: the increasing length of time needed for studies reduces the \$ available for construction.
- The current website is good and well used. WFLHD is planning improvements, such as a Q&A section.

Contracts:

- WFLHD should offer hard copies of plans for those who live in areas where website access is not always available, or . . . use an outside contractor to provide hard copies for a fee.

- WFHLD should provide either GPS data or specific directions and markings for site visits / pre-bid and pre-show activities.
- Contractors prefer real projects for MATOC – not a dummy bids.

Environmental and cultural clearance of contractor-selected sources.

- Notify WFLHD environmental section immediately if you will need to use an area that has not been cleared. Environmental may be able to save you a great deal of time and money.

Quality Control

- Don't sugar coat it. The contractor is ultimately responsible for the entire construction process. You will continue having resistance and confusion from contracts until you hammer home that clever dodges of contractual responsibilities will continue costing everyone money in post job claims and dispute resolution.
- FHWA should solicit input from the current QC managers as to the requirements needed to be a QC manager.
- Hopefully changes will bring even better projects!
- Would like to see actual results from projects; see how other contractors are doing QC, etc.
- Changing a spec like this can be very complex. Hopefully a couple pilot jobs will use this spec before it is used completely.
- The new thrust – “direct approach” to QC is good.

Evaluation

At the end of the conference the group identified what they thought went well and what could be improved. The responses are noted below.

What Went Well

Good variety of topics
 Knowledgeable presenters
 Meeting was a good length
 Long breaks good for talking
 IT help was great – everything worked!
 Handouts were great – not too many, very informative

Improvements

Send response back when registration is received and / or reminder email

Compilation of ratings and comments from evaluation forms

Context Sensitive Solutions		1	2	3	4	5
		<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
CSS: Topic mix				4	13	5
	One thing to look at: when environmental commitments possibly make unsafe conditions during construction for both contractors and the public.					
	Explained in very common language of a controversial subject when so much outside influence affects a contract.					
	Engineer did a good job with information					

Adam did a good job of conveying the different responsibilities and concerns that factor into a design – contractors often do not take time to care about these concerns and factors.
Good – could have given more specific examples
It's good to look for assistance from the contractors as to how to design in a cost effective manner that limits construction costs while still giving the public the product they desire.
Very educational
Fairly educational, especially in describing pre-design input from stakeholders and owner / agencies. Slope sculpting in rock cuts: be sure no future laybacks will be needed – “sculptured” slopes are hard to get back or to drill. Use retired contractors / superintendents as consultants.

	1	2	3	4	5
	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
CSS: Depth of discussion			3	13	6
Good involvement with group					
Good discussion, good participation					
A good balance of background, technical and internal considerations.					
We spoke of communications – the preface that “it is essential that the DOT project engineer and the contractor’s superintendent get along and talk openly and freely. Discussion guarded, but good.					
Project Delivery	1	2	3	4	5
	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Project Delivery: Topic mix		2	4	9	6
Very good information presented					
Good information; should have been earlier in the day.					
Very good information					
Was well done; engineer had a good grasp of funding, costs, etc.					
Topic mix was OK; however, a lot of the information was not good.					
Very informative!					
	1	2	3	4	5
	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Project Delivery: Depth of discussion		2	6	11	3
The presentation was so good there was no need for additional questions					
Good conversation during presentation					
When sharing ho-hum news it is often best not to dwell – Bob handled this well by keeping it moving.					
Contracts	1	2	3	4	5
	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Contracts: Topic mix			4	10	8
Ms. Firestone talked a little too fast; hard to keep up before she moved on to next topic. Probably because she knows her stuff, but hard to keep up while taking notes.					
Good explanation on the website. Bid on CDs suggested, electronic bidding is a good idea					
Topic mix was great. This particular topic could be expounded on.					
Elizabeth was good.					

	Post questions and answers to the website					
	Very useful information					
	Firestone is well versed in contracts – in regards to the NP / Teton they seem to be starting new procedure without the impact on bonds for small companies. Website seem to be behind Central's site.					
		1 ☹	2	3 ☹	4	5 ☹
Contracts: Depth of discussion				3	12	6
	This topic requires at least a ½ day seminar					
	Good discussion with help of facilitator.					

Materials		1 ☹	2	3 ☹	4	5 ☺
Materials: Topic mix				4	9	9
	John hit his points in rapid succession and covered the variety that seem to affect contractors the most after a project is underway.					
	Very informative and notifies of changes to come. FHA/Dot now require SuperPave					
	Presenter had a very good knowledge level on materials, SuperPave, etc. Easy to hear and understand.					
	Materials presentations are usually boring, but this one was alright. Nice job.					
	Good information.					
	Could have gone a little more in-depth. Very good speaker.					
		1 ☹	2	3 ☹	4	5 ☺
Materials: Depth of discussion				5	10	7
	Not much depth of each coming change – this may have been by design.					
	Fair					
	Good discussion					
	Would like to see actual results from projects – see how other contractors are doing on QC, etc.					
	Explained very well.					
	Wasn't much because he didn't go into much detail.					
Environmental		1 ☹	2	3 ☹	4	5 ☺
Environmental: Topic mix				1	11	10
	Presentation covered the “intent” of the environmental specifications better than the specifications.					
	Interesting. I wasn't aware of all the issues. Very good presenter.					
	Very knowledgeable – knew her stuff					
	Terri has a good hands-on type of presentation. Her knowledge and network skills working on environmental areas was superior!					
	Very good.					
	Distasteful subject presented very well by lady.					
	Speaker is well versed in her job understanding and aspects needed.					
		1 ☹	2	3 ☹	4	5 ☺
Environmental: Depth of discussion			1	0	9	12
	Way too long, she kept repeating herself. She also said “I” too much, seemed self absorbed.					

Participation in Terri's seminar should be requirement for contractors to perform WFHLD work – even better – it should be a requirement to bid on projects and it should be a factor in evaluation of best value proposals.
Good answers
Acceptable. Ran overtime – very wordy.
Good approach to answers
Fairly well discussed

Contractor Quality Control		1	2	3	4	5
		☹		☹		☺
Contractor QC: Topic mix				3	8	11
	Very good coverage of the proposed changes to the QC spec and why.					
	Good information, well presented; lots of new requirements.					
	Chart looks great.					
	Great presentation!					
	The new thrust – “direct approach” to QC is good.					
	Marty explained things well.					
	Very well prepared – good presenter.					
		1	2	3	4	5
		☹		☹		☺
Contractor QC: Depth of discussion				4	9	9
	Much discussion of good points.					

General Information						
		1	2	3	4	5
		☹		☹		☺
The number of topics presented was appropriate for the length of the meeting.			1	2	6	11
	Wonderful topics with too little time. This should be a 2 day program.					
	Good, kept interesting					
	Facilitator did a good job keeping it interesting and moving.					

If this seminar is held again, the subjects my office is most interested in are:	
Alternative contracting methods	
QC / QA pay issues	
Overhaul QA calculations	
Worker training programs	
Changing concrete specifications	
Contractor QC / QA	
Upcoming projects	
Changes in STD specs	
Environmental	
Contract administrations	
New technologies / innovations	
Health and safety	
Streamlining CSS	
Environment permits	
Organization of the WFL	
Materials - paving	

	Funding
	Recycling / reclaiming to save money
	Unique contracting opportunities
	IT

The best time of the year for this seminar is:	
	Winter
	Late winter – early spring
	Nov. - March
	Feb. - March

What process, specifications, or practice would you suggest WFL improve, simplify or otherwise look into?	
	It sounds like the WFL website needs to catch up with the Central website
	Speak more to how project personnel interface (government and contractors).
	Water quality management
	Environmental regulations
	Your ultimate project success would increase with contractor prequalification requirements. You should implement prequalification requirements.

General Comments	
	Projects are getting more difficult and costlier to deliver. This meeting is a good start to helping improve what can be accomplished for available dollars.
	It was an illuminating experience. I am encouraged to provide feedback to WFLHD project planners. The materials portion needs to be expanded.
	Great meeting!
	Fine program
	Enjoyed it.
	Encourage more suggestions on what would improve you QC –what would work best.
	First time I have attended. I felt the content was good and pertinent information. It was also a good opportunity to network with WFLHD people as well as other contractors.
	Overall very good – lots of information passed on – good knowledge by speakers.

Where would you like the next Contractors Conference to be held?		
	Portland / Vancouver	5
	Spokane	7
	Boise	6