

EconWorks Expert Task Group 2017 Q3 Meeting Minutes

Monday, September 11, 2017 • 1:00 – 2:30 PM Eastern

Webinar Link: <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/8327763026482522369>

Call in: 866-203-7023 Code 8980060415

ATTENDEES (in Bold):

<u>Members</u>	<u>Liaisons & Others</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alan Dybing, <i>North Dakota State University</i> • Mac Hughes-Cromwick, American Public Transportation Association • Ben Gruswitz, <i>Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission</i> • Kelly Gwin, <i>Georgia DOT</i> • Jeff Harris, <i>Utah DOT</i> • Bill Keyrouze, <i>Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations</i> • Subrat Mahapatra, <i>Maryland State Highway Administration</i> • Sebastian Montagne, <i>North Carolina DOT</i> • Ben Orsbon, South Dakota DOT • Steve Polzin, <i>University of South Florida</i> • Eric Randall, <i>Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments</i> • Joseph Schofer, <i>Northwestern University</i> • David Schwartz, <i>Kansas DOT</i> • Jeff Sudmeier, Colorado DOT • Kevin Verre, <i>Nevada DOT</i> • <i>Arizona DOT</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mara Campbell, CH2M • Ryan Endorf, <i>Federal Highway Administration</i> • Brian Gardner, Federal Highway Administration • Steve Fitzroy, Economic Development Research Group, Inc. • Lei Zhang, University of Maryland • Eirini Kastrourni, University of Maryland • Cui Qingbin, University of Maryland • Paul Schonfeld, University of Maryland • Dorothy Parnian, University of Maryland • Lei Zhang, University of Maryland • Rahil Saeedi, • Matthew Hardy, AASHTO • Pam Hutton, AASHTO • Stefan Natzke, Federal Highway Administration • Jen Smoker, CH2M • Valentin Vulov, <i>Federal Highway Administration</i>

Summary of Topics

1. Welcome and Rollcall
2. Review Agenda
3. Long Term Approach for EconWorks
4. Marketing and Outreach Updates and Discussion
5. University of Maryland Update
6. Final Questions/Topics
7. Wrap-up and Adjourn

SUMMARY

1. Welcome and Rollcall – Matt Hardy

Matt Hardy welcomed everyone to the call, went over logistics, and thanked them in advance for their participation on the call. He then turned the meeting over to Chairman, Jeff Sudmeier.

2. Review Agenda - Jeff Sudmeier

Jeff Sudmeier also welcomed the attendees to the call. He outlined the agenda for the call and asked if anyone had additions or suggestions to add to the agenda. None were elevated, so he asked Matt to start by giving an update on the presentation at the AASHTO SCOP meeting.

3. Long Term Approach for EconWorks – Matt Hardy

- Matt then initiated a discussion about the long-term approach for EconWorks reminding ETG members that funding for EconWorks runs out in December 2018, so there will be a need for a sustainable model to keep it running.
- During the AASHTO Standing Committee on Planning (SCOP) meeting, held August 2, 2017, Matt had the opportunity to approach the SCOP members regarding the long-term future for EconWorks, including where EconWorks web pages would be housed and hosted. As background he explained, at the start of this research product, the SCOP had volunteered to be a home site for the research but had not been required to commit any financing.
 - The first stage of the EconWorks product was the research, followed by
 - The second stage of implementation and populating EconWorks with select Case Studies.
 - The third stage is to see the product find a sustainable path forward—enabling EconWorks to be used by transportation agencies as well as continuing to populate the database with more case studies.
- Matt reported the committee agreed the benefits of this product are good. People believe in the utility of the before/after Case Study data and think that the collecting, documenting, and analyzing of Case Study data is beneficial to a larger audience.
- Committee members agreed that the tools will effectively help sell economic impacts of projects to state leadership (even Governors) and that this is a role that the state DOTs should fund with AASHTO Committee on Planning oversight. Matt shared that it was very eye opening and made him happy to hear how much the State DOTs liked the product. There was significant interest from committee members interested in participating in a pooled fund to sustain the project.
- Members were enthusiastic and requested that a detailed proposal be prepared and presented. Matt explained that he (along with the EconWorks consultant team) is willing to pull together an overall statement of work and other documents to provide to the SCOP, which is the beginning process of creating a pool fund.
- A Pool Fund Project would be sponsored by US DOT with several lead states championing the project. Depending on the number of states providing voluntary investments the scope of the project could be scaled up or down from the initial cost estimates.
- Matt stressed that these issues are at a preliminary conversation stage and there are still outstanding questions to be addressed including what would be a minimal amount needed to make the pool fund project successful and conversely if a cap on investments might be necessary depending on how much might it be feasible to scale up should more states contribute than anticipated.
- Paul asked if state contributions might be requested proportional to their populations but Matt wasn't sure this would be necessary due to the small amount of funds requested and the enthusiasm of both Rhode Island and California at the committee meeting.

- Jeff noted that the project will have some fixed costs including technical assistance and marketing but Case Study development could be a variable cost (approximately \$15K per Case Study).
- Matt shared a draft discussion document on the webinar including several key talking points and a high-level cost estimate to visualize a realistic scenario should half of all states agree to fund the project at a small amount over five years. See below.
 - *EconWorks is a SHRP2 product that AASHTO is now implementing in cooperation with FHWA.*
 - *EconWorks is a simplified economic modeling tool that uses data and information from before/after case studies of transportation projects to better understand economic impacts.*
 - *The foundation of EconWorks rests on case studies that are prepared and entered into a database.*
 - *Currently, there are 120 case studies which are multimodal in nature. An additional 20 will be added over the next six months.*
 - *Implementation funding for EconWorks will run out December 2018 and it is necessary to make a decision on either shutting down the EconWorks website or continuing to fund the overall operation, maintenance, and improvement costs.*
 - *The AASHTO Committee on Planning has committed to oversee the continued operation, maintenance and improvement of EconWorks as they see it as a valuable tool for transportation planners to better understand the economic impact of transportation projects.*
 - *During the AASHTO Committee on Planning August 2017 business meeting, the members instructed AASHTO staff to put together a high-level cost estimate to fund the continued operation, maintenance and improvements of EconWorks through a pooled fund project.*
 - *A decision needs to be made by **December 2017** as to moving forward with the EconWorks Pooled Fund Project.*

EconWorks Pooled Fund Project Cost Estimate

Item	Annual Cost	Five Year Cost	Notes
1. Hosting	\$26,000	\$130,000	
2. Technical Assistance	\$15,000	\$75,000	
3. Server Fees	\$4,000	\$20,000	
4. Program Management	\$12,000	\$60,000	AASHTO and CH2M
5. Case Study Development	\$60,000	\$300,000	Assumes 4 per year at \$15k each
6. Marketing	\$3,000	\$15,000	
TOTAL	\$120,000	\$600,000	

EconWorks Pooled Fund Project Revenue Estimate

Item	Amount	Total
1. State DOT Contribution at \$20,000 each over 5 years.	25 x \$20,000	\$500,000
2. FHWA Contribution	\$150,000	\$150,000
TOTAL	n/a	\$650,000

- The Wider Economic Benefit tools were created in excel to help users benefit from market access, connectivity and reliability. The potential of a pool fund that would create a sustainable EconWorks site would impacts the decision and schedule to convert of the Wider Economic Benefit tools into a web based approach. If a pool fund is created and shows strong commitment over the next several months, Matt felt it would be appropriate to ask the ETG if funds currently set aside might be released to convert the WEB tools to a more interactive web based platform. The ETG members replied multiple times that this was a good plan and were looking forward to seeing this happen.

4. Marketing and Outreach Updates – Brian Gardner

- Brian shared the Webinar series has been going well. June’s webinar had 73 registrants and August’s webinar registered 30 people. The registration for September’s webinar hosted by Volpe looks promising. It will be the last application focused webinar of the series and will show the MPO perspective of working with EconWorks.
- Brian spoke concerning the WEB tool usage among the IAP states. Volpe plans to use the application information and report data to produce a sharper brochure to market EconWorks. To collect data on how people are using the tools post implementation they need to develop mechanisms to collect this information. It is important to think about the high level uses and who is using the tools for what purposes. Some considerations include:
 - If the project team should develop this analysis or would users submit their comments as part of the process.
 - If the request for self-reporting might be connected to the newsletter sign up, when users download information, or when users are active on the web site.
- The current organization and flow of the web site is being evaluated. Brian asked for input if there are specific changes or additions the ETG members would like to see.
- Regarding the Marketing Timeline Status:
 - Three final webinars are scheduled for September 21, October 19, and December 14.
 - Continue to look for relevant conferences to expose potential users to EconWorks along with emails, newsletters and other marketing efforts.

5. University of Maryland Update – Eirini Kastrouni and Lei Zhang

The Case Study update was presented by Eirini Kastrouni who thanked Matt and Jeff for the opportunity to present introduced everyone on the line from the University of Maryland team. She also stated how pleased UMD is to work with the ETG to support EconWorks.

- Eight new case studies have been uploaded to the EconWorks site including, Hiawatha Light Rail Transit, River Line (NJ Transit), Legacy Parkway corridor, South Lake Union Streetcar, Frontline West Valley LRT, 1-75 Roadway Expansion (iROX), I-57/Veterans Memorial Drive Interchange, Mt. Vernon (IDOT District 9), and Grandview Interchange, East of Durango.
- The QA/QC process has been improved and the EDR Group has been extremely helpful in supporting UMD’s efforts.
- A comment from the ETG was provided to UMD to consider sending the final Case Studies back for review to the project teams that were interviewed. It would allow them to review and discuss the results before they are published and perhaps prepare the team to speak to those results once published.
- Six more Case Studies are being sent to EDR Group this week for review. The plan is to upload them soon but a review as requested in the bullet above might delay publication. These projects include: Airport MAX Red Line, Green Line Extension, South Bay Expressway, Pioneer

Crossing, 95 Express, and Highway 141 – Page Olive Connector. Eirini was confident that UMD was on track continuing to finalize these Case Studies.

- Citing a map of the US, Eirini showed how the final selection of projects provided good coverage both in geography and defined categories. She presented a slide showing the coverage including the 20 new Case Studies.
 - Ben Orsman of South Dakota has introduced the MRC Rail Reconstruction Study of a state owned short line with a private operator. This project would be the first in the freight/rail project category unlike similar projects that fall in the freight/terminal category. There was discussion around if it should remain or another project be chosen. Eirini noted that one option would be to keep it as a look ahead for the second phase once there are more Case Studies available. The tradeoff of adding more to cells for depth or simply filling all gaps in the table was noted. UMD felt there is currently a good balance that will serve to attract more users.
 - Ben explained that one justification for the study in question is the removal of truck freight from highways. The first planned extension shortens truck trips by 100 miles and the second extension eliminates another 30 miles from truck trips. He explained that other agricultural commodity states may value this project due to changing demand and new relationships with short line railroads (some of which are state owned). There is a growing demand for short lines to reduce truck freight to and from grain terminals.
 - As a pilot project, the ETG participants supported this study as an important project type to consider. They agreed to keep this Case Study acknowledging that as a standalone project, data cannot be extrapolated till other similar projects are added.
- Lei Zhang then reviewed some of the lessons learned during UMD’s work on EconWorks. In regards to technology transfer challenges:
 - The development of new case studies requires extensive training, significant time commitment, dedicated outreach efforts, and even trial-and-error iterations.
 - Existing training materials are helpful, but general QA/QC support mechanisms need to be established for newer case studies from other contributors. They want to help streamline the process for others to develop Case Studies to promote crowd sourcing.
 - The cost and time requirement for each case study has decreased over the course of this project as our UMD staff become more experienced with the process.
 - Guidance from and review by original EconWorks case study developers have been extremely helpful.
- Lei announced the newly formed Maryland Transportation Institute that has been funded within UMD. Moving forward Lei stressed that MTI/NTC is happy to continue to support and willing to provide matching resources to support EconWorks and host/promote the EconWorks tools.
- UMD has received comments and revisions regarding their course module work and are willing to send links to the training to the ETG members as they did in June.

Questions and Discussion:

- Provided the pool fund goes forward, one participant noted that a key issue will be keeping the Case Study database alive either with direct support or by providing time to build out resources to create a crowd source platform. Either way there will be a role for quality assurance and consistency among added Case Studies.

6. Final Questions/Topics

Jeff thanked everyone for their participation and asked the ETG members if there were any additional questions or topics they would like to discuss. None were elevated.

7. Wrap-up and Adjourn

Jeff reminded the ETG members of the next ETG meeting is the 3rd Annual ETG Meeting. Mara explained this will be a full day in Washington, D.C. from about 9:00 am to 4:00 pm. More information will be provided in a few weeks including links to per diem hotel rates. A robust conversation is anticipated as the group charts the course for the upcoming year.

Jeff asked if Matt or Brain have anything else to add or closing remarks. They thanked everyone for great discussion on the call and the meeting adjourned at 2:26 EST.

NEXT STEPS/ACTION ITEMS

- Minutes from this quarterly update will be sent out to the ETG. (Matt H/Mara C)
- Links to the updated curriculum will be sent to all ETG members (Matt H/Mara C)
- Next ETG meetings will be:
 - Tuesday, December 12, 2017 *(At AASHTO office in DC)*

Meeting Materials

- ETG Meeting Agenda
- Second Quarter Meeting Minutes
- EconWorks Pooled Fund Project Discussion Points