

Build Bridges, Not Barriers

As we head into our eighth month of working remotely under the COVID-19 pandemic, one thing remains the same. The transportation industry will continue to move forward, and our customers will remain dependent on us to provide the services and assistance they have always expected. An important part of keeping the transportation industry moving forward is sharing our knowledge and best practices with other State transportation agencies throughout the nation and with our partners and stakeholders.



from the desk of
TIM SMITH
ADMINISTRATOR

Year in and year out, one of the best opportunities to share and gather this knowledge has been the American Association of State Transportation Officials' (AASHTO) Annual Meeting. As you may recall from prior information shared, MDOT and MDOT SHA planned to host the 2020 Annual Meeting in Baltimore this month. While we are truly disappointed that we cannot host an in-person event this year, Maryland Governor Larry Hogan will welcome attendees during the opening session and discussions are already underway to possibly host in Baltimore in 2022. The 2021 Annual Meeting is already scheduled to be held in San Diego. Fingers crossed!

So while this year's meeting will be held virtually from November 9 - 13, attendees can still participate in interactive and highly engaging meetings, and have a little fun too! Meeting topics include several related to our Northbound Ten initiatives – communications, inclusiveness and asset management, just to name a few – Transportation Is Personal: Strategies to Help State DOTs Communicate the Benefits of Transportation, Incorporating Civil Rights Principles in DOT Programs, Organizing for Automated Vehicles, Home Alone! – Harnessing the Virtual Environment, and Planning for Transportation Investments post-COVID. The exhibit hall will still be available and allow participants to make connections via the virtual platform to chat or to set up one-on-one calls. And a little fun will be added with yoga, interactive mixology and trivia sessions. On opening night, MDOT and MDOT SHA will host the evening and take attendees on virtual tours of some of Baltimore's most historic and famous sites followed by interactive trivia. For additional information, visit aashtoannualmeeting.org.

As we continue to navigate the COVID landscape, let's remember that events such as the AASHTO Annual Meeting provide new opportunities to build relationships, share knowledge and reach out to others. With the World Series recently concluded, I am reminded of a quote from baseball great Bullet Bob Feller: "Every day is a new opportunity. You can build on yesterday's success or put its failures behind and start over again. That's the way life is, with a new game every day, and that's the way baseball is."

Here's to a great November! Stay safe and take care of each other!

Major Weekend Project Shutdown of Baltimore Beltway Ends Early

You couldn't blame MDOT SHA planners and workers for being a little anxious at a key turning point in a major project. As the weekend of October 16-19 approached, the Southwest Outer Loop Project Field Office announced that traffic on the normally crowded I-695 would be squeezed onto a single lane to pave the ramp to MD 144/Frederick Road. Since this section near the national headquarters of the Social Security Administration and other federal agencies is normally heavily trafficked, MDOT SHA team members would be excused for biting their nails. The ramp has been closed since summer 2019 as part of a \$68 million project to widen I-695 Southwest Outer Loop between south of US 40 (Baltimore National Pike) and MD 144. The project is expected to be complete by late fall 2021.

The work began on a Friday night, as crews worked non-stop to finish by Monday, October 19, in time for the weekday morning commute. MDOT SHA alerted drivers to take alternate routes during the critical period.

As construction progressed, Office of Transportation Mobility and Operations (OTMO) staff calmly reported the slowdown in traffic. The time to drive I-695 from Exit 17 MD 122 Security Blvd to Exit 11 I-95 (7.1 miles) – slowed from 8 minutes on Saturday morning to 31 minutes by mid-afternoon. The news was better along nearby I-70, where no delays were reported. As day became night, queues shortened so that by 11:30 p.m. Saturday, OTMO confidently reported that there were no delays anywhere in the system.

Sunday brought a breath of fresh air. Travel time on that key stretch of I-695 was never slower than 12 minutes. By 10:30 a.m., all lanes reopened – nearly a day ahead of schedule – and CHART units guiding traffic were sent back to their normal stations.

D4 District Engineer Wendy Wolcott sent an email thanking OTMO, CHART, D4 construction and Maintenance for their careful coordination.

MDOT Secretary Greg Slater wrote, "Big thank you from me to the whole team! Got the work done, traffic was managed appropriately, and communications was flowing. Great teamwork!" "Also," said Scott Yinger, "I much appreciate the efficiency of the contractors to complete the project sooner than expected and before game time!" adding, "Go Ravens!"



On the weekend of October 17 SHA and its contractor shifted traffic lanes on I-695 south from the left side of the roadway to the right side and re-opened the ramp from the Baltimore Beltway Outer Loop to Frederick Road. The project is expected to conclude in fall 2021.

Pre-Holiday Annual Traffic Incident Management Event Goes Virtual

While this year's Traffic Incident Management (TIM) event looks different than in years past, the focus remains the same – providing an opportunity for MDOT SHA, our sister TBUs, and our emergency responder partners to come together during National Traffic Incident Response Awareness Week (NTIRAW) and share coordinated information on traffic incident management before the busy holiday travel season.

Instead of an MDOT-led, on-site training day that typically includes a press conference, the Baltimore Metropolitan Council, mindful of COVID-19, will host a Baltimore regional virtual traffic incident management conference – TIM Training Never Stops – on Tuesday, November 10, from 1-3:15 p.m.

Open to first responders, conference presenters include MDOT SHA's Office of Transportation Mobility and Operations Acting Director Scott Yinger and CHART Training Manager Patrick Rooney.

"Unlike in many other professions where people can work remotely because of COVID-19, it's impossible for responders to major crashes and other traffic incidents to work in a virtual world," said Scott Yinger. "However, we are able to hold a virtual conference where we can discuss the importance good traffic incident management practices have on saving the lives of responders and others who remain with their 'boots on the ground.' By institutionalizing nationally recognized best practices into each of our own disciplines' standard-operating procedures and by working in concert, we can better protect our protectors."

Learn more or register for the event, by [CLICKING HERE](#).

Motorists also have a role in keeping first responders safe. The Office of Communications has secured a NTIRAW proclamation from the Governor's Office and is utilizing social media and the news media to remind motorists to slow down and move over when approaching incidents along our roadways. In-house videos featuring several of our courageous and dedicated CHART team members are currently running on MDOT SHA's social media pages, including one with [Devin Naylor](#) sharing one of the many harrowing experiences he's faced as a first responder.

We can all do our part by continuing to lead by example and urging our family members, friends and social media contacts to slow down, move over and stay alert when approaching traffic incident scenes.

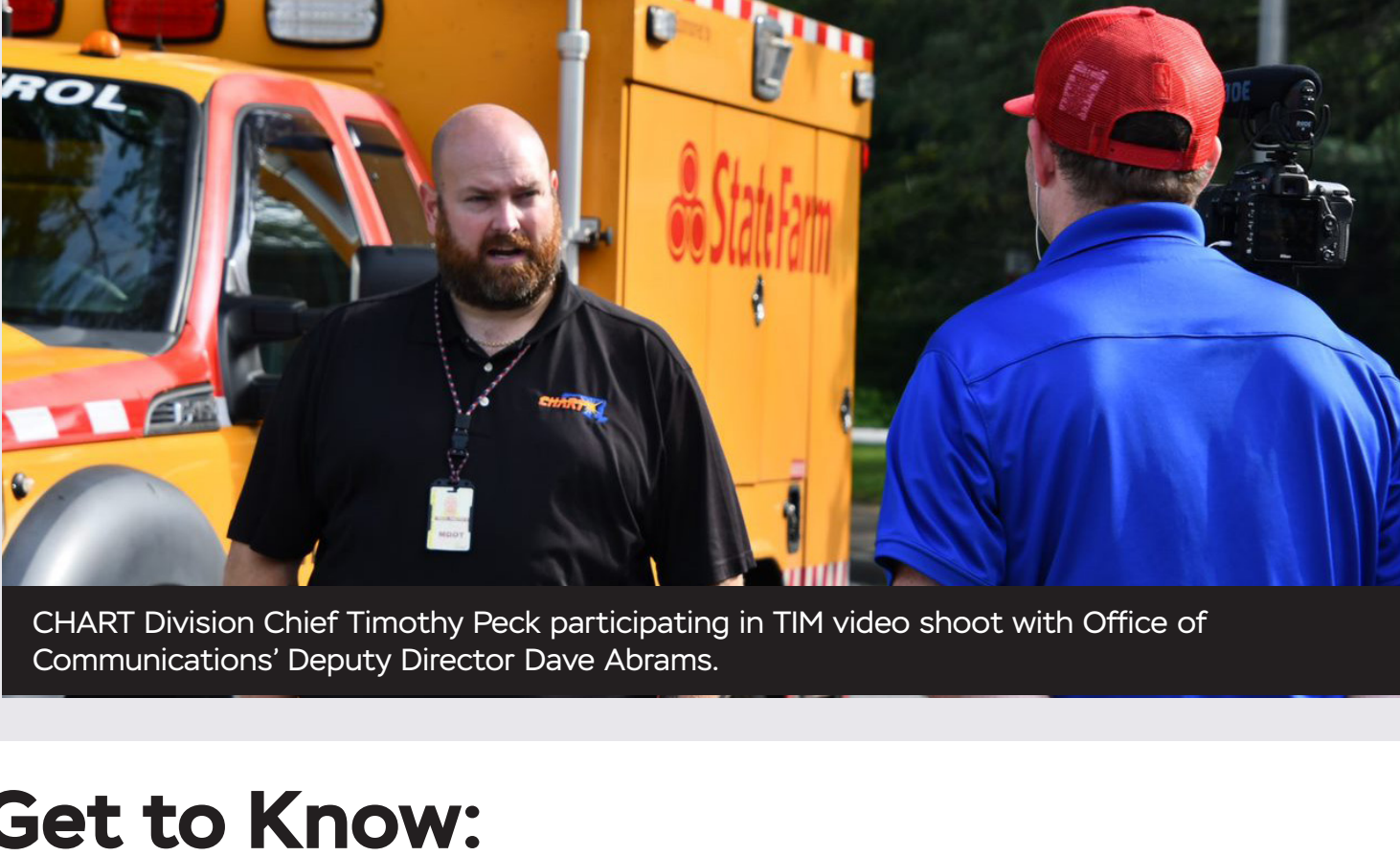


CHART Division Chief Timothy Peck participating in TIM video shoot with Office of Communications' Deputy Director Dave Abrams.

Get to Know: Our Expert Who Fights Conflict

Let's say your project team is in a meeting with the gas utility, a community spokesperson, our maintenance of traffic department, and the construction company. They're all arguing their own needs. You're the facilitator. How do you focus them on the shared vision and goals? Carly Levine is there to help you.

"In every project there are many stakeholders," she explains. "My job is to make sure they're all collaborating."

Just before the COVID budget freeze hit, in May, Carly joined the Office of Construction as a Statewide Partnering Coordinator. An expert in building functional teams, she's at MDOT SHA to ensure that the principles of teamwork are applied on construction projects and internally between departments and divisions.

Here's her credo: "To me," she says, "a team is a group of people coming together to achieve a common goal, and partnering is the act of working together. Successful, high-functioning teams can resolve conflict through collaborative problem solving, open and honest communication, coordination and cooperation. Team members have cross-functional understanding of the roles and responsibilities within the team, holding themselves and others accountable, and maintaining mutual respect and constructive working relationships."

You can reach out to her if you need help.

"I encourage people to contact me before there's a problem, to be proactive," she says. "I can offer you lots of tools and strategies."

In this age of COVID, she can also get you past the doldrums of virtual meetings that just aren't moving your project forward.

The shift to a remote workforce fundamentally changed how teams interact and communicate. "The change is magnified during virtual meetings," she says. "I've been working with a wonderful group of people to create resources, tools, and strategies for how to facilitate a more effective meeting. Whether you want to learn more about running effective meetings, collaborative problem solving, positive conflict resolution, or leadership principles, I'm your go-to."

A common difficulty, she says, is when a meeting gets derailed because someone goes off topic. She can offer you tips to get past that struggle and get your meetings back on track.

Carly comes to her expertise through a background in athletics. For more than 20 years, Carly pursued field hockey as a player, a teammate, a coach, a businesswoman, and an advocate. She held collegiate coaching positions at NCAA Division 1, 2, and 3 levels while organizing some of the best-known, large scale recruiting and developmental camps around the country.

Now, Carly is traveling across the State to meet engineers and staff, observe, and offer solutions. Need assistance organizing an upcoming project or getting past a stalled one? Contact Carly Levine at clevine@mdot.maryland.gov.

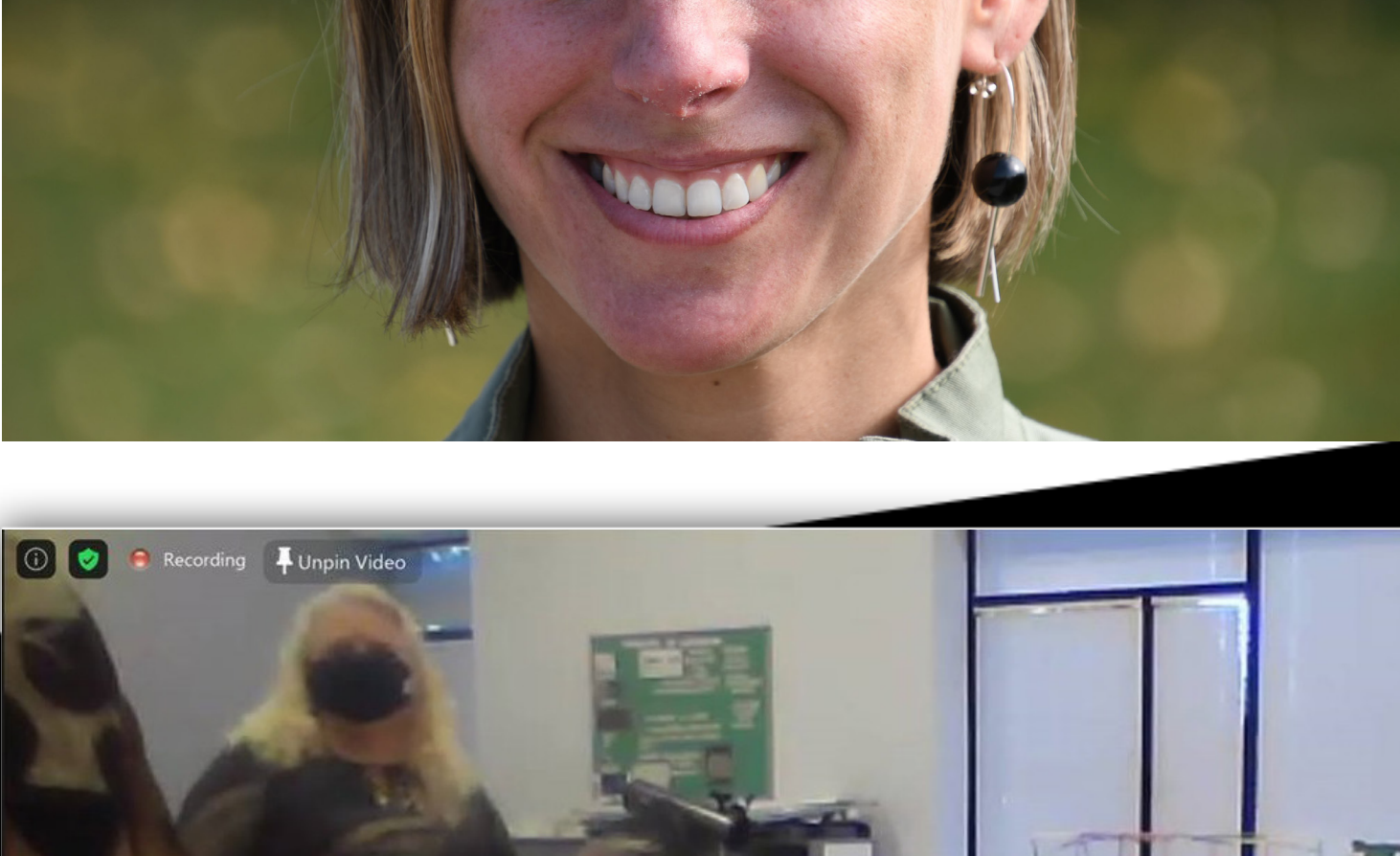


Photo of the Month:

Virtuality Rocks: AASHTO trainer Julia Smith gave a virtual class to teachers and school officials at Chesapeake Math and IT Elementary School as part of the RIDES program. MDOT SHA sponsors the program in Maryland to interest grade school children in highway engineering.