MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
STATE HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION

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RESEARCH SUMMARY

IMPROVING INTERNAL COMMUNICATION WITH SHA EMPLOYEES

WHAT WAS THE NEED?

Effective internal communication is essential to the Maryland Department of Transportation State Highway Administration's ability to coordinate work, share timely information, support operational performance, and maintain organizational alignment across offices, districts, and maintenance shops. SHA employees work in diverse environments and have different levels of access to email, computers, mobile devices, and other communication tools. Therefore, a comprehensive assessment was needed to understand how SHA employees receive, interpret, share, and act on internal information across field and office-based work settings.

WHAT WAS THE GOAL?

The goal of this project was to assess SHA's internal communication practices and develop evidence-based recommendations to improve communication effectiveness for field and office-based employees.

WHAT DID THE RESEARCH TEAM DO?

The research team reviewed prior research, current SHA communication practices, and internal communication practices used by other transportation agencies. The team also conducted interviews and administered structured surveys to non-supervisory field employees, field supervisors, office-based employees, and communication staff. Survey results, interview findings, and open-ended comments were analyzed to identify major communication challenges and improvement strategies.

WHAT WAS THE OUTCOME?

The project found that SHA's internal communication is strongly shaped by employees' work settings, roles, and access to communication tools. Communication was strongest when it occurred close to employees' local work settings, particularly through supervisors, peers, shops, and local

OCTOBER 2026

REPORT NUMBER:
MD-25-SHA/UM/7-13

START DATE:

MAY 2025

COMPLETION DATE:

JUNE 2026

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units. Communication was less favorable for broader agencywide and top-level leadership messages, especially when employees did not see clear follow-up, local relevance, or opportunities for direct engagement.

The findings also identified distinct challenges for field and office-based employees. Field employees faced barriers related to limited digital access, inconsistent on-site communication tools, and reliance on informal relay through supervisors, coworkers, and shop-based office staff. Office-based employees reported email overload, duplicate messages, unclear action items, and coordination challenges across offices, districts, and units.

The report recommends strengthening leadership visibility and feedback follow-through, improving message targeting and role relevance, upgrading field-accessible communication infrastructure, clarifying field relay responsibilities, reducing unnecessary email burden, improving shared information management, and strengthening cross-office coordination through clearer responsibility, routing, and confirmation practices.

HOW WILL MDOT SHA USE THE RESULTS?

The Office of Communications (OC) will present the findings to SHA senior leadership and encourage district leaders to adopt practices that address the concerns of district workers, particularly field workers, and supervisors. OC will encourage senior leaders to address the concerns of office workers by reducing the volume of emails and clarifying action items in their messages. OC will develop action items for its staff and prioritize their implementation.

LEARN MORE

To view the complete report, click here.

For more information on research at MDOT SHA, please visit our website*.*
