

Intelligent Transportation Society of America Weekly Briefing

A timely report on news and activities intended exclusively for ITS America members.

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FUNDING + AWARENESS = SUCCESS

By

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At our INTI workshop in Houston in February, I had an opportunity to meet the folks who run Houston TranStar and to see first-hand the technology solutions they use to overcome transportation challenges in the area.

TranStar is addressing difficult mobility and safety problems every day and providing answers to improve transportation. However, despite the clear benefits of TranStar, the organization struggles to maintain adequate funding to operate effectively. Houston TranStar is a partnership of the transportation and emergency management agencies in the Houston area, including the Texas Department of Transportation, the Metropolitan Transit Authority, the City of Houston and Harris County. TranStar allows these agencies to coordinate their technology activities in managing their transportation systems. Through TranStar, the region is able to maximize the use of high occupancy vehicle lanes, to effectively manage freeway traffic systems, to better coordinate signals, to optimize METRO bus and police dispatch, and to be prepared for and respond to emergencies.

Through TranStar, the public and private sector come together to improve the distribution of travel information, warn about accidents, alert drivers to dangerous flood and weather situations, and manage construction zones.

Initial construction costs totaled less than \$14 million when TranStar opened its operation in 1996. Over the next three years, the system returned benefits to Houston area travelers of more than \$95 million, such as improved response to incidents, shorter travel times, and lower data collection costs.

By all accounts, TranStar is a huge success and clearly a good investment of transportation dollars. So why must the agency work so hard to secure the resources it needs to continue to provide benefit? Two intertwined reasons: funding and awareness.

Most of us would agree that a robust, well-funded ITS program at the federal level would give state and local governments the resources they need to dedicate funds to the construction and operation of projects like TranStar. Funding is critical to accelerating the deployment of ITS solutions to a larger portion of our transportation network and population.

Give transportation professionals the resources and tools, and partnerships like TranStar will emerge and thrive in every metropolitan area, in every rural region, on every transportation system and benefit every one of us. With greater funding will also come greater awareness, at the policy and legislative level and with users of the system, whether rail or road, passenger or freight. And with greater awareness will come customer demand for state-of-the-art ITS systems. **-end-**