

Revised November 1, 2010

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION AND DEVELOPMENT

SECRETARY'S POLICY AND PROCEDURE MEMORANDUM (PPM) NO. 6

SUBJECT: Communications with the Media and Public Records Requests

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 14, 1995

INSTRUCTIONS: This memorandum supersedes all other memoranda and manuals.

PURPOSE. Effective communications with the media are critical to the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development's (DOTD's) ability to fulfill its mission and promote continued public support of our work. The purpose of this policy is to provide employees of the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development with guidance on handling issues of public interest and on responding to media requests.

- A. The Secretary, Communications Director and Public Information Officers (PIO) are primary spokespersons for DOTD. The Secretary and/or Communications Director may authorize additional individuals to speak for the Department in matters of policy, crisis, and any other wide-ranging topics considered sensitive, controversial, or of significant impact or scope including the Deputy Secretary, Chief Engineer, Assistant Secretaries, Undersecretary, General Counsel, and Legislative Liaison Officer. All media calls should be directed to the public affairs office to coordinate an appropriate response with the exception outlined in (C).
- B. In matters of day-to-day business concerning each Office's operations, the Communications Director or Public Affairs Office may authorize division chiefs, section heads, program or project managers, or other staff at managerial levels to provide factual and timely information on their specific area of expertise, operations, plans, projects, procedures, written/established policies, etc., to the media.
- C. District Administrators are hereby authorized to respond to media requests for information pertaining to their respective operations, plan, projects, procedures, written/established policies, etc. In Districts with a dedicated PIO, the PIO will act as the primary point of contact and serve as spokesperson for the media. The PIO may designate appropriate spokespeople in collaboration with the DA and/or Executive Director of Toll Facilities. Outside the previous exception, DAs may authorize spokespersons to respond to media inquiries regarding an employee's respective area of jurisdiction. For example, a District Project Engineer may be the spokesperson for his/her respective project assignment; however, media requests related to overall policy, lawsuits, controversial issues, legislative matters, budget and finance issues, and state executive decisions should be directed to the Public Affairs Office.
- D. For ready reference, each Section Head and District Administrator shall maintain and make available to employees who answer telephones or otherwise "need to know", a current list of persons authorized to address media inquiries and any restrictions or limits placed on the

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authorization. Current lists of authorized persons described in (b) and (c) above shall also be routinely provided to the Public Affairs Office (PAO.)

- E. District Administrators and Section Heads are also responsible for ensuring that all employees under their respective jurisdictions clearly understand that media inquiries may only be handled by authorized persons. In the absence of a specific authorization to interact with the media, employees must promptly refer requests to the appropriate, authorized person.
- F. The Public Affairs Office should be notified if any employees provide quotes to the media and all details related to the interview. G. The Public Affairs Office (PAO) serves as the media's centralized "point of contact" for DOTD. To ensure that the PAO is knowledgeable of media requests/activities, each Section Head and District Administrator shall notify the PAO whenever a member of the media requests information about agency policy, a controversial matter, or a potential "news problem," providing highlights of the media contact, such as who requested the information, the media organization with whom the reporter is employed, telephone number, reporter's deadline, and what information was requested. Each Section Head/District Administrator shall also notify the PAO of any upcoming meetings, programs, media events, awards, project completions, etc., that would positively portray our agency and its accomplishments.
- H. With the exception of routine news releases related to road closures, projects or events of general public interest, the PAO and designees of the DA's Office will issue all media advisories, press releases and news articles.
- I. All public records requests shall be directed to the Office of the DOTD's General Counsel for handling. Employees shall refrain from discussing with the media and/or any non-DOTD employee, any matters pending or under litigation, personnel issues, or questions involving ethics without first obtaining legal advice from the Office of the DOTD's General Counsel. This policy however shall not deprive any employee of his/her right to contact the Department of Civil Service or legal counsel of the employee's choosing concerning any right or claim of the employee.

Violations of this policy will be handled in accordance with DOTD policies on Employee Conduct (PPM#29) and Discipline (PPM#26).



Sherri LeBas, P.E.
Secretary