

Department of Transportation's Docket Management System

Christine S. Meers
Systems Program Manager
Department of Transportation's
400 7th St., S.W.
Washington, DC 20590
email: christine.meers@tasc.dot.gov
<http://dms.dot.gov>

DOT is the first—and only—major Federal Agency to create an Internet-accessible system for the review and submission of documents to *all* of the Department's rulemaking and adjudicatory dockets. (A docket is a public record and contains all the information the agency uses to establish rules or make adjudicatory decisions, such as rulemaking and adjudicatory orders.) DOT is, by some measures, the largest Federal rulemaking agency. Its DMS allows the public to submit comments and recommendations to DOT instantly and easily via the Internet, to view the comments others have submitted, and to respond to those comments. Over 1.2 million pages of docketed material are currently available on-line. In fiscal year 2000, we had over 2 million hits on the website. As an example of increased public participation in our rulemaking process, last year more than 309,000 people used DMS. This number is a dramatic increase from the 3,000 annual visits to the paper dockets, clearly showing improved public accessibility. Also, there has been an increase of greater than 25 percent in the number of comments filed since electronic filing was introduced. We believe this is at least partly due to the easy, worldwide access; over 30 percent of our comments are now being submitted electronically, including hundreds from personnel aboard ships on a recent maritime proposal.

Improved public access revolutionizes the way individuals around the globe participate in the development of public policy. Citizens can electronically access DOT regulatory and adjudicatory materials from the convenience of their desktop as public policy is being developed, and respond by electronic submission to government proposals and to comments made by other citizens or groups. DMS has dramatically reshaped transportation public policy debates, significantly increased the accessibility of public policy information to the citizenry, and provided interested parties with an easy way to actively engage in the regulatory process without leaving their home or office. DMS truly brings the government to the people, can be used to provide the public with easy access to proceedings from any DOT agency, and has enormous potential for increasing public involvement in overall policy development. DOT has established service standards to make items available on the internet within 8 business hours of receipt. Today we achieve this goal more than 93 percent of the time.

Others recognize the merits of DMS. In 1999, *Government Executive* magazine and the General Services Administration honored DMS as an "IT Pioneer" by giving the system a 1999 Government Technology Leadership Award for online government. In addition, Senator Lieberman and the Government Accounting Office (GAO) lauded the system. GAO, in a February, 2001 report on technology-based regulatory innovations, found that DOT's DMS was "a model that could be followed by other agencies. One representative suggested that OMB implement a DOT-type docket system itself and become the model or standard system that other agencies could emulate." In July 2000, Senator Lieberman praised DOT for conducting rulemakings on the Internet and stated: "Every other regulatory agency should study the DOT

system.” Other agencies such as the Department of Labor, National Transportation Safety Board, and Health and Human Services have requested our help in establishing similar systems.

Through DMS, DOT has reduced internal administrative costs by \$1.3 million annually, by drastically reducing the amount of space needed to store paper files and the number of staff needed to process docketed material. DMS also saves the government and the public time and money spent to travel to the docket facility, to review files, to copy dockets, and to transmit or pick-up documents. Best of all, however, is the tremendous opportunity DMS represents for all public agencies to increase and improve public participation in government decision-making processes. Being on the internet has increased our accessibility. For example, in 1998, DOT published 137 rules and received 4,341 comments. In 2000, DOT published 99 rules and received 62,944 comments-and increase of over 1500 percent.

DOT began converting to electronic dockets in 1995 and placed those dockets on the Internet in 1998. Before DMS, anyone who wanted to view DOT docketed material had to journey to one or more of the twelve different DOT offices located in Washington and manually search through paper files or ask for copies of those files. Through DMS, DOT consolidated dockets from its operating administrations and created one electronic docket system. From the convenience of their desktops, the public can use DMS to determine what rulemaking or adjudicatory actions DOT is proposing; view or download the background material and information DOT is relying upon; and electronically search across all DOT dockets simultaneously. The system also provides other valuable information not readily available in paper files, such as a “running” list of rulemakings open for public comment.

Transportation affects everyone, and all benefit from better access to the government. DOT directly regulates over 8 million people and over 500,000 companies. DMS provides these customers with easy and convenient access, while saving them time and money. Better public access means better participatory democracy and more effective public policy decisions.