Transportation for the Nation

Building a National Road Centerline File

National States Geographic Information Council
2105 Laurel Bush Road
Bel Air, Maryland 21015
http://www.nsgic.org
443.640.1075

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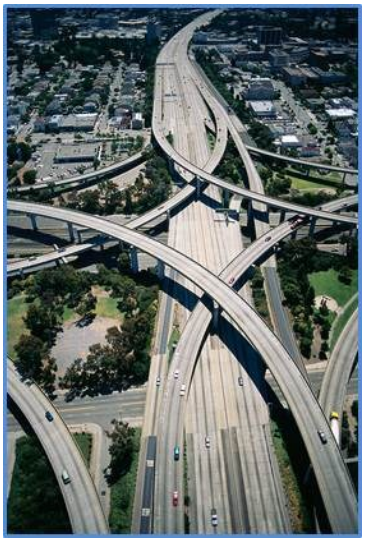
find this position paper at http://nsgic.org

Vision

The Transportation for the Nation (TFTN) dataset includes consistent, current, high quality road centerline data for the entire country.

Background

TFTN will ultimately encompass data sets covering multiple modes of transportation. However, the initial focus is on producing a road centerline data set that includes all types of roads, both public and private. Digital street networks (road centerline data) are one of the most widely used geospatial information products in today's society. They support numerous critical applications, including E-911 dispatching, mail and parcel delivery, response and relief efforts during major disasters, online sales tax collection, mapping, geocoding, intelligent transportation systems, automated vehicle routing and vehicle location systems.



Nationwide programs that collect and assimilate geospatial transportation data from local, state, regional and federal sources are often done for a single purpose, rather than for multi-purpose use. Commercial data providers also buy or recreate the data that is produced by government agencies. In the absence of an organized national program, and without incentives to cooperate, each level of government duplicates effort by creating these data to meet only their own specific business needs. This practice leads to wasted tax dollars and inefficient government. The true business value of shared geospatial transportation data is only beginning to be realized.

Transportation for the Nation (TFTN) was originally put forth in a 2008 “Issues Brief” from the National States Geographic Information Council (NSGIC). In that brief, NSGIC noted the fundamental importance of transportation data, which is universally utilized by geospatial practitioners, and the fact that there are at least three overlapping federal efforts that create nationwide transportation data sets. These inefficiencies cost taxpayers millions of dollars. Under the Office of Management and Budget's Circular A-16, the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) was designated as the framework “theme leader” for transportation data sets. USDOT developed a Strategic Plan as it investigated whether a TFTN program could help the agency meet its own internal business needs, fulfill its Circular A-16 responsibilities and help the country more efficiently provide transportation data that is widely demanded.

With the proper focus on coordination and collaboration, TFTN will generate nationwide transportation data that meets both the USDOT's internal business needs and the broader requirements of other stakeholders across the country.

Outcome

Beginning in 2014, each state’s Highway Performance Monitoring System (HPMS) reports will include centerline data for all roads within the state.

Next Steps

Additional effort will be required to integrate this data across state lines and the country, perhaps performed by the private sector or USDOT/FHWA as a national compilation service. NSGIC believes that USDOT should be funded to develop more detailed business planning and proof-of-concept prototyping. After concurrence from the stakeholder community, USDOT should be funded to produce and publicly distribute TFTN to help eliminate government waste.