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## Message from the President

Winter is still upon us, but some signs of spring are beginning to crop up in the region. Mountains of road salt have become hills, the number of storms has started to decrease (but not the volume of snow in the mountain passes) and snow removal budgets have melted away with alarming speed. We'll soon see true spring pop-up as the pot-holes and orange barrels slowly emerge from their icy hibernation. In most of the West, we have struggled through one of the harshest winters in more than a decade and now it is time to begin to switch gears a bit as winter travel and maintenance programs transition into spring projects. What does this mean for us? It must be a call for traveler information to help our customers navigate the myriad challenges of late winter and early spring.



Several of our member states have made changes, improvements and upgrades to their 511 systems this year. The reports in this newsletter will help you make the determination whether these were successful. We have reports on traveler information systems in four states – Idaho, Montana, New Mexico and Wyoming. Where possible we've tried to include both input from the states and feedback from their customers.

Have you visited the Chapter website recently? New information is being added every week. If you would like to post an RFP, a job announcement or training opportunity simply e-mail [web@itsrm.org](mailto:web@itsrm.org). Items are usually posted within 24 hours.

Remember, the mission of the Rocky Mountain Chapter is to “develop partners for the effective deployment of ITS across all surface transportation modes, thus providing a viable and sustainable system for the Rocky Mountain Region that will benefit all users.” Help us meet that mission by becoming involved in the chapter.

You can phone or email any comments, suggestions and opportunities to me at [rmhodes@rmhodes.com](mailto:rmhodes@rmhodes.com) or to our admin staff at [admin@itsrm.org](mailto:admin@itsrm.org).

**Richard Hodges**  
President, ITS Rocky Mountain Chapter  
President, Hodges Transportation Consulting



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## Submit an Article...

You can submit an article for publication in the ITS Rocky Mountain Newsletter! Articles must be no more than three pages in length and must contain contact information for the author. Graphics and photos are welcome!

**2008** submission deadlines are as follows:

*April/May/June 2008* - April 25, 2008

*July/August/September 2008* - July 25, 2008

*October/November/December 2008* - October 31, 2008

## 6th Annual Spring Transportation Symposium - Denver, Colorado

The ITE Colorado/Wyoming Section and the WTS Colorado Chapter are proud to present the 6th Annual Spring Transportation Symposium in conjunction with ITS Rocky Mountain. This event brings together the region's transportation planners, engineers, and decision makers to share information and lessons from innovative and successful transportation projects. The meeting will be held Friday, April 4, 2008 at the Marriott Denver South at Park Meadows. For program information download the program flyer by visiting <http://www.itsrm.org/downloads/2008%20Symposium%20Flyer.pdf>.

THE 6<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL  
**Spring Transportation Symposium**

The ITE Colorado/Wyoming Section and the WTS Colorado Chapter are proud to present the 6th Annual Spring Transportation Symposium in conjunction with ITS Rocky Mountain. This event brings together the region's transportation planners, engineers, and decision makers to share information and lessons from innovative and successful transportation projects.

WHERE: **Marriott Denver South at Park Meadows**  
10345 Park Meadows Drive • Littleton

WHEN: **Friday, April 4, 2008**

Register at the WTS Colorado website ([www.wtscolorado.org](http://www.wtscolorado.org)) before 5:00 p.m. Monday, March 31, 2008

★Full Symposium - \$55.00 ★Luncheon only - \$30.00 ★Full-Time Students - FREE! (Registration and Student ID required)  
If you cannot attend the luncheon you must cancel your reservation three (3) days prior to the symposium or pay the full price.  
For registration questions contact Jamie Archambeau at 303-221-7275 or [JLARCHAMBEAU@PBSJ.COM](mailto:JLARCHAMBEAU@PBSJ.COM).

# Busy Snow Season Impacts Member States



For those of us living in the West, this winter brought some pleasant - and not so pleasant - surprises. Numerous storms passed through our region transforming the landscapes into winter wonderlands, but also turning our roadways into sometimes impassable stretches of pavement.

It seems that each state had its ups and downs, with the individuals at the State Departments of Transportation often on the receiving end of both thanks and criticism. At times congratulated for keeping a road open and other times disparaged for closing the highway, it appears they were often in a “darned if you do, and darned if you don’t” conundrum.

So while you were busy trying to dig out, take comfort that those around you were also doing their best to stay ahead of the storms. With those thoughts in mind, we have attempted to touch on the winter - and more specifically - 511 activities in each of our 6 member states of Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Utah, Colorado and New Mexico. What follows can best be described as the good, the okay, and the “we need to do better” experiences of the Rocky Mountain region. ■

## Winter Challenges Montana and Idaho



Snow and wind wreaked havoc across much of Western Montana this winter and this was no more apparent than along the Idaho/Montana border. Heavy snow fall and unstable snow layers contributed to several avalanches on Highway 12 over Lolo Pass. The first slides occurred on January 31st, sweeping one truck loaded with lumber into the Lochsa River and stranding several other trucks between slides. Additional slides over the next few days kept the road crews - particularly those on the Idaho side of the border - busy clearing snow. The pass did not reopen until February 15th.



So how did the traveling public deal with these closures? Very well it appears! Thanks in part to Montana’s 511 system, information was quickly and accurately distributed. And it wasn’t just individuals trying to plan a trip that received information through the state’s system, radio stations in Missoula - the nearest Montana city to the slide area - kept listeners updated on closures by calling the 511 system and visiting Montana’s 511 Lolo Pass web cam and reporting what they learned. It seems as if everyone has learned that the best, and most reliable information about roads in Montana, can be found on the state’s 511 system. ■



As reported by the **Montana Department of Transportation** in *Newsline*.

HELENA - As winter weather settled over Montana, motorists were encouraged to check the MDT Road Report before they traveled. By simply dialing 511 or going online to [www.mdt511.com](http://www.mdt511.com), motorists could learn about road conditions for a region or a specific route.

MDT’s road report covers much of the 24,500 lane miles MDT maintains, relaying timely information on travel advisories, driving conditions, weather forecasts, road construction, road closures, and major delays. Winter travel information is updated every 30 minutes or as major changes occur.

Real-time roadway and pass conditions are also available on the 511 website from MDT’s 27 web cameras. Although the primary purpose of the cameras is to aid maintenance crews, MDT also makes them available to the public for viewing road conditions. During severe winter weather, the cameras are often the most visited pages on MDT’s website.

# Idaho Introduces Improved 511 Website



Recent improvements to Idaho's 511 Traveler Services Web site will help motorists become better informed about winter conditions on highways and make better travel decisions. Visitors to the Web site – [511.idaho.gov](http://511.idaho.gov) – will find two options. They can stay on the low-bandwidth site that looks similar to what was available last winter and may be best for users who access the Web through dial-up connections. Or a high bandwidth version is available now for high speed Internet users. The low-bandwidth site features a larger map, an event list in geographic order for each route below the map and a print option to provide an event list for selected routes. As before, routes on the Winter Driving page map are color-coded based on driving conditions – difficult, good and fair. When selecting the All Advisories tab, users can view all road closures, blockages, crashes and other events affecting interstates, U.S. routes and state highways.

The new high-bandwidth version can be selected from the top menu bar. It works best on a high speed Internet connection and is best viewed at a resolution of 1024 X 768. It has been developed for use on Microsoft Internet Explorer version 7 but performs well using other Internet browser applications. The high-bandwidth site includes a more interactive map based on Google Map technology. Users can select from a detailed list of features located in the menu bar on the left of the map including road closures, crashes, road conditions based on color-coded segments and camera images.



The winter pictures at right were all taken within the Rocky Mountain Region. Can you tell which might belong to Utah, New Mexico, Montana or Colorado? Answer on page 8.



by jared at Flickr.com



by dchousegrooves at Flickr.com



by sagedesigns at Flickr.com



by jakesmome at Flickr.com

# Wyoming: 511 Travel Information Service Increases Customer Satisfaction?



This article originally appeared on the  
Wyoming Department of Transportation's  
Website

An effort undertaken last summer to improve WYDOT's 511 Travel Information telephone service is paying benefits this winter, based on recent customer feedback.

With much of Wyoming experiencing storm after storm over the past two months, it's not surprising that demand on the 511 system has increased substantially. Yet at the same time, the number of complaints about the system is significantly down.

"Even if you don't consider the increased volume of 511 calls, compared to the amount of complaints received, the number of dissatisfied users has dropped tenfold," said WYDOT's Vince Garcia, who oversees the system for WYDOT. "We're continuing to work on enhancements to the system, but are confident we're providing a much improved service to travelers," Garcia added. The initial version of 511 phone service went live during the fall of 2006, replacing the previous travel reporting system known as the Wyoming Road Report. Although surveys indicated a majority of the public were at least somewhat satisfied with the new 511 system, they also indicated that specific changes were needed.

Last summer, WYDOT revamped 511 to address common complaints, such as the system was too repetitive, that it couldn't understand user requests and it took too long to hear reports. The system also had a tendency to drop calls during busy periods.

The voice recognition function, which allowed callers to speak their responses when prompted by the system, was the biggest problem last year. The system often couldn't distinguish between the caller's voice and any background noise, resulting in confusion and considerable customer dissatisfaction.

Now, touch-tone input is the default method for using the 511 service, which was restored in late September 2007. Voice response remains as an option, but callers must choose that option at the beginning of the call.

Garcia said the new 511 system has been tested often since the beginning of December, when southern Wyoming in particular began experiencing much colder, snowier and windier weather than normal. From Dec. 1 through Feb. 10, the system fielded nearly 933,000 calls. The peak call volume day so far this winter was Feb. 8, when more than 68,000 calls were made to 511.

"Up to this point, we've been very pleased with the performance of the revamped service," Garcia said. "Our statistics show that the system takes more than 20 calls per minute on average, night and day, and during periods of peak demand, it's handled in excess of 250 calls simultaneously, without busy signals or dropped calls."

Garcia said callers in some areas might still encounter a busy signal at times, but that problem is due to limitations of phone systems in some of the state's more rural areas.

WYDOT worked with Meridian Environmental Technology, a firm based in Grand Forks, N.D., to revamp the 511 system. Meridian provides similar travel information services to several other states, including Montana, South Dakota and Nebraska.

The telephone component of the 511 services provides:

- Road closure and other current advisories;
- Pavement conditions (dry, wet, slick, etc.);
- Current weather conditions;
- Short-term weather forecasts; and

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- Seasonal road closures.

The weather forecasts, provided to WYDOT by Meridian, include predicted changes in temperatures, wind speed and direction, and visibility for the upcoming six hours.

Callers can choose the route for which they wish to hear conditions. After selecting the route, they can then hear a condition report for the entire route, or for only a portion of the route. Callers can also choose to hear the report such that it corresponds with their direction of travel. ■

On January 30th the Casper Star-Tribune reported that the Wyoming Department of Transportation crews broke through large and recurring snowdrifts to reopen Interstate 80 near Rawlins.

Maintenance crews brought in extra help in anticipation of the storm with crews from Riverton, Lander and Thermopolis helping out. During the peak of the storm, two plows worked all day and night west of Rawlins where the worst problems were.

“We mustered all the help we could possible get during the entire storm,” said WYDOT’s District 1 Maintenance Engineer Tim McGary.

So how did the updated 511 system fare during the incident? Was the traveling public informed of the closures? Yes and no. After reviewing over 30 follow-up postings to the original Casper Star-Tribune, it appears that the traveling public, while knowledgeable and accepting of the closure directly around Rawlins, was less thrilled and informed about the closure between Laramie and Cheyenne.

This particular stretch of road remained clear and was open to local traffic throughout the 40 hours, but this information could only be obtained by calling the Highway Patrol. It was not made available to the traveling public via the 511 system.

WYDOT has indicated that during winter storms which result in road closures, WYDOT will sometimes allow - on a case-by-case basis - local traffic on closed sections of roadway. Whether local traffic is allowed varies in accordance with each storm; in some events, no traffic of any type is allowed.

Traditionally, WYDOT has not publicized that local traffic is being allowed on closed roads. One reason is there may be no personnel available to post at the road closure gate to authorize those travelers wanting to pass the gate. It is understood by many experienced local travelers that they may call the Highway Patrol dispatch center to obtain permission to drive on the closed road.

WYDOT is continuing to look at ways to improve the process of authorizing local traffic during road closures, with one possibility being the credentialing of individuals prior to beginning of the cold weather season. Another discussion point is how future ITS deployments and the institution of an integrated rural Transportation Management Center could help improve processes.

# New Mexico Improves Road Advisory Hotline?

This article originally appeared in the Winter issue of New Mexico Department of Transportation's *Que Pasa?* Newsletter

State Transportation Secretary Rhonda Faught announced implementation of an improved road advisory hotline to report driving conditions and road information this winter beginning on December 17th.

The new system will incorporate information from the Department's road advisory website - [www.nmroads.com](http://www.nmroads.com) - into the phone messages, and uses a test-to-voice speech engine.

"This new system was implemented at the right time," said Transportation Secretary Rhonda Faught. "With another round of holiday travel quickly approaching and winter weather conditions affecting our state's roadways, the Department wants to make sure the traveling public is able to get quick and accurate information at their fingertips."

"This system is a vast improvement over our existing platform and will be an effective tool for disseminating information about driving conditions to the public," Secretary Faught said. "We encourage the public to use it when making their travel plans."

It will allow the public to choose options from a menu to retrieve information about specific roadways and allow users to transfer to hotlines for surrounding states. For example, callers can get information about interstates by pressing one; major roadways in the northwest portion of the state by pressing two; major roadways in the southwest portion of the state by pressing three; major roadways in the southeast portion of the state by pressing four; major roadways in the northeast portion of the state by pressing five and transferring to a surrounding state such as Arizona, Colorado, Texas and Oklahoma by pressing eight.

This capability allows users to target and retrieve specific road information without having to listen to road information and driving conditions about other highways that may not be relevant to their needs. ■

*The New Mexico Department of Transportation's updated traveler information system was not met with satisfaction by everyone, however. The following editorial is from the Mountain View Telegraph, Thursday, February 14, 2008.*

The state Department of Transportation's second-generation Website, [nmroads.com](http://nmroads.com), is an improvement over the first. Travelers should consult it as they plan trips, then pull it up just before leaving. But for everybody without an Internet connection in the car— in other words, for just about everybody— its utility ends once you hit the road.

Just about everybody with a cell phone— in other words, just about everybody— does have a mobile communications link. Back in 2001, state officials seemed to realize that, joining a consortium of six other states to develop a 511 telephone service to provide road-condition updates on the go. Better yet, it would be about as seamless crossing over state lines as the highway blacktop.

Since then, more than 30 states including all those west of the Mississippi and north of New Mexico have adopted the system. Road hot lines that have converted from 800 numbers to the three-digit 511 have seen call volume rise by 300 percent to 500 percent, while users' on-time performance has improved from 5 percent to 16 percent.

But after years of effort and \$850,000, New Mexico is not part of that success story.

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Transportation officials decided in September to stick with the less-expensive, less-capable 800 number and the Web site the department calls a stopgap measure.

But the time and \$850,000 spent trying to get on the 511 bandwagon wasn't wasted, according to Robert Ortiz, deputy transportation secretary for highway operations. The agency is now better prepared to forge ahead with new technology, he says.

Let's hope it's technology that makes sense for people behind the wheel. And that it gets here before the next big blizzard.

## Colorado: Why CDOT Decided to Close the Highway

This article written by Ward Lucas,  
Anchor Reporter for 9NEWS, Colorado

GOLDEN (12/31/2007)- The winter storm that stranded thousands of motorists along the I-70 corridor was constantly monitored by Colorado Department of Transportation employees in the Traffic Operations Center.

At the Golden center, a half-dozen employees have access to nearly 400 traffic cameras stationed around the state. Rod Mead, Traffic Operations manager, says his office got lots of complaints from motorists about the decision to close the highway.

"They want to know why it's closed," Mead said. "They're sitting on dry highway and they're not grasping the fact that down the road, they can't see the road. Although conditions may look very nice if you're at Idaho Springs, you don't have to go very far in our mountains to find some really rough going."

Mead says many motorists ignore flashing traffic warnings that the highway is closed ahead. They end up waiting for hours in traffic jams, often preventing snow plows from reaching areas where the weather is bad.

Another aggravation, according to Mead, is that many motorists don't slow down in adverse weather conditions.

"I would say that 90 to 95 percent of every accident we see on our highways is directly related to speed. People just refuse to slow down," he said.

For more information on CDOT's road conditions, travelers can visit [www.cotrip.org](http://www.cotrip.org). ■

Answers to pictures on page 4:

1. New Mexico, 2. Utah, 3. Montana, 4. Colorado



## News and Notes...

### **CITE and FHWA Introduce New Blended Course: Principles and Tools of Road Weather Management**

The Consortium for ITS Training and Education (CITE) and the FHWA Office of Operations have released an interactive web-based course on the “Principles and Tools of Road Weather Management.” This course provides transportation professionals in highway maintenance and/or highway operations with training to apply tools and strategies for addressing road weather problems.

The course begins with an overview of the types of road weather problems and their associated costs, as well as basic meteorology for non-meteorologists. Through this course, participants are exposed to various strategies for addressing road weather problems, including Road Weather Information Systems (RWIS) and the development of crosscutting decision support systems to respond effectively to weather situations. In addition, road weather solutions unique to maintenance management, traffic management, traveler information, and emergency management are discussed. It is the same content as the NHI classroom version of the course, only it is converted to an on-line format. A complete outline of the course can be found on the CITE web site.

CITE eliminates the inconvenience of attending courses away from the office by providing courses through an interactive web-based format. All of CITE’s courses are accessible 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The courses provide student interactivity through a stimulating mix of participatory activities, such as self-study quizzes, exercises or problems, and drag-and-drop pages. These activities help support and reinforce the text-based information and keep students engaged and active in the learning process.

This course is available as both an independent study web-based course and a “blended” course. A “blended” course combines the best features of both instructor-led and web-based instruction. These features include:

- Live discussions with the instructor through the use of conference calls,
- Convenient, flexible web-based learning,
- A specific time schedule in which to complete the course, and
- Interaction with other students through the use of class workshops posted on a discussion board.

The instructor for this blended course is Leon Osborne, professor of atmospheric science and director of the Regional Weather Information Center at the University of North Dakota. He has served since 1995 as the principal investigator of the Advanced Transportation Weather Information System at the University of North Dakota, which has laid the foundation for much of the present weather applications within the surface transportation industry. This blended course begins on March 14th and continues through April 27, 2008. The fee for the course is \$250 and students can register by going to the CITE web site at <http://www.citeconsortium.org>. For more information, please contact Denise Twisdale, [mztwiz@umd.edu](mailto:mztwiz@umd.edu) or 301-403-4592.

### **US Transportation Secretary Peters Announces New Strategy to Improve Safety on Rural Roads**

U.S. Transportation Secretary Mary E. Peters on Feb. 29 announced a new national strategy that will bring new focus, including resources and new technology, to reducing deaths on the nation’s rural roads. “We want to put the brakes on rural road fatalities,” said Secretary Peters.



The affairs and business of the ITS Rocky Mountain Chapter are managed and controlled by its Board of Directors. This Board, made up of representatives or Senators from each of the six member states, delegates to the Chapter Officers the necessary powers to conduct Chapter business.

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“This is a challenge that we have the experience, the ability and the resources to address. We can make our rural roads safer, we can do it now and we can do it without reinventing the wheel.”

The Department’s Rural Safety Initiative will help states and communities develop ways to eliminate the risks drivers face on America’s rural roads and highlight available solutions and resources. The new endeavor addresses five key goals: safer drivers, better roads, smarter roads, better-trained emergency responders, and improved outreach and partnerships. The Secretary said approximately \$287 million in existing and new funding is available to support the effort. To view the full press release, go to <http://www.dot.gov/affairs/dot2708.htm>.

## ITS Transit Fact Sheets Available

ITS Transit Fact Sheets. ITS Transit Fact Sheets provide transit agencies with basic information about advanced technologies used in transit system planning, operations, maintenance, and communications. The ITS Transit Fact Sheets support FTA and ITS Professional Capacity Building Program goals for knowledge transfer in the area of intelligent transportation systems. In addition to current offerings, additional Fact Sheets are being developed and will be added to the Fact Sheet website as completed. Transit Fact Sheet link (<http://www.pcb.its.dot.gov/factsheets/factsheets.asp>). ITS PCB Program link (<http://www.pcb.its.dot.gov>).

## Utah Comprehensive Safety Plan Released

UTAH. The Utah Department of Transportation, in conjunction with other public and private organizations, recently released the *Utah Comprehensive Safety Plan*. The plan was created through the efforts of the Utah Safety Leadership Team. This team, consisting of 19 separate public and private organizations, came together to introduce the goal of reaching zero fatalities in Utah. This report highlights their findings in determining the direction the transportation system could take to improve safety and reduce crash rates. To view the report, go to <http://www.udot.utah.gov/main/uconowner.gf?n=916062825047006861>.

## Utah 2007 Traffic Fatalities Report

The Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT), the Utah Department of Public Safety and Zero Fatalities have made available the 2007 fatal crash statistics for the state of Utah. The report ([http://www.zerofatalities.com/statistics\\_utah.php](http://www.zerofatalities.com/statistics_utah.php)) identifies the major causes of Utah’s traffic fatalities, what ages have the highest number of fatalities, and where they happened.

## ITS Joint Program Office Updated ITS/Operations Resource Guide Website

The ITS Joint Program office is pleased to present its updated ITS/Operations Resource Guide website, [www.resource.guide.its.dot.gov](http://www.resource.guide.its.dot.gov). This website is a comprehensive listing of over 500 documents, videos, websites, training courses, software tools, and points-of-contact related to ITS and transportation operations.