

Technology In Our Lives

Rural Transportation Professionals Share Information

(NAPSA)—Keeping travelers safe and secure, the ability to track the location of goods being shipped cross-country and the effect of extreme weather on transportation systems. These are a few of the issues of interest to professionals who use advanced communication, information and electronics technology to solve existing transportation problems.

The field is referred to as ITS—Intelligent Transportation Systems. In its simplest form, ITS is concerned with the collection and sharing of information.

Most early efforts in ITS focused on urbanized metropolitan areas. However, in 1991, the state of California's Department of Transportation, Caltrans, inquired into rural concerns dealing with advanced transportation technologies. Many point to this as the beginning of the Rural ITS movement.

Rural areas encompass a significant portion of this country's transportation system. Most rural ITS efforts address travel within and through communities or areas with less than 50,000 residents.

Roads in rural areas have unique needs associated with the characteristics of the way they are used and their maintenance and operations.

For example, rural secondary roads tend to get less frequent maintenance. There are usually fewer navigational signs, less existing infrastructure per square

Rural ITS professionals use high-tech systems to solve transportation problems in rural areas. 

mile and more motor vehicle deaths with higher frequency of accidents per vehicle mile traveled, and more severe accidents than found in urban areas.

These are just some of the issues that Rural ITS professionals take into account when attempting to design more efficient rural transportation systems.

The 2005 National Rural ITS Conference-themed "Moving Forward!" was hosted by the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) and held in "the city of lilacs," Spokane, Washington. The conference featured two days of sessions about a variety of ITS efforts from "Hurricane Katrina: Texas DOT Evacuation Experience" to "Wireless and WiFi at Rest Areas."

Technical tours also offered participants the opportunity to observe the operations of the Spokane Regional Multi-Agency Traffic Management Center, the Spokane Regional Transit Operations Center and the National Weather Service Forecasting Center.

The Western Transportation Institute will host the 2006 National Rural ITS Conference in Big Sky, Montana August 13-16, 2006.

To learn more, visit the Web site at www.itsa.org.