



A New Model In Utility & Railroad Coordination

The Utilities & Railroad (U&R) staff, in central office and the districts, recently created a mission statement. It reads: “The mission of the Utility & Railroad staff of INDOT is to proactively coordinate with our internal project managers and external partners to facilitate the planning, development, construction, maintenance, and operations of our roadways in a safe and economically responsible manner.”

Utilities can be as small as a single cable strand, or as large as a seven-story transmission tower housing high voltage power lines. Utility companies have a legal right to be in our public right-of-way, and are therefore, our partners. INDOT’s U&R intends to align with the agency’s first value of treating everyone with respect.

“One of my priorities is to get the utility companies involved in the process early, during the design phase and before we establish right-of-way,” said U&R Manager Kenny Franklin. “That way, we find potential utility issues sooner than later. Our catch phrase is: ‘Everyone knows where everyone goes!’ We also want to engage in discussions to provide acquisition services for utility easements so that our right-of-way team has more impact on schedule and costs.”

“It’s a new way of thinking for some, but I am confident that we all will see it’s better to work in advance and in partnership mode,” said Franklin. “To facilitate building better relationships and to bring clarity to project delivery, we’re also keeping the same contact at INDOT for the utilities for the entire project, from the beginning to completion. It’s about valuing relationships.

These changes are important because utilities are an integral part of nearly every project. There are various utility companies and multiple communications providers across the state, giving INDOT the opportunity to forge mutual partnerships for successful and lasting outcomes.

If a project involves railroad property, the process starts even earlier. Rail Project Engineers Doug Gannaway and Tom Rueschhoff are INDOT’s central office liaisons with more than 45 railroad companies operating in Indiana. They work with each operator to gain access to railroad property, while ensuring that railroad companies have access to their equipment and facilities. Railroad companies’ main priority is safety – first to ensure that any and all that are working on or around railroad property are safe from harm. Another critical consideration is that the rail bed, which is where the tracks lie, is not compromised. Additionally, INDOT’s construction activities must never interfere with the railroad’s operations.

INDOT always conducts a preliminary field check attended by the railroads and most of the utilities involved. Later in the process, a final-review diagnostic field check for the railroad specifically is held to facilitate open dialog and ensure everyone is on the same page with regard to project scope and safety at the project site. Any issues or remaining questions are addressed at the pre-construction meeting that is held after the contract has been awarded. This allows for the project contractor to



interact with the railroads and utilities and clear up any potential issues that could affect construction or cause unnecessary delays.

“As most folks that have dealt with the railroads know, we are very protective of our right-of way,” said Norfolk Southern Railway’s James Kazmierczak, who has worked in tandem with INDOT for years. “The rapport that Tom (Rueschhoff) and Doug (Gannaway) have built with us can most often lead to a simple and inexpensive solution that is mutually satisfying to all concerned.”

As part of the cultural changes, Franklin plans to ensure that all policies and procedures are implemented consistently throughout central office and the districts.

“It’s imperative that we are operating the same throughout the state,” stated Franklin. “A utility company or railroad doesn’t distinguish between our offices’ varying views and methods. They see INDOT as a single entity, which is why statewide consistency, along with a new way of doing business, will strengthen our relationships with utilities, railroads, consultant and contractors.”