This chart documents relationships between four major organizations conducting highway and transportation research in the United States: The Transportation Research Board (TRB) of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine (NASEM), state Departments of Transportation, the U.S. Department of Transportation, and AASHTO (American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials). Solid lines represent reporting structures, while dotted lines indicate transfer of funds or advice.

Transportation Research Board

The Transportation Research Board (TRB) is a not-for-profit organization and is a division of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine. It is the home for a major highway research initiative, the National Cooperative Highway Research Program (NCHRP); NCHRP is funded cooperatively by state Departments of Transportation. NCHRP establishes advisory panels that enable the major stakeholders to guide the research work. Projects are conducted by contractors, generally academic institutions, or private sector consultants.

The Behavioral Traffic Safety Cooperative Research Program (BTSCRP) is a small program managed by TRB and is funded by both the Governor’s Highway Safety Association (GHSA) and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA).

TRB manages several other cooperative research programs.

Among other responsibilities, the Standing Committees of TRB’s Technical Activities Division organize the sessions at the TRB Annual Meeting. Committees also generate ideas for new research. While these committees cannot submit problem statements directly to the NCHRP, they may coordinate with the three authorized research idea submitters: State DOTs, AASHTO Committees, or the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to have ideas submitted to the program.

TRB Committees AJE35, the Standing Committee on Research Innovation Implementation Management and AJE45, the Standing Committee on Information and Knowledge Management are closely tied to research efforts.

AASHTO

AASHTO is a not-for-profit organization that represents the state Departments of Transportation. The AASHTO Special Committee on Research and Innovation (R&I) is the oversight group for the NCHRP. R&I receives advice from its Research Advisory Committee (RAC).

All AASHTO Councils and Committees may submit research problem statements to the NCHRP and play a role in reviewing problem statements in their areas of expertise.

AASHTO manages several Technical Service Programs (TSPs), most of which are 100% SPR Eligible. A regularly updated listing of TSPs that are eligible for 100% SPR funding is linked at the bottom of the TSP program page.

State Departments of Transportation

Research by the state Departments of Transportation can be divided roughly into two categories: research funded through federal State Planning and Research (SP&R) funds, and those which are funded only with state funds.

Each state provides a portion of its SP&R allotment to fund the Core Support Services of TRB and the NCHRP.

States also fund their own research projects and collaborate with other states through the FHWA Transportation Pooled Fund program.

Some states conduct research in-house, while most contract the work out to universities or private consultants. Most DOTs collaborate with their state university partners, some of which receive Federal grants as part of a University Transportation Center (UTC).

United States Department of Transportation

Within the U.S. Department of Transportation, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) is a partner along with TRB and AASHTO in the NCHRP. FHWA conducts its own research projects, provides assistance to the state DOTs, and administers the Pooled Fund program.

The Office of the Assistant Secretary for Research and Technology (OST-R), has a coordination role across the USDOT and also manages delegated research programs.

OST-R administers the National Transportation Library (NTL), which maintains and facilitates access to DOT and other research results as well as statistical and other information.

OST/R also oversees the University Transportation Centers program, where research is typically conducted in partnership with state DOTs.