

Date: 23 January 2006
Site: Wisconsin DOT Library
Staff: John Cherney, Librarian

Site Visit Summary

History

The Wisconsin DOT library has been in existence since 1969, when it began as a collection of file cabinets and reports within the department's planning bureau. In 1972 it was formally organized as a transportation library, providing services and expanding its collection through the absorption of the departments' rail and transit materials. The library became an OCLC member in 1984. In 1996, the library moved along with the departments' planning function, into the newly created Division of Transportation Investment Management (DTIM).

In 1999, the library was a potential budget cut, which caused division management to call for a complete evaluation of library products and services, both at the home office and in the districts. The evaluation resulted in a report, completed in the Spring, 2000, for divisional management and WisDOT's Board of Directors. Working with DTIM's budget director, who wrote the report, the library surveyed customers and collected statistics to evaluate the usage of library services within the entire department. One of the recommendations of the report was to house and integrate various office collections by cataloging them into OCLC, and making them more available to the department and the public. These office collections included computer training videos, books and CDs, affirmative action office materials, career planning items, workplace safety materials, and several donations from district offices.

In 2000, the determination was made to maintain the operation of the Central Library at the home office (Hill Farms State Office Building), and create positions to staff the library with 1.5 Full-time employees. Further complementing the staff was a .5 limited term employee. About the same time, the library began a synergistic and collaborative partnership with the department's Research Coordination Section. This arrangement was formalized during the department's 2005 reorganization, by placing the library under the newly created Research and Communications Services Section (RCSS), within the Division of Business Management, under the direction of section chief Nina McLawhorn. This section includes not only the strong connection between the research and library functions, but also contains web, graphic arts and audio-visual services.

Currently, there are plans to expand the library's space by creating remote storage options for some of the lesser-used materials. The expanded space in the Central Library will be used to create an Information Commons, an open area where the latest technology will be combined with library staff, and a more pleasant working environment for library patrons. There are various options discussed currently for how to create more space for both the Central Library and the Truax Materials Lab library, a department collection that focuses on technical pavement research on Madison's east side.

Staff

John Cherney, Full-time Librarian
Wendy Brand, Half-time Librarian
JonAnne Hobbs, Three-quarters time Librarian assistant from the University of Wisconsin.

As a result of Nina McLawhorn's partnership with the University of Wisconsin (UW), a research project was recently implemented to help the WisDOT Library with the equivalent of 80 hours of

labor per week. JonAnne Hobbs was hired to fill one of these positions, with the other hire pending. JonAnne's varied duties include web work, cataloging, serial collection maintenance, journal routing as well as participating in marketing efforts. She has a Masters of library Science from the University of Oklahoma.

The other UW position will focus on Web services and virtual library activities. A part-time (15 hours/week) person will be hired for the Truax materials library across town, and is independent of the UW partnership.

Physical Space

The library is on the 8th floor of the Hill Farms State Office building on Madison's west side. The current library space is approximately 1400 square feet and is very crowded. Currently, there are no private offices for the staff. The information desk is situated at the entrance to the library, with a small reference collection and audiovisual section across from it. There are three PCs for public use, and a copier for staff and patrons. There is a reading table in the front and three study carels, with stacks in between. Moving materials to the basement storage area will be a great help in making the library a more open and welcoming space. The Central Library has responsibility for absorbing satellite collections around the state during the recent reorganization. Collections already absorbed include the LaCrosse, Eau Claire and Madison district office collections. The large collection in Waukesha (near Milwaukee) is to remain in that district office. Staffing concerns for that collection will be addressed in the near future.

Collection

The WisDOT library collects materials that represent all modes of transportation, including planning, land use, bike/ped, rail, transit, air, water and motor vehicles. The main collection is cataloged in OCLC and uses the Library of Congress classification system. The collection contains:

- Over 33,000 books and technical reports
- 300 periodical titles
- 350 audiovisual materials
- Approximately 250 CD-ROM titles
- Six daily newspapers
- Reference materials, phone books, road maps and tourist information
- Conference announcements¹

We visited the Truax materials testing library is located on Madison's east side. This library is not staffed at present, but as mentioned above, there are plans to hire a part time librarian. The collection contains Wisconsin research reports, FHWA materials, standards and specifications, and many unique items not in OCLC. The collection is largely uncataloged and uses a variety of numbering systems, including LC, FHWA, and the TRB publications nomenclature from the 1970s.

Plans, Goals & Concerns

John is concerned about the space issues in the WisDOT library, but is optimistic about receiving a larger space and moving some items into storage. There are office collections John would like to see cataloged, which include employee assistance, aeronautics, and legal materials. However, the main library has no jurisdiction over these, and although valuable and unique collections, they may continue to be, in effect, hidden and underutilized.

¹ Wisconsin Department of Transportation Library brochure.

In addition to space concerns, John sees visibility as challenge for the WisDOT library. He feels that their target audience - agency employees, practitioners, the public - is largely unaware of the library and the excellent services they offer. A small, internal core group of users is making regular use of the library. This is a major focus of the pooled fund study, with Christi Powers as our administrative coordinator in charge of marketing.

John has some great ideas for projects including building a full text and image (archival photos) database in InMagic, their local library software. InMagic is very well suited towards this kind of database/knowledgebase/textbase, and there is plenty of server space to accommodate it. Another project is the "Wisconsin Information Capture", which John envisions as a systematic search and capture of the wealth of 'borne digital' information proliferated by PDF publishing and buried on the invisible web. Information produced by municipal, county and state planning departments, highway commissions, academic centers, and consultants are often buried within Web sites. Even AASHTO and FHWA publications are buried and not captured by library catalogs. The focus would be on state and local information.

WisDOT Expectations for the Pooled Fund Study

Among the reasons WisDOT was motivated to join and take the lead in the pooled fund study are:

- Raising visibility for transportation information services and professionals
- Increasing resource sharing
- Filling in the gaps within Wisconsin's transportation information record
- Learning techniques and strategies that other state DOTs are using to manage archival information, including photographs.

Photos:



