

March 2018 Director's Report

Hi, everybody! I've just been walking around the house changing clocks to adjust to "springing" forward. It's a day that always has such an odd feeling – I spend most of the day feeling late and behind, but then when the day comes to an end and it's still bright out I feel like a kid that's been let out for recess – the evening light holds the promise of evening walks, bike rides, games of catch (yes, I still play catch – I'm like a dog, I'll run after any ball or frisbee you throw), driveway hoops, sidewalk chats with neighbors that you have only seen furtively dashing through the cold and snow – the promise of spring, I guess. I hope it comes quickly for all of us.

It's been an odd last month as well because I've been going through my Senate confirmation process, which is something I've never done before. Although the Governor appoints you as director, your appointment has to be confirmed by a two-third majority vote of the Senate. It's an interesting process – you are escorted to the "well" of the Senate to be formally presented to the full membership of the Senate, you informally meet and talk with members of the Senate in the Senate lobby, and you appear formally before the Senate Transportation Committee to answer questions about your qualifications, your viewpoints on issues that affect our work, and our work in general. It makes you reflect upon the breadth of our work, the importance of our work, and how many people (and how much talent) it takes to do our work – I've had the privilege of talking about, and being genuinely excited about, the very good things that we have done and are doing, and the reception I've gotten to that from the Senators I have talked to is an affirmation of your collective work and qualifications, not mine. Thank you for that.

Another thing that prompted some reflection is the concept of being addressed as "director." There's a certain formality in the Senate, and people there often address me as "Director Lowe." I always think it's unnecessary, but I get the formality of the setting. One Senator has been careful to address me as "Interim Director." I get and respect that too – the legal framework in which we work reflects the balance of powers between the executive branch and the legislative branch by making executive agency appointments by the Governor subject



A fish-eye view of the Iowa Senate chambers. If you have the chance, visit our state capitol building and take a tour. It is a gem among state capitols. There are also terrific online tours at the Iowa legislature's website – both a [virtual](#) and ["beyond the ropes"](#) video series.

to the approval of the Senate. And so he's right – you're still not "permanent" unless and until the Senate confirms you.

But from my perspective, when are we ever not "interim?" We don't own these positions or get to keep them forever, we are only caretakers for the period of time we have the honor of filling them, and in the end, we are all "interims." Our work goes on because we all contribute our collective effort, talent, experience, expertise, and creativity. Building the people of the Iowa DOT, engaging them and unleashing their capacity, is the thing that drives our success. Titles will never do that. Titles like "director" (and we have lots of titles like that) are useful organizational constructs to help us understand how we're organized, who's responsible for what, and who guides what, but I urge us to mostly check them at our doors. See each other as people and not classifications, titles, or reports; encourage open communication and dialogue; help each other to learn, participate, contribute and know our work and purpose – these are things that build a resilient organization that successfully transcends all the "interim" changes.

Alright, I have that bit of philosophy off my chest! Here's this month's report.

Caring is cool

There's a song called "Caring is Creepy" by The Shins (a band that weaves in and out of my playlists depending on how "alt" I'm feeling), but The Shins have that one wrong – caring is cool, and there's always room for caring (and kindness) in our work – after all, we're *people* on a common mission.

Will Jacoby, a Highway Tech Associate and our team at the Grimes shop clearly gets that. February was a long, draining month for everyone clearing snow and ice, but they didn't let that stop them from making a difference in someone's life. Last month, after eight straight days of plowing snow and treating ice along with the rest of the Grimes shop, Will

woke up to watch evening news on KCCI. He saw a segment by Eric Hanson about Mason Rumpf, a young man with cerebral palsy who loves to plow snow, so much that his friends bought him a special wheelchair equipped with a plow so he could plow snow. (You can see the original piece about Mason [here.](#))

Will was touched by the Story and thought Mason might enjoy coming to the Grimes shop to see how the pros plow snow. Will worked with supervisor Jim Scott to clear the visit and then contacted Mason's mom to



Mason Rumpf in the cab of a snowplow with Will Jacoby.



Jim Scott awards Mason a snow-fighter certificate.

make the invitation. On Thursday, Feb. 22, Mason and his parents toured the shop and Mason became an honorary Iowa DOT snow-fighter, complete with an "Honorary Iowa DOT snow-fighter" certificate and a hat and patch from snow-fighter school.

After the festivities in the shop, Will put Mason in the cab of a plow truck and took him on a snow plow run (they took a crew cab truck so his parents could ride along). It's hard to say who enjoyed it more – reports are that Will was grinning ear-to-ear the whole time. Will explained how we operate our snow runs, and Mason and his parents asked great questions and got an up-close-and-personal look at plowing I-35/80 in the Des Moines metro, which is Will's normal run. Time ran out on this visit, but Mason plans to come back another time when he'll be able to get into the snowplow simulator and "drive" his own Iowa DOT snowplow. If you want to see more of Mason's visit, check out [this coverage](#) from KCCI.



Mason (complete with honorary snow-fighter hat and patch) and the Grimes shop team.

Thank you to Will and to whole Grimes team for putting such a caring, kind, and personal face on the work we do. We can't be customer driven if we don't see our customers as people first. Well done!

A focus on "getting you there"

In my November report, I talked about our fall Leadership Conference and highlighted a presentation by Donna Tweeten, Vice President and Chief Marketing and Customer Officer for Hy-Vee, titled "Living the Brand," that helped us understand how customers see an organization's brand and how we can choose our brand. Donna asked us to think about what brand can we own – what thing will people truly know and trust us for – and as I said in November I think that brand is our mission – "getting you there." Again, we get people there – it's what we've done, it's what we're known for, it's what we're good at and it's what we will always do, and it's what should drive our work and focus.

To carry that forward, I've started working with our Strategic Communications & Policy team on a marketing and branding plan – internally and externally – to make the focus of our marketing and branding "getting you there." On the surface, you will start to see this play out in our website, our publications, and places of work, but more

substantively I hope it will take more prominence in the way we think about and structure our work, products, and services and the way we guide and draw customers to them.

One thing I want to be careful about is recognizing that changing the prominence of our mission is not rejection of our vision –smarter, simpler, customer driven. That vision remains, and it's an important part of how we better meet our mission. But the "how," in my mind, can't be more prominent than the "what," if that makes sense. So we're going to look for more balance and more connection to what we really do and what we're charged to do.

We'll share more information as we go forward, but for now I wanted to give you a heads up about the direction we are taking. Let me know if you have thoughts or ideas about what we should be thinking about or including in our plan.

New license plates will hit the streets soon!



The new "county standard" license plate design.

The new license plates Iowans voted for last summer are about to go into production. We've been working with Iowa Prison Industries (IPI) and our license plate sheeting vendor, 3M Company, to finalize the sheeting design for production and to wind down the inventory of sheeting that has the old license plate design, and we're poised to switch to the new sheeting and start production at IPI on March 19th. I'm excited about the new product – they've done a great job of capturing the graphics we designed, and the sheeting with the new graphics is a new, high-

definition sheeting with better reflectivity, which means the new plates will be easier to see and read both at day and night. (Best of all it came at no additional cost, so we're getting a better product for the same price.)

It will take a few weeks to see the plates on the vehicles – we use an automated plate ordering system that tracks plate inventory at each county treasurer's office to predict inventory levels so plates are produced and delivered as they are needed, which avoids excess inventory and inventory expense. (We estimate the system saves the state about \$400,000 annually). As counties deplete their existing inventory of license plates they will start to receive inventory of the new plates, and again to avoid waste and unnecessary expense we're not changing all plates at one time – the new plates will be issued for newly acquired vehicles, replacement plates for plates that have reached their "end-of-life" (we automatically replace your plates when they are more than 10 years old), and plates issued to replace lost or damaged plates.

Customers that want to aren't due for new plates but want to change to the new design can also order them as replacement plates for \$5. By summer I expect you will see the new plates all over the state, and until then we are encouraging customers that want the new plates to check with their county treasurer to make sure they have received them in inventory.

Look for more information in a license plate blog that will go out on or about March 19th. In the meantime, great job and thanks to everyone who has worked so hard to make this happen!

Want more information on Iowa license plates? Go to our [license plate web pages](#).

New driver's licenses and IDs coming too!

I was looking back at some old Director's Reports and reminded that I first talked about the new license plates in the March 2017 director's report, where I mentioned Melissa Spiegel (Motor Vehicle Division Director) and I had met with then-Governor Branstad and Lt. Governor Reynolds, and reported that Governor Branstad had asked us to pursue a new license plate design. But what I forgot to mention was the original reason for our visit, which was to discuss a new design for Iowa driver's licenses and IDs. To keep driver's licenses and IDs fresh and protected from counterfeiting or alteration, we update them on a regular basis to adopt new and better security features, and we're getting ready to release the new designs soon. Melissa and the alliterative Driver & Identification Services Director Darcy Doty will be sharing more information with Driver & Identification Services and county treasurer staff this week, and then I'll share the new designs with everyone in my April report. We expect them to go into production in mid to late April. (Like license plates, not a wholesale replacement, but just a roll out as new licenses and IDs are issued.) Stay tuned!



Raygun sticker on my acoustic guitar to cover where Erin accidentally kicked it. It works here too.

Upcoming training sessions

Sexual harassment training. You all already received an e-mail from Lee Wilkinson, our Administrative Services Director, about this, but I thought it was important to mention it here well. As Lee's email indicated, Governor Reynolds asked all state agencies to make sure all employees complete the *Preventing Sexual Harassment for Supervisors* or *Preventing Sexual Harassment for Employees* training before May 1, 2018.

I of course support the Governor in this and applaud her leadership. I did it this weekend; it's a small investment of time but a big commitment we can call make to the safe and health work environment we all deserve. Please make it a priority to complete and give it your careful attention when you complete it.

As Lee's note indicated we enrolled everyone in the training through IowaDOTU, and you should receive an email notification from IowaDOTU that indicates you have been assigned to the appropriate training for your position and gives you instruction on how to complete it. (If you have not received the notice, you may want to check your junk mail folder; we had an issue with email notices being diverted to junk mail folders last week.) If you have any questions regarding the training or how to complete it, or you can't locate your enrollment

notification, please contact Hope Arthur in the Office of Employee Services at hope.arthur@iowadot.us or 515-239-1022.

Active shooter training. You're also going to receive an email from Lee this week about active shooter training. Our Motor Vehicle Enforcement has developed active shooter training that can be delivered throughout the state, and we're going to start rolling that out soon.

Active shooter training can seem ominous and scary, but I don't want us to feel threatened by it. We're certainly not implementing it out of any sense that we're at imminent or unusual risk. But it does seem like a reasonable and prudent thing to do – just like tornados and fires, we hope they will never happen but we know we will be better prepared and better protected if we take time to think, talk and walk through our strategies for responding to the unlikely. It's also training that can help protect us wherever we are, whether in or out of work.

Our strategy for this is to not just roll it out and do it once, but to make it a regular and repeated exercise, much like we do tornado and fire drills, and to include with it security assessments for our work places and work to improve security where appropriate. We'll work with the supervisors for our various work locations to schedule trainings and to develop a practice to repeat the exercise. We're also developing a threat assessment team that will help us assess security assessments whenever they may arise and take effective protective action when necessary.

Safety is one of the core values we commit to, and I'm pleased we're strengthening our commitment to safety by taking these steps. Thank you to everyone who has worked so hard to put this together.

Freight plan recognized as one of nation's best

Here's some exciting news – on February 27th, the American Transportation Research Institute (ATRI) released its report on best practices in freight planning at the state level, and ranked our Iowa State Freight Plan as one of the top 12 in the country, ranking it fourth overall. The ATRI report will help state departments of transportation and their consultants better address freight planning components that the Federal Highway Administration, state DOTs and state trucking association leaders deem critical.

We originally completed and amended our state freight plan to comply with federal requirements (the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21) Act in 2016 and Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act in July 2017). But what's cool is that we moved beyond just focusing on compliance and made it a plan that really works for us. In recent years, we took on numerous freight planning activities to help achieve our mission of providing a safe, efficient, and convenient transportation system. This plan connects all of these initiatives and orients them to a common goal of optimal freight transportation in the state. The plan helps guide our investment decisions to maintain and improve the freight transportation system, which strengthens the state's economy and improves the quality of life for Iowa's citizens. (I often like to say that mobility drives economic and personal vitality, and that's ably reflected here.)

Other cool aspects are that the plan was developed collaboratively, with regular industry and stakeholder input from our Iowa Freight Advisory Council and other freight-stakeholders, and that it recognizes that freight movement, like transportation, is truly multi-modal. The state freight plan addresses each of the five modes of the freight transportation system: air, truck, pipeline, rail, and water. It includes:

- Detailed relationship between elements of planning/programming process
- Identification/description of major supply chains in the state
- Detailed Freight Advisory Council identified freight issues and solutions
- Detailed asset inventory and condition summaries for each mode
- State-designated multimodal freight network
- Multi-tool highway condition evaluation
- Oversize/overweight utilization and permitting evaluation
- Freight-specific highway crash analysis
- Multimodal bottlenecks identification and analysis
- Multimodal freight strategies prioritized by stakeholders
- Multi-factor highway improvement identification and prioritization
- Multimodal freight improvements
- Highway freight investment plan

As part of their best practices report, ATRI called for nominations of innovative state freight plans from state DOT personnel and freight stakeholders nationwide. The top twelve plans then formed the basis for an “Ideal Attributes Checklist.” These ideal attributes, along with lessons learned and innovative practices that were highlighted, will help freight planners consider a broad continuum of freight planning techniques for their next freight plan updates.

The highest ranked plans used a variety of tools including quantitative industry data, visualizations, project prioritization tools and strong reliance on Freight Advisory Committees. We were particularly noted for showing an excellent multimodal network analysis in our plan, which identified “priority corridors” for in-depth study using our in-house developed Infrastructure Condition Evaluation (ICE) tool. (The ICE tool produces a composite rating for corridors using seven different criteria that includes metrics such as annual average daily traffic (AADT), combination truck counts, congestion index value and pavement condition rating.)

Congratulations to our Planning, Programming & Modal Team! It’s great to see their excellent and hard work recognized nationally, but even better to know we’re reaping the benefits from it here at home.

Want to learn more about our state freight plan? Check it out [here](#).

Legislative update

We continue to make progress with all of the bills we sponsored – all of them remain alive, and two of them have actually been signed by the governor. Here’s the current status of our bills:

Signed by the Governor

- **Third-party commercial driver's license (CDL) skills testing by Iowa motor carriers.** This bill eliminates a May 14, 2019 sunset provision and allows Iowa-based motor carriers (or their subsidiaries) that operate a CDL training program to continue to conduct the skills (driving) tests a driver must pass to get a CDL at their premises and using their own examiners, provided we train and certify those examiners and audit their performance as required by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations. This bill was filed as [House File 2197](#) and was signed by Governor Reynolds on March 7, 2018.
- **Blue/white lights on snow plows.** This bill ends a pilot project we started in 2015 and accelerates equipping all of our plow trucks with rear facing white and blue lights to improve their visibility and avoid side-swipe and rear-end collisions during winter operations. This proposal progressed as [Senate File 2163](#), and was also signed by Governor Reynolds on March 7, 2018.

Both these bills have an effective date of July 1, 2018.

Still pending

- **Charges for operating a commercial motor vehicle while texting or while using a handheld mobile device.** This bill assures continued compliance with Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations (FMCSRs) that prohibit a person from texting or using a hand-held mobile device (for instance a mobile phone) while driving a commercial motor vehicle, unless the device is being used to make a call and is within the immediate reach of the driver and can be activated by a single touch, by adopting them under a specific and separate code section that can be specifically cited and tracked to the driver's record to assure proper identification of drivers that are subject to disqualification of their CDL for multiple serious offenses. This proposal has been filed as [House File 2196](#) and has passed the out of the House. It is now on the Senate calendar for debate by the full Senate.
- **Transportation Commission terms.** This proposal will shift the terms of members of our Transportation Commission from four-year terms beginning May 1 in the year of their appointment and ending April 30 in the year their term expires to July 1 in the year of their appointment and ending June 30 in the year their term expires, to assure that Commissioners that start developing a five-year highway program can see it through to its approval in June, and that new members aren't asked to immediately approve a program they are not familiar with. This proposal is filed as [House File 2195](#) and has passed out of the House. It is now on the Senate calendar for debate by the full Senate.
- **Motor Vehicle Enforcement (MVE) officer authority.** We've continued to make some adjustments to this proposal but the basic premise remains the same – MVE officers are fully authorized peace officers that have authority to enforce all laws of the state and all rules and regulations of the department, but operationally we will assure that our focus remains solidly on our core missions of size and weight enforcement and commercial motor vehicle enforcement. We worked with the legislature to tie operational requirements to our reporting requirements to assure we're consistently targeting 90 percent or more of enforcement activities at core activities, but I'm again very comfortable with the

balance we struck, as it's very consistent with how we consistently function. The bill was filed as [Senate File 2326](#) in the Senate, and just passed the full Senate. It has now been messaged to the House for action there.

Song of the month

In honor of our new license plates and all the people that work so hard to make and distribute them (our Vehicle & Motor Carrier Services staff, Iowa Prison Industries, and Iowa's county treasurers and their staff) this month's song is the 1976 Johnny Cash classic "One Piece at a Time" – the musical story of an auto factory worker that stole a Cadillac piece-by-piece over 25 years and then put together a mismatched mess that a trucker called a "psycho-billy Cadillac." Part of the song recounts getting the vehicle titled:



Johnny Cash (driver) and his psycho-billy Cadillac.

*So we drove up town just to get the tags
And I headed her right on down main drag
I could hear everybody laughin' for blocks around
But up there at the court house they didn't laugh
'Cause to type it up it took the whole staff
And when they got through the title weighed sixty
pounds.*

This song has a special connection for me to our new plates, because then Lt. Governor Reynolds, a former county treasurer, had to suffer through Governor Branstad and I regaling her with the details of this song as we were discussing the new plates. She was

very patient with us. But I feel like our salvage theft inspection requirements would stop this car from hitting the roads today.

Wellness tip

Looking for a fitness routine that has great benefits and is easy to work into your daily routine? Think about yoga. Although there are of course studios and gyms that offer guided classes, yoga is as close as your phone – all you need is a yoga app and a flat open space in your house or your yard for a yoga mat. (There are lots of great apps that offer a variety of guided classes for beginners to advanced practitioners.) I've become a big fan of yoga over the last few years – yoga adds a lot of things that are important as we age, including strength, balance, flexibility, and respiratory and cardio-vascular health, and can improve metabolism, help manage weight and prevent injury. It also encourages meditation and reduces stress. Don't be afraid to give it a try – you can get benefits from as little as five minutes of practice, and you don't have to tie yourself into a pretzel to do it (although you can if you want).

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Alright, my friends. We've again reached the end of report and my night time relaxation yoga beckons. As always, stay safe in all you do. Namaste!¹

Mark

¹ In yoga-speak, I bow to you.