

THE ROLE OF TRANSPORTEK IN TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER

K KISTAN

CSIR TRANSPORTEK. E-mail: kkistan@csir.co.za

Technology Transfer and Technology Transfer centres have become a very important medium in the Transportation sector both nationally and internationally. As such they play a very pivotal and critical role in bridging the divide between technical excellence, academic reengineering and practical implementation of technology.

There are three Technology Transfer centres in South Africa. CSIR TRANSPORTEK is one such centre with the special emphasis and focus on research and development.

Over the recent past there has been several attempts to define Technology Transfer.

For the purpose of this article Technology Transfer can be defined as the process by which existing knowledge, facilities or capabilities are utilized to fulfil public and private needs. Transportation Technology transfer contributes towards creating the conditions necessary for sustainable development as well as creating the environment that promotes the exchange of innovations in transportation that stimulate local economic growth and trade.

One of the key principles upon which technology transfer revolves is the fundamental issue of bridging the theoretical with the practical. According to the Federal Highway Office of International Programs, Technology transfer:

- Promotes institutional development;
- Promotes national and regional programs;
- Coordinates various transportation activities;
- Disseminates and implements appropriate technology and
- Addresses relevant needs of the transportation community.

The Technology Transfer (T2) centre at CSIR Transportek was established in October 2000. Transportek, in collaboration with the Federal Highways Administration, has agreed that the primary objective of the T2 centre would be to identify the needs of the transportation sector, and then to facilitate the provision and dissemination of technology, policies, practices and procedures as well as technical skills and expertise to the wider transportation community in South and southern Africa. In the new millennium the need for reliable and accurate information, reports, statistical analysis and interpretation and research findings has never been greater.

One of the key roles of the CSIR technology transfer centre is to host the first clearinghouse for all transport related information. The clearinghouse will serve as an important support vehicle to all involved in the transport sector and will seek to provide an on-line service in the near future. Therefore the centre is sourcing out the latest institutional and technical knowledge which exists as well as research findings which is currently being developed and making these available to all stakeholders in the transportation sector.

The T2 centre is also an excellent channel for ensuring that the results and findings of transportation research are made available to the transport community through workshops, seminars and regular training activities designed to build capacity within the sector.

There are two other Technology Transfer centres in South Africa. One is housed with the South African National Roads Agency at Pretoria and the other centre is with the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Transport based in Pietermaritzburg.

Part of the mandate of the CSIR T2 centre is to take an active lead in promoting the ideal of a South African T2 Centre concept. In this regard our broad function would be to actively engage the other T2 centre in carrying out common activities to achieve this purpose for example, joint training activities, common newsletter etc.

The technology transfer centre has also embarked on a process of developing strategic alliances with institutions of higher learning (Universities and Technikons) as well as with other key professional institutions. One such institution is the Asphalt Academy. The Asphalt Academy would be working alongside the Technology Transfer Centre in promoting the latest technology developments in the asphalt industry and supporting T2 initiatives from an asphalt perspective.

The intention is for the Asphalt Academy to work very closely with the T2 centre in submitting joint proposals for projects in specified areas as well as to collaborate to present joint training courses in the broader southern African context.

Thus the T2 centre would serve as the ideal conduit for the promotion of the latest technology related to the asphalt industry and the academy would be seen as an important support structure on T2 issues related to roads and specifically bituminous materials.

In addition, the T2 centre has begun to function as the Training arm of Transportek and in this regard a number of training courses have been developed and presented to stakeholders within the country. The T2 centre has also participated in two community based labour intensive projects.

In conclusion, the Transportek Technology Transfer Centre can therefore be seen as a centre of excellence that will act as provider of transportation education and training needs in collaboration with specific higher education institutions, a focal point for advancing best practices through cutting edge technologies, to capture and make available technology transfer activities that meet local needs and finally to be your transportation technology solution partner.