

## *ITS Florida—Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow*

Each year the incoming president of ITS Florida is invited to write an article for the SunGuide Disseminator. Thinking about what I would write, it occurred to me that we have many new and not-so-new members, but there are just a relative few of the original group still active (wow, that makes me feel old!), so having been here in the beginning, I thought a quick history of our founding might be of, at least, historical value.

### **Our Roots**

I'm sure I'm not the lone ranger in this idea, but I did act on it and eventually got results. What we now called "ITS" (intelligent transportation systems) had its roots in a series of two meetings instigated by a small group of U.S.DOT, key industry, and academic leaders, who saw the rapidly emerging technologies in the vehicle and traffic management and information systems as a potential "new era" in transportation. They recognized the need to marshal the forces necessary to focus on ITS development as a viable part of transportation. After a series of meetings in several locations, during which the group named itself "Mobility 2000," a more widely attended meeting was held in San Antonio in February 1989. If you could see the list of these pioneers, you would recognize that these were the "giants" of our industry. I won't attempt to list them, for surely some would be omitted, but I can assure you that Dr. Bill Spreitzer, General Motors, retired, knows them all. I didn't attend that first meeting, but my University of Florida colleague, Ken Courage, did and told me this was something that we had to get involved with.

So, in March 1990 outside of Dallas, the second Mobility 2000 meeting was held. I went and came out with the same conclusion. It was really exciting being present at the conception of a new movement. We invented a whole list of new acronyms (for which we've been condemned ever since), like ATMS, ADIS (later ATIS), CVO, APTS, and, the mother of them all, IVHS (intelligent vehicle-highway systems)—thanks to Drs. Kan Chen and Bob Ervin, then of the University of Michigan. The key recommendation of this meeting was that there needed to be a national, non-governmental organization to ride herd on this new "industry." Shortly thereafter, the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) and the Highway Users' Foundation for Safety and Mobility (HUFSA) teamed up to create the Intelligent Vehicle-Highway Society of America, or IVHS America.

In 1990, IVHS America was incorporated and began business; soon negotiating an on-going arrangement with the U.S.DOT to be a scientific and educational resource as well as a "Federally Utilized Advisor" to the U.S.DOT—in other words, a closely joined association. I was privileged to be at the first and all subsequent meetings of IVHS (and then in 1994, ITS) America until 2002 (this was the only meeting I missed). But that's not the story. After the first IVHS America meeting in Reston, Virginia, in 1990, I concluded that this was indeed the "real deal" and we needed a counterpart organization in Florida. (...and other states as well—but they could take care of themselves, and several were. In fact, the race was on, although we didn't know it at the time.)

Accordingly, on June 4, 1991, while still the Director of the Transportation Research Center at University of Florida, I wrote to then FDOT Secretary of Transportation, Ben Watts, proposing formation of a state-level organization to promote and facilitate IVHS information exchange. I didn't hear back for a year or so and later learned that Secretary Watts, who was a charter member of the IVHS America Board of Directors, was concerned about competition with the national organization. (This indeed became an issue in several of the fledgling state organizations.) In September 1991, I sent a follow-up letter clarifying the competition issue and assuring that was not the intent. Still no response.

But FDOT wasn't blind about IVHS. On April 13, 1992, FDOT established its first formal policy on IVHS Concepts and Technologies, declaring it FDOT policy to consider IVHS in any major transportation improvement. Meanwhile, the first major IVHS demonstration project, TravTek, was getting cranked up in the Orlando area.

Then on May 19, 1992, an informal meeting of FDOT (Frank Carlile, then Assistant Secretary), FHWA Florida Division (Jim Skinner, Division Administrator), Florida Section Institute of Transportation Engineers (FSITE) (Jack Freeman), University of South Florida (Mike Pietrzyk), and University of Florida (yours truly) met at the 2nd IVHS America Annual Meeting in Newport Beach, California. Standing around a luncheon table in a hallway, munching sandwiches, we discussed and quickly agreed, in principle, to pursue "IVHS Florida." Frank Carlile invited us to meet at the FDOT office in Tallahassee, and, on June 5, we met in the Secretary's conference room and, in effect, founded IVHS Florida. While Frank Carlile was out of the room to take a call, the rest of us named him president and chairman of the board. We were giddy with power!

I was charged with drafting a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for IVHS Florida and Mike Pietrzyk with organizing the first "IVHS Florida Forum." Several drafts of the MOU were distributed in the subsequent months, and then, on November 4, 1992, the first IVHS Florida Forum, co-sponsored with FSITE, was held in Orlando. Dr. James Costantino, Executive Director of IVHS America, was the keynote speaker and announced that, if we signed the MOU ASAP, we would be the first "state chapter." Four of us signed that day. Then days later (after a legal review) on November 10, 1992, Secretary Watts added the final signature to the IVHS Florida Charter to officially create the organization. I'm told that we beat Texas by about a week.

In 1994, we renamed the organization to "ITS Florida," following ITS America's lead. I might add that I was one of two dissenting votes at the ITSA ATMS Committee meeting—the largest by far—feeling that "IVHS" was unique, whereas "ITS" had established research and other centers around the country. And worse of all, it would likely be mistaken as "its"—as has often been the case. Well, you can't win them all, but I have an IVHS story I'll be happy to share if you're interested, which, in the end, might have justified the change. ITS Florida also became an official charter-affiliated chapter of ITS America (1995), got incorporated as a 501(c)(3) in Florida, and joined the ranks of real-world associations.

## Our Values

The birth of ITS Florida and our early years in terms of events was described in the March 2005 issue of this newsletter, but what was our purpose? From the beginning, we aspired to be a forum for information exchange and outreach for our “new” industry. We would not be a playmaker or team-builder (unlike a few of our early sister chapters) to “get the bucks.” We would not compete with IVHS America; rather we would be a grass roots supporter, funneling local views up to them, and disseminating their good works to our members. Like all volunteer organizations, we were not entirely effective in either of these, but over the years, a number of endeavors have grown and borne fruit, such as:

- Our early annual ITS Florida Forums were successful educational and networking events. We partnered with the Florida Section Institute of Transportation Engineers (FSITE) for all of these, and still do so today. This has been a great partnership for both organizations, avoiding the rigors of competition and divisiveness among our many overlapping members, while producing successful joint ventures.
- In 2000, ITS Florida joined with FSITE, FDOT, FHWA, and the University of Florida to co-host the millennium statewide transportation event, “Transpo2000–The Future is Now!” in Orlando, featuring every aspect of transportation, literally from earthworks to space. This was arguably the largest statewide transportation event ever in Florida up to that time (about 750 attendees), and certainly the most successful exhibition (104 exhibits, although our 1995 forum in Tallahassee had been a very well-attended exhibit as well, and gave us encouragement to do this in the future).
- Transpo2000 was intended to be a one-time event, but our exhibitors encouraged us–ITS Florida–to continue. So, again in partnership with FSITE, FDOT, and FHWA, we hosted “Transpo2002–Safety Under the Sun: Technology for Safe and Secure Transportation,” an ITS/operations/planning-only conference in Orlando, attended by 488 and 54 exhibitors.

When we were planning for this (now) traditional biennial event, we selected Jacksonville for 2004. We were taken with much of the sports tradition of Jacksonville, with the world-class golf (and home of the PGA), Gator Bowl, Super Bowl XXXIX, and the annual Florida-Georgia game. The latter led to two significant decisions: 1) the conference title we chose was “Transpo2004: Border Wars–Building Bridges to Overcome Barriers,” and 2) obviously, invite Georgia to co-sponsor. Thus our first truly southeast regional ITS *et al* event was co-sponsored by ITS Florida and Georgia, Florida and Georgia Sections ITE, FDOT and GDOT, and FHWA (namely the two Divisions and the Southern Resource Center). About 500 attendees and 72 exhibitors declared Transpo2004 an unqualified success. We believe this was the largest ITS event in the nation outside of ITS America’s Annual Meeting and Expositions and the ITS World Conferences (periodically held in this country). I was honored to be the general chairman, with the outstanding support of Phil Mann (City of Gainesville, representing FSITE) as program chair, Pete Vega (FDOT District 2) as promotions chair, Cheryl Freeman (Parsons Brinckerhoff and First Coast Chapter, FSITE) as the local arrangements

committee chair, and a large group of dedicated volunteers who worked their tails off through four hurricanes and a tropical storm to pull it all together. But I digress—just wanted to thank these folks.

- In December 1998, under the leadership of FHWA’s Grant Zammit, we formed the ITS Florida “Team of Champions” to promote ITS awareness and provide customized training. In March 2002, we renamed this effort the ITS Florida Professional Capacity Building (PCB) Program to be consistent with the national moniker for training activities. Under both names, ITS Florida has sponsored dozens of workshop, seminars, and “Lunch-and-Learn” forums in subjects ranging from public-private partnerships to fiber optics and the National ITS Architecture. Several thousands of Floridians have attended; indeed, the Web-based Lunch-and-Learn series (offered by PBS&J) has drawn audiences from other states and Canada.
- In August 2001, FDOT designated ITS Florida as its official Advisory Council, the first such designation in the nation. We have offered advice on training and other minor topics, but last year the Florida Transportation Commission (FTC) asked us to develop performance measures for FDOT’s ITS Program. This project was so successful that the FTC charged FDOT with expanding it to include new data-collection efforts (which had previously not been allowable), an effort that is now underway using the same study team, albeit under direct FDOT oversight. In December of last year the FTC approached us again, this time to offer advice on co-location of multi-agency transportation management centers. This effort is underway.
- ITS Florida has also offered informal-to-formal advice and counsel to others, including former Senator Bob Graham, ITS America, the Federal Communications Commission (regarding the designation of 511 as the national traveler information number), and others.
- In 2002, ITS Florida initiated an Annual ITS Awareness event at the Capitol in Tallahassee. We have toned this down to simple one-on-one meetings with key legislators, which actually began last year.
- For several years we have been partnering with FDOT for joint ITS activities in conjunction with their ITS Working Group Meetings. Our Board of Directors regularly meets during this timeframe, as it did in March 2005.
- ITS Florida, under the leadership of Anne Brewer of FDOT District 5, is developing an “ITS Florida Tour” that will be a virtual tour of our major ITS facilities in the state, such as TMCs. If security concerns don’t negate this, the system could also be a vehicle for arranging physical tours by visiting ITS professionals from around the state, nation, and world.

In short, we have been a very proactive organization in the areas of training, information exchange, networking, and, now increasingly, as a trusted advisor to state and other agencies.

## Our (well, at least my) Vision

The state of our society is strong. We currently have the largest organizational membership in our 12 ¼-year history, at 112. We are recognized as a leading state chapter in the nation. We have a great partnership with our close collegial association (FSITE) and our prime mover and shaker, FDOT. But we need to expand our net to include more local agencies. Membership Chair, Mike Pietrzyk, is working to engage more local transportation agencies on a targeted regional basis. If you work for city or county transportation, get ready—Mike, or an ITS Florida colleague, will be in touch soon.

This is the same with the MPOs. We only have a few MPO members, although several have been quite active in the past. Of all local agencies, the MPOs hold the greatest power to deploy urban-based ITS on a scale that no others can. We need to enlist their full support, not just to toot the horn of ITS, but to reap the benefits of more effective traffic management and operations.

We have just come off the great success of Transpo2004, but more important is the fact that our tireless Program Committee, under the leadership of Phil Mann from the City of Gainesville, his track chairmen, and mostly the nearly 70 presenters, all prepared their program tracks or individual presentations amidst the onslaught of five major storms—Bonnie, Charley, Frances, Ivan, and Jeanne—that hit our shores, cities, and homes this past summer. It is a tremendous credit to our transportation profession that we absorbed this horrific set of blows (pardon the pun) and kept the transportation system running as well as it did. ITS had a key role in all this, but the story hasn't really been told. This sets the stage for where I see ITS Florida and our professional community going in the coming years. The transportation community needs to do three things:

1. Plan better for dealing with large-scale events of all kinds (including storms, fires, and special events),
2. Integrate our incident and emergency management resources better to cooperatively deal with these events, and
3. Deploy redundant systems that can keep agencies in touch, communicate with the public, and dispatch needed assistance in a timely manner.

ITS Florida can be a bully pulpit for planning for the future. As an example, the Florida Transportation Commission has again asked ITS Florida to advise on a crucial topic of the day—agency collocation in TMCs (that is FDOT, Florida Highway Patrol, and other traffic and incident managers working together in regional centers). It's a pipe dream to believe that this will happen everywhere, but an ITS community-wide examination of the pros, cons, and wherefores is an important and correct role for ITS Florida.

I have stated on several occasions that the proper future role for ITS America is to somewhat return to its roots and be the clearinghouse for, and advocate of, advancing technology applications in transportation. As a state chapter, we need not do research and development ourselves, but we need to stay abreast so we can inform our member organizations of coming opportunities to serve their travel customers.

We can do even more than we have in the past to assist in training our practitioners. I firmly believe that performance excellence in our growing number of TMCs and traffic incident management operations (including our wonderful Road Rangers), must be shored up with a system of professional “qualifications and accreditation.” If construction inspectors and testers in highway construction need to have such formal “Qualifications” to test earth, aggregates, asphalt, and concrete; why not fiber splicers, TMC operators, and Road Rangers?

We should be the state’s leading advocate for ITS—not for its namesake, but for the enlightened perspective it brings—namely traffic operations is the key mission of the transportation community. To accomplish this, we need to continually reach out to others in our transportation community, embrace and partner with the public safety community, bring decision makers on board with hard evidence of the values of intelligent/integrated/institutional transportation systems, and educate the public in safer transportation practices.

These are all practical activities that a mostly volunteer organization can guide and nurture, but cannot operate on a sustained basis (at least not without outside financial support), so our role is to examine the needs and formulate recommended actions by public agencies, private companies, academia, and effected associations.

In closing, I thank ITS Florida—particularly its member organizations that elected me, and my many colleagues statewide—for your trust. Working together, we can place Florida and Transpo squarely on the national map of transportation.

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