MEDIA POLICY

The N.C. Department of Transportation has an open and responsive relationship with the media. It is the practice of the department, through the Public Information Office, to work collaboratively with local, state and national media to promote the initiatives of the department as well as educate the public about important transportation issues and policies.

Employees should respond directly to the media when approached about routine matters. Routine matters include details about specific transportation projects or areas in which the employee possesses expertise.

Questions of policy, legislative or legal issues or controversial matters should always be referred to the Public Information Office.

The Public Information Office is the lead office for media relations; especially when there are questions regarding policy, legislative or legal issues and controversial matters. In addition, it is the responsibility of managers and division heads to notify the Public Information Office immediately when important or potentially controversial events occur.

I. What to Do When You Receive a Media Call

Routine Inquiries

For routine inquiries, employees may respond directly to the reporter. Examples of routine matters include: project schedule, general questions about construction and maintenance activities, public hearings or traffic alerts. Respect deadlines and respond promptly. See "Basic Rules for Talking to the Media" in Section III for more information. After the interview, notify the Public Information Office immediately, using the list provided in Section II.A as a guide.

Questions of Policy, Legislative or Legal Issues or Controversial Topics

When a question is received regarding policy, legislative or legal issues or controversial topics, employees should notify the Public Information Office immediately by calling (919) 733-2522. The Public Information Office will assess the situation and determine how to respond. If you are chosen as a spokesperson, the Public Information Office will help you prepare for the interview.

Important Note: If you are in any doubt about whether you should respond to any media question, always consult the Public Information Office.

II. Notification Procedure

A. Media Contact

After responding to the media, contact the Public Information Office at (919) 733-2522 and ask to speak to an available public information officer. Be prepared to provide the following information:

- Date of Media Contact
- Which Media Outlet Contacted You
- Reporter Name
- Question (s)
- Who Responded
- Summarize Response
- When will the story appear?

B. Important or Potentially Controversial Events

It is also the responsibility of all managers and division heads to notify the Public Information Office about important events, with as much advance notice as possible. Examples include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Traffic fatalities or serious injuries resulting from traffic crashes;
- All incidents obstructing travel on major interstates for more than one hour;
- Construction schedule delays on projects with high local interest;
- Construction accidents and environmental hazards;
- Significant opposition or a great amount of concern expressed at a public hearing
- All legislative action-committee action, pending bills and approval of bills related to transportation;
- All staff presentations to the General Assembly;
- Completion of reports requested by the Secretary or General Assembly;
- Changes in departmental procedure or changes in federal regulations that may affect project schedule;
- Lawsuits against the department or staff;
- Alleged criminal activity by employees.

Remember that the final word on whether the Public Information Office needs to be informed about certain events or actions rests with you. If you are in doubt, contact the Public Information Office. Notification should always be made by phone to the Public Information Office number at (919) 733-2522. The office is staffed from 8 a.m. until 5:30 p.m. Monday - Friday. The outgoing message gives you instructions for reaching the public information officer on call after hours.

Be prepared to provide the following:
- Date of action
- Description of action
- Names of staff involved
- Status of project or next action
- Does the media know?

Upon receiving notification, the Public Information Office will alert the Secretary and appropriate Board of Transportation member.

III. Basic Rules When Speaking to the Media

- Respect the reporter's deadline and respond promptly.
- Respond only to what is asked.
- Avoid bureaucratic language, jargon and acronyms; explain in layperson's terms.
- Give facts, not opinions.
- Always tell the truth; it's the easiest to remember.
- Stay on the record.
- If you can't answer a question, be honest and say so.
- Never be condescending or try to set a reporter straight.
- Don't speculate or comment on things outside your area of expertise.
- Be patient.
- Never be argumentative, confrontational or lose your temper.
- Remember, to the reporter, you are NCDOT.