Roadsoft on the Road:
Personalized On-site Support with Roadsoft Developers

During any given year, the Center for Technology & Training staff are veteran road warriors traveling over 30,000 miles annually. The CTT treks around Michigan throughout the year serving the various needs of state, county and local agencies by providing various training programs. However, due to increased travel costs, tightening budgets and efficient use of technologies (such as webinar trainings), time spent on the road for Roadsoft training has largely declined in comparison to the early years of the program. Reduction in travel created the anticipated savings on the travel budget, but a perceived decrease in dialogue with our Roadsoft customers. Gary Schlaff, a senior project manager at the CTT, recognized that costs saved on travel did not compare to the value gained in the personal relationships developed while meeting and working with our Roadsoft customers face to face.

So, starting in 2014, in addition to the standard trainings, Roadsoft on the Road offered more individualized Roadsoft training and support with on-site technical assistance opportunity for interested agencies.

The Traveling Roadsoft Team

The on-site Roadsoft sessions provide agencies with an opportunity to work directly with Roadsoft software developers. During April and October 2015, the Roadsoft on the Road team covered 2500 miles to meet with 12 Michigan agencies who are Roadsoft customers. Since the agencies provide their own Roadsoft data and session topics, our developers can personalize these sessions to each agency's needs. The team can help customers troubleshoot specific issues and apply Roadsoft principles to their specific data sets.

The City of Williamston was one of the municipalities that took advantage of the Roadsoft on the Road sessions in 2015.

Customers reached during our 2500-mile circuit included the cities of Williamston, West Branch, St. Ignace, Portage, and Rogers City; the Village of Vernon; the road commissions of Barry County, Shiawassee County, Alcona County, Bay County, and Kalamazoo County; and the Kalamazoo Area Transportation Study.

The 2015 Roadsoft on the Road team included three of the CTT's software developers. Sean Thorpe focuses on providing customer support for Roadsoft as well as writing Roadsoft Mobile. Mike Pionke has worked as a software engineer for the CTT for 10 years; he specializes in pavement modeling and asset management. And, Mary Crane has been a software engineer with the CTT for nine years with a focus on Safety Module and TAMC Reporting. Thorpe, Pionke, and Crane have degrees

from Michigan Technological University's computer science and mathematics programs.

Benefits of Roadsoft on the Road

The concept behind Roadsoft on the Road is to provide Roadsoft expertise to the unique issues agencies face. For example, one on-site session might include strategizing new ways to obtain millage and learning methods for importing, exporting, and updating data. Or, if an agency must provide data for presentations of websites, a Roadsoft expert can demonstrate the process in a way that best suits the agency. Roadsoft customers can also schedule a Roadsoft Tech Assist session to learn how to use the Laptop Data Collector (LDC) or Roadsoft Mobile.

The direct contact between Roadsoft developers and customers was invaluable for learning Roadsoft, according to City of West Branch Clerk/Treasurer John Dantzer. The CTT team was "very helpful in showing us what the program was capable of doing and how it could help us in our future planning and budgeting processes", said Dantzer. Roadsoft on the Road also provides customers with the advantage of instruction in advanced Roadsoft techniques. Jake Welch, SWO project manager with Barry County Road Commission, felt his agency benefitted from the personalized instruction. He explained, "Every county has stuff set up differently, it was priceless to have [the CTT] be able to look at how we were doing things and get their thoughts as to what we could do differently or where we were on the right path." Because of the individual session format, Roadsoft on the Road can cover both the basic principles and advanced features that will most benefit a customer's work process.

When agencies can bring Roadsoft expertise into their own envi-ronments, they can find new and more efficient ways of tackling their unique processes. Roadsoft on the Road participant Megan Arndt, an associate planner with Kalamazoo Area Transportation Study, shared Welch's viewpoint, saying, "Sean and Mike [Roadsoft team members] were able to solve a few issues with my version of Roadsoft and answered specific questions that I had. Overall, the conversation on ways that I felt that Roadsoft could be more beneficial to me was the most valuable part of the experience." Offering relevance between the software and specific agency processes is one of many benefits to participating in Roadsoft on the Road.

For Toby Kuznicki, engineering and zoning assistant with the City of Rogers City, the personal connection with the CTT staff was one of the most valuable things he gained from his time with the Roadsoft on the Road team. Because Kuznicki calls himself an "occasional Roadsoft user", he feels that "every time [he uses] the program it is almost like…learning it over again." Kuznicki says, "For me support is key, so I don't get hung up and waste a lot of time on something that a little technical help can walk me through in minutes." The value added to agencies participating in Roadsoft on the Road is measurable in resolved issues, new knowledge, and personal connections that not only help the agencies using Roadsoft, but help to guide future Roadsoft development.

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Building Relationships

Providing our customers this opportunity to engage face to face with our software developers serves to improve Roadsoft through greater insight by our developers into customers' daily processes. Because the developers on the Roadsoft on the Road team meet with agencies individually, they go beyond simply meeting with an audience of 400-plus Roadsoft customers or

having a technical support phone conversation. Pionke, who has travelled four times with Roadsoft on the Road, enjoys meeting people to see how they use Roadsoft in their particular circumstances and context. He explains that, "going to the agencies in person allows us to examine in detail what they are trying to accomplish and how Roadsoft can help. We also get ideas to make the program more useful [to them]." The value added for the CTT is a clearer understanding of who our customers are, what their needs are, and creates a richer emotional stake in the development of Roadsoft.

When Roadsoft developers get to know people like Dantzer, Welch, Arndt, and Kuznicki, these face-to-face interactions are helping our developers "better understand what people are using the software for and how they use it," says Crane. It gives the developers a chance to learn from their users, she points out. For example, Thorpe explains that "by engaging [customers] directly, we can ask very specific questions about what [our customers] like, dislike or otherwise. It also gives developers a better understanding of real world usage of the program." Building and maintaining relationships with our customers is an integral part of our technical support, training, and effectively all our services offered by the CTT.

Toby Kuznicki (left) and Mike Pionke (right) during a Roadsoft session, which provides our customers direct contact with Roadsoft developers

Mike Pionke (left) and Sean Thorpe (right) at the Bay County Road Commission office during a Roadsoft on the Road training event.

Upcoming Opportunities

Roadsoft on the Road sessions are typically offered on-site in the spring and fall. Alternatively, customers can set up a personalized instruction webinar at any time during the year. If you schedule a Roadsoft on the Road training, preparing for the session will optimize your experience. Keep a list of questions about issues that you experience while you are using Roadsoft, suggests Crane, to ensure that the Roadsoft on the Road is able to address your specific needs and concerns. She also advises clients to prepare for server access during the training in case backups and troubleshooting are necessary. Be sure that you are using the latest release of Roadsoft, notes Thorpe. Use the opportunity for networking, both developers advise; invite stakeholders and other nearby agency to attend your Roadsoft on the Road training. Your time investment will be rewarded: Don Nickels from the Shiawassee County Road Commission declares that "the time spent was well worth it."

Keep an eye on our website, www.roadsoft.org, for upcoming Roadsoft on the Road events.

Upcoming Training

We are currently planning the 2016 Roadsoft training schedule.
Please check our website frequently for the most up-to-date Roadsoft training events.

www.roadsoft.org