Office of
Program Policy Analysis
And Government Accountability

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Follow-Up Report on the
Quality Assurance Review Process
Used by the Florida Department of Transportation

Abstract

The Department has taken most of the actions we recommended to improve its Quality Assurance Review process. The goal of the Quality Assurance Review Process is to help the Department's Central Office ensure consistent application of statewide policies, procedures, and standards among its district offices. The Department is in the process of revising its Quality Assurance Review database, which is the remaining action needed to implement our recommendations.

Purpose

In accordance with s. 11.45(7)(f), F.S., this follow-up report informs the Legislature of actions taken by the Department of Transportation (FDOT) in response to our Report No. 95-11, which we issued November 1, 1995. This report presents our assessment of the extent to which the Department has addressed the findings and recommendations included in our report.

Background

Chapter 20, F.S., provides that FDOT is to operate on a decentralized basis, with primary responsibility for implementing transportation programs vested in its eight districts. In conducting their operations, the districts are to follow statewide policies, procedures, and standards developed by FDOT's Central Office.

Statewide consistency is an important goal for FDOT. Significant differences among districts in implementing construction standards could increase road building and maintenance costs as well as cause quality and safety problems. Differences in district operating methods could also be confusing for private consultants and contractors who design and construct Florida's roads and bridges.

FDOT's Central Office is charged with monitoring its district operations to ensure compliance with statewide policies, procedures, and standards. FDOT has developed the Quality Assurance Review (QAR) process as its primary oversight method. In these reviews, Central Office staff typically conduct site visits in the districts to review documents and interview district employees; staff may also observe field operations. At the end of the review, an exit meeting is held at which the results and recommendations are discussed with the district secretary and staff. The Central Office then issues a written report. The district being evaluated must respond to any instances of noncompliance cited in the report.

QARs are conducted by each Central Office unit with oversight responsibility. Central Office managers prepare monitoring plans and schedules for their QARs. Most Central Office units review each district annually, but do not check all district activities during each visit. The Quality Management Office within the Office of the Secretary is responsible for establishing general procedures for QARs. This Office also maintains a database that lists summaries of all QAR reports.

Prior Findings

Although we concluded that the FDOT QAR process was providing reasonable oversight of the districts, we identified several areas where improvements could be made.

First, we recommended that FDOT revise its procedures to require that staff complete a QAR checklist for each review and to standardize report formats. Standardizing the report formats and using checklists to document reviews would enable FDOT to quantify QAR results and measure performance over time. This would also provide more consistency to the process and more assurance that all required areas of district operations were assessed regardless of which staff conducted the reviews.

Second, we recommended that all items of noncompliance cited during QARs be reassessed within a reasonable period of time. This follow-up should either be documented in subsequent QAR reports or in separate follow-up reports that are forwarded to senior managers. This follow-up is important to ensure that cited cases of noncompliance are resolved.

Third, we recommended that the QAR database incorporate information from QAR checklists. This would enhance FDOT's ability to assess compliance trends and identify areas of district operations that are problematic; these areas could then be addressed through training and/or procedural changes. Currently the database includes summary narrative text of the results of QARs. Because the information is summarized in a narrative format, managers cannot readily use the database to identify compliance trends. Using checklists to record results in the database would help quantify the QAR results and enable FDOT to measure performance over time.

Lastly, we recommended that FDOT continue to work with industry groups to identify and resolve instances in which districts may not be operating in a reasonably consistent manner.

Current Status

The Department reports that it implemented the following changes:

- Department staff complete a QAR checklist for each review;

- QAR reports regularly include standard report subject headings;

- District noncompliance items cited during QARs are reassessed and documented in subsequent QAR reports; and

- Industry groups and the Department continue to work together and "reasonable consistency" is one of the issues monitored.

The Department reports it is in the process of implementing our remaining recommendation to revise the QAR database to incorporate information from the QAR checklist.