Utah Transportation Center Awarded Funding | Utah Transportation Center

The Utah Transportation Center, housed in the College of Engineering at Utah State University, has been awarded $550,000 to help the state and the country with transportation needs.

The United States is faced with an aging infrastructure, and that problem is coupled with limited fiscal means to meet these demands. The funding to USU will be used to support student-based research to find innovative ways to address these needs. The money will primarily be used to fund graduate student research to find solutions to state as well as national needs.

Three engineering professors will be involved in the project, including Paul Barr, an associate professor of civil and environmental engineering and director of the Utah Transportation Center; assistant professor Kevin Heaslip; and professor Marvin Halling.

“We have a great working relationship with the Utah Department of Transportation and will actively look for ways to use it to help them build and manage our infrastructure,” Barr said.

The U.S. Department of Transportation invests in the future of transportation through its University Transportation Centers Program, which awards grants to universities across the United States to advance the state-of-the-art transportation research and develop the next generation of transportation professionals.

“This success illustrates the fruits of all the hard work that has been performed over the past five years since the establishment of the Utah Transportation Center at USU,” Barr said. “This includes Long-Term Bridge Performance Program, Automated Electric Transportation, Local Technical Assistance Program and other state and federal projects totaling approximately $10 million over the past five years.”

Barr said the new funding will come from two tiers of sources. The first is with a combination of eight other universities. This collaboration will result in $300,000 each year and will be led by Barr. The second source, Tier 2, will be from the Mountain Plains Consortium that incorporates USU with seven other schools. This partnership will result in $250,000 annually led by Heaslip.

The universities will work together to solve transportation problems in each state, particularly focusing on infrastructure problems and limited fiscal means to fix it, and finding the best way to solve them. Barr said one of the important things the U.S. DOT has done is move from a competitive and earmark-based program to a purely competitive program that forced the collaboration of multiple universities.

“This collaboration will facilitate discussion from people at various universities and departments of transportation,” Barr said. “We can utilize the best practices from each of these states and work to find the best solution for our national needs.”

Barr said proposals were from universities across the United States.

“Looking at the caliber of schools that we have teamed with shows just how far we have come in terms of a national reputation,” Barr said. “I think that it also says that we are seen as having a strong core that will be successful in the future.”

Five years ago, the college received start-up grant funding from Sen. Orrin Hatch and Sen. Bob Bennett.

“We have used that money to develop a program that was competitively selected based on our past accomplishments against some of the best schools across the country,” Barr said.

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