



Special Libraries Association (SLA) Transportation Community (SLATRAN) History

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Early History

The Special Libraries Association (SLA) was founded in 1909 in the United States by a group of librarians working in specialized settings. SLA was led by John Cotton Dana, who served as the first SLA president from 1909 to 1911.

Transportation librarianship in the U.S. dates back even earlier, when a group of dedicated transportation library champions operated together informally. The first transportation library in the U.S. may have been the Altoona Mechanics' Library (Altoona, PA), which existed from 1858-1926.

When the Transportation Research Board (TRB) (then named the Highway Research Board - HRB) was founded in 1920, one of its missions was to collect and coordinate transportation research, and in 1926 it received \$8,000 for the project. The formal organization of transportation librarians and libraries within

SLA began in the mid-1920s. At that time, a Transportation Committee was formed within SLA's Commercial-Technical Group.

The official SLA Transportation Group was founded in 1943. SLA renamed Groups as Divisions in 1950 after deciding on the change the previous year; in 2020, Divisions became Communities.

The importance of the aeronautical and rail industries in the years leading up to and during the Second World War necessitated the librarians in both industries to collaborate more frequently. These librarians formed the SLA Transportation Group in 1943, with aviation and rail librarians occupying a strong presence within the group's early membership.

Adrian Alexis Paradis, Assistant Secretary with American Airlines at the time, was the first chair of the Transportation Group, and was the advocate who asked SLA for official group status. Paradis was also an author and educator who wrote many children and adult books, including *Librarians Wanted: Careers in Library Service*, 1959; *From Trails to Superhighways, The Story of America's Roads*, 1971; *Opportunities in Aviation*, 1980; and *Opportunities in Transportation*, 1983.

Emma Quigley (Librarian for the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority from 1937-1958) was one of the ten founding members of the SLA Transportation Group in 1943, when LA Metro was called Los Angeles Railway. She served as co-chair of the SLA Transportation Division in 1946. The other SLA Transportation Division members were mostly from railroad organizations back then. LA Metro may be the only "legacy" member from the founding group.

SLATRAN History and Archive

Rather than reinvent the wheel and redocument it here, much of SLATRAN's early history is chronicled at [Celebrating 50 years on the Move: Transportation Division, Special Libraries Association 1943-1993](#). Our early activities included a union list.

A special logo was also created for the 70th anniversary of SLATRAN.



The [SLATRAN Archive](#), available to SLA Transportation Community members, lists SLA Business Meeting and Board Meeting minutes from 2007 to the present. SLATRAN published a quarterly newsletter called the [Kaleidoscope](#), which was issued between 2012- 2017.

GTRIC

A group of State DOT librarians (IA, NC, KY, WA, and MN) gathered at the SLA Annual Meeting in 1976 in Denver, CO. At the meeting, there was concern about a lack of opportunities for input on national issues and a lack of involvement in development of a TRB-led effort (TRISNET - Transportation Research Information System Network) to provide access to transportation information resources. TRISNET was set up to include a series of regional centers to provide local access to the network and loans and photocopies of transportation documents cited in the TRIS abstracting/indexing services.

The State DOT librarians involved believed the unique resources held in their collections, along with their understanding due to daily interactions with end users of users' information needs, would be essential to any truly national transportation information network. Following the SLA Annual Meeting, the group decided to petition SLA's Transportation Division to form the Committee on Transportation Libraries and Information Services in State Government, which was the predecessor of GTRIC (Government Transportation Research Information Committee).

In 1980, a U.S. DOT funded project was coordinated through the committee to catalog State DOT library resources into OCLC. Although the OCLC demonstration project never came to fruition, another initiative of the committee, also reported on in the 1979-1980 Annual Report, survives to this day. To increase attendance of State DOT librarians at SLA's annual meetings, the committee put together a workshop in cooperation with TRB and the U.S. DOT Library. The workshop focused on issues of interest to State DOTs, and letters went out to each State DOT librarian encouraging their attendance at the 1980 SLA Annual Meeting in Washington, D.C. The workshop became an annual event known as the annual GTRIC meeting.

In the late 1980s, AASHTO's librarian Joan Kohout approached Barbara Post of TRB with the idea of having a meeting of State DOT librarians. Barbara obtained permission to host it at TRB headquarters and she and Joan worked on planning that meeting. Frank Francois, AASHTO's director, sent a notification that State DOTs should send their librarian or a representative to this meeting. It was extremely well attended. After that meeting, State DOT librarians wanted to continue meeting and it was decided since State DOTs have limited travel capacity, that these meetings be held in conjunction with SLA - thus GTRIC was formed.

Joan, Nelda Bravo, Michael Kleiber, Jean Thomas, and Barbara were some of the early planners for these meetings. The first meetings focused a lot on the role of AASHTO, TRB, and U.S. DOT in the field of transportation. As a result of these meetings, the librarians realized they could access some of the resources that were available, and they developed an NCHRP proposal to develop the Transportation Research Thesaurus (TRT). GTRIC librarians have served on many TRB committees and worked on helping to establish the National Transportation Library (NTL).

Through Nelda's and Northwestern University's Roberto Sarmiento's leadership, GTRIC expanded and for a while had an international government focus. GTRIC had speakers from Germany, England, Panama, Sweden, Finland, and Denmark.

GTRIC served as core programming for the SLA Transportation Division for many years. In 2002-2009, GTRIC was a showcase of projects among its members: digitization, websites, services, indexes, data collection, database access, social media efforts, collection development, outreach, and cooperative efforts. The meeting lasted 6 hours, which was against the SLA rules, so each year division chairs had to seek an exception from the division cabinet to be able to hold it. The board would charge an additional fee for attendance.

From the beginning, GTRIC was endorsed by TRB and AASHTO and had strong participation by the academic transportation and State DOT libraries. TRB and AASHTO brought speakers from outside the library community who provided background on current issues in transportation research, policy, rules, regulations, and congressional authorizations. In the 1990s, GTRIC indirectly helped elevate awareness within FHWA of the important role that information sciences play as a conduit between information creators and users. Jean Thomas and Nelda Bravo led the 1994 FHWA scanning study “Acquiring Highway Information from Abroad,” and transportation librarians were resources for the 1998 FHWA study “Value of Information and Information Services.”

GTRIC also served to better justify State DOT library attendance and travel to a national conference. In some years, GTRIC had a broad mix of presenters from across government as well as its own members that focused on their transportation libraries and collections. Meetings usually had about 50-55 participants. The GTRIC fee would cover lunch since it was a 6-hour event. GTRIC has been a great idea with solid programming.

At the 2023 MLA | SLA Annual Meeting held in Detroit, MI, there were no onsite meetings permitted, so a GTRIC meeting was not held.

Fun Fact

The largest SLA Annual gathering of State DOT librarians with 19 states in attendance was in 2008 in Seattle, WA.

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