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SPECIAL EDITION

TRANSPORTATION RESEARCH BOARD  
OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMIES

# TR NEWS

A portrait of Tom Palmerlee, an older man with white hair, glasses, and a mustache, smiling. He is wearing a blue shirt, a patterned tie, and a dark plaid jacket. The background is a solid dark blue.

FACILITATING  
CHANGE

***TOM PALMERLEE'S  
IMPACT ON PRACTICE***



# TR NEWS

This is a fake edition of the TR News but all the content in it is true.

No committee members were harmed in the collection or production of this material.

While contributors might want to retain the right to intellectual property, it's too late now; we're giving irrevocable rights to Tom Palmerlee and let's add Mark Norman, too, because Tom's too modest to share this with anyone but his wife, Chris.

## **Brought to you by past and present Chairs of the committees that Tom supports and some other folks too!**

- 1 A0030T - Special Task Force on Data for Decisions and Performance Measures
- 2 A0030T - Special Task Force on Data for Decisions and Performance Measures
- 3 AB000 - Policy and Organization Group
- 4 AB010T - Task Force on Knowledge Management
- 5 ABC40 - Transportation Asset Management
- 6 ABJ00 - Section - Data and Information Systems
- 7 ABJ10 - National Transportation Data Requirements and Programs
- 8 ABJ10 - National Transportation Data Requirements and Programs
- 9 ABJ15T - Task Force for the Using Census Data for Transportation Applications Conference
- 10 ABJ20 - Statewide Transportation Data and Information Systems
- 11 ABJ25T - Task Force on the Traffic Monitoring Conferences
- 12 ABJ30 - Urban Transportation Data and Information Systems
- 13 ABJ35 - Highway Traffic Monitoring
- 14 ABJ35 - Highway Traffic Monitoring
- 15 ABJ40 - Travel Survey Methods
- 16 ABJ45T - Task Force on Understanding New Directions for the National Household Travel Survey
- 17 ABJ50 - Information Systems and Technology
- 18 ABJ60 - Geographic Information Science and Applications
- 19 ABJ60 - Geographic Information Science and Applications
- 20 ABJ70 - Artificial Intelligence and Advanced Computing Applications
- 21 ABJ70 - Artificial Intelligence and Advanced Computing Applications
- 22 ABJ90 - Freight Transportation Data
- 23 AFB80 - Geospatial Data Acquisition Technologies in Design and Construction
- 24 AT000 - Freight Systems Group
- 25 AT010 - Freight Transportation Economics and Regulation
- 26 AT015 - Freight Transportation Planning and Logistics
- 27 AT015 - Freight Transportation Planning and Logistics
- 28 AT025 - Urban Freight Transportation
- 29 AT040 - Transportation of Hazardous Materials
- 30 AT055 - Truck Size and Weight
- 31 AT060 - Trucking Industry Research



## Volunteers telling it like it is



### **Facilitating Change: Tom Palmerlee's Impact on Practice**

*Fifteen years, thousands of people*

*What happens when you're Tom Palmerlee?*

Having a big impact doesn't always come from prolonged effort focused on one product. Sometimes it comes through a smile, a conversation to ponder possibilities, a suggested connection, a word of encouragement, or assistance with a meeting. Through these seemingly small actions, one can inspire events that lead to sustained, incremental change that has a significant impact.

The Transportation Research Board (TRB) staff provide this type of support to each committee, panel or expert task group and the transportation community is better for it. To each TRB employee, a heartfelt thank you. You make it look easy but we all know it's not.

There is one TRB employee we particularly want to recognize for the length, breadth, and depth of his effort and impact.

Thomas "Tom" M. Palmerlee is an Associate Director of the Technical Activities Division at Transportation Research Board. Prior to joining TRB, Tom was executive director for the University Consortium for Geographic Information Science (UCGIS), and for the Urban and Regional Information Systems Association (URISA). In the 1980's he served as a legislative assistant and legislative director for U.S. Senator Malcolm Wallop of Wyoming.

Tom has been with TRB since 1998 when he started as a Senior Program Officer in the Technical Activities Division. In addition to his role as Associate Director of the Technical Activities Division, he currently supports 31 groups, sections, committees and task forces. He also serves as TRB staff liaison to 23 Cooperative Research Projects.

And while that's a lot, this isn't about his workload. This is about the impact Tom has had on people, activities and practices within the transportation community. The primary focus of his portfolio is information management in its many forms. And whether you're working with census data, travel survey data, geographic information systems, remote sensing, visualization.... If you're working with data and information systems in transportation, you know Tom or at least the work that he has in some way influenced.



Tom's warm personality and ready smile help ease any uncertainties one may have about approaching him. This has allowed him to develop a diverse network of individuals including CEOs and technical specialists who represent several technical disciplines, sectors, modes and functions within the transportation community. When ideas emerge, he draws on this network to encourage cross-disciplinary discussions, expedite connections and foster partnerships.

Throughout his 15 year tenure at TRB, Tom has worked with a countless number of people. A small sample of this community was offered the opportunity to provide feedback on that experience. From an analysis of that data, a few themes emerged.



## Career Enhancement

Mentor. That's a word that many of us use when we think of Tom and his impact on our lives. Tom has a way of getting the best out of people.

Through Tom's leadership, suggestions, and support, we have served in capacities we hadn't envisioned and developed partnerships that we might not have considered. Our careers are better for it. We are better for it. What Tom gave to us has echoed in our communities to the students and staff we have worked with.

*He is an advisor, guidance counselor, motivator, teacher, and pilot in helping me navigate through the myriad of TRB activities. Tom is a source of encouragement and support, particularly about latching on to opportunities. He is a resource person, enhancing my personal development and career growth. He is a champion for ABJ20 (and I know with other committees as well), recognizing the committee successes and providing the direction for increased committee opportunities. He can also play the devil's advocate, guiding me through TRB decisions.*

**Jack Stickel**

Tom is a dear friend of mine, and like many others, has taken me under his wing to allow me to make any contribution I have made to the



TRB. Actually, Tom did much more for me and my career, students, and colleagues by tutoring and encouraging me. More important than promotion, the affiliation has provided contacts and opportunities to collaborate with leading data works (as Tom would call them) from Federal, state and local government, other universities, and the private sector from all over the US and well beyond.

## Reg Souleyrette

*Tom had a significant impact on my life and on my success as a former data manager at the Minnesota DOT. Through Tom I became a member of the TRB Statewide Data and Information Committee. And, because of Tom I became increasingly involved in TRB data related activities. Through Tom, I learned the meanings of all kinds of interesting acronyms like NATMEC and CTPP. I had the great pleasure of chairing a research project that resulted in new traffic data guideline recommendations, as well as chairing NATMEC and Census Data conferences. My participation in TRB led to my involvement in AASHTO Standing Committee on Planning (SCOP) activities and ultimately to the former role I was invited to play as Chair of the SCOP Data Subcommittee*

*Through Tom I met so many incredible friends and colleagues. ... I remain indebted to Tom for all I learned and the experiences we shared. We have had so many great times together.*

**Jonette Kreideweis**



## Master of Making Things Happen

Tom is a master at drawing together experts from different disciplines and allowing the innovative spirit to unfold. He serves as the social connector bringing people and networks together. In many ways, the groups that emerge behave as a functional family, productively addressing data challenges and opportunities that are making real contributions to both science and practice. Tom is the modern father of these contributions.

*Of all the skills that Tom has, his ability to mobilize a team and identify resources quickly to get stuff done is the most admirable. Tom has helped me understand how to take what you can get and to get what you can take from your industry peers. Another of Tom's attributes includes staying involved but behind the scenes of many Committees and Sub-Committees. Tom has been a great help in recruiting and connecting skilled resources to maximize efficiency within TRB Committees and Sub-Committees.*

**Liz Stolz**

Tom was a great help in the transition between different senior staff assigned to the Hazardous Materials Transportation Committee leading up to the 2013 Annual Meeting, ensuring that our meeting was a success. His ability to connect the right people and ideas together has enabled great progress in so many areas. His stewardship of the conferences, workshops, and meetings that he has supported over the years has truly made an impact – and made them enjoyable and productive for those on planning committees as well for the participants. It's always a pleasure to work with Tom!

**Mark Lepofsky**



*Tom is a wise master in the art of making things happen, taking the straightest line between two points. I've watched in awe as he puts peer exchanges in motion, finding funding, motivating volunteers, keeping schedules and people on track, making the comment or phone call that gets things unstuck, all in the most pleasant, egoless way. He is a complete dream to work with, and a model for all of us.*

**Frances Harrison**

With just one phone call, Tom can convince me to “volunteer” for an activity that will be good for me! Tom is the master at bringing people together to organize a conference, facilitate a peer exchange, or support a task force. His power lies in his charming personality, his willingness to make volunteering as painless as possible, and his commitment to finding ways to get people involved in addressing issues in transportation. Through many years of working with this wonderful man, I have learned to accept any opportunity that is offered to me because 9 times out of 10 his suggestions have improved my life both personally and professionally. The Transportation Asset Management Committee (ABC40) wouldn't have accomplished as much as we have without Tom's assistance. On behalf of all of our committee members or friends, we want to wish Tom a hearty “thank you.” We couldn't have done it without you!

**Katie Zimmerman**

*Tom Palmerlee is the most effective person I know when it comes to working with a group of volunteer professionals. He makes sure the right priorities are on the table and the committees stay focused. When we wanted to expand industry participation from IT companies and senior public sector technology leaders, Tom made sure that TRB was a welcoming environment. On a personal note, Tom is a friend, mentor, and colleague. He is always there when you need him. I appreciate his support all the years that we worked together and look forward to many more.*

**C. Douglass Couto**



## The Volunteer Whisperer

One of the most common statements made about Tom is along these lines:

*Even when you haven't done your homework, Tom is always there with a genuine smile of appreciation and encouragement.*

**Reg Souleyrette**

He is gracious and kind. He helps you find the best in yourself and that next ounce of wherewithal to "git 'er done".

*Herder of Cats, Wizard of TRB*

*Getting volunteers to do ANYTHING is like herding cats. It's really worse, because some volunteers actually have a conscience, which leads them to agree to do something, after which they often do nothing.*

*Tom Palmerlee is the best cat herder at TRB. I think he is the best in the business. He gets his volunteers to do things – very good things, sometimes great things. They do those things, and they like doing them. Even more than painting fences for Tom Sawyer.*

## Wise Counsel

A small suggestion here, an introduction there, a gentle reminder or three.... We value Tom's coaching and wise counsel.

*It is hard to imagine what our TRB experience would be without Tom. We all benefit from his guidance and insights in so many ways. He always has time for a question, and is ready with a kind word or a compliment to encourage us.*

*The most memorable advice that Tom has given me (so far ...) is to remember that TRB is a volunteer organization. The group may agree that it is really important to do X, but if there is not a champion for that initiative, it won't go far. Instead, focus the group's energy where there are natural champions, and the committee/task force/subcommittee will be a resounding success. Tom, thank you for all you do to make TRB the success and resource that it is!!*

**Stacey G. Bricka**

When Tom speaks, people listen. His voice conveys wisdom and energy. Tom inspires people, who are active professionals with many other demands on their time, to go that extra mile, give that last ounce of effort, because they know the outcome will be a quality product. His seemingly 24/7 presence keeps multiple projects organized, on track and goal-focused. He readily communicates with practitioners and chief executive officers at the same level of understanding.

**James Hall**

*He is the connector, linking this idea to that one, telling us about someone down the hall, at some DOT, in some obscure university, who is doing interesting, relevant things that we need to bring into our tasks. He knows them all. And, all know him.*

*I know how he does it. He knows his people. He treats them well. He supports them, reminds them, reminds them again, backs them up, gives them the ideas, gives them the credit. He is a volunteer whisperer. The not-quite-silent source of good ideas: "You could do this... you might do that...better get her to do this..."*

*He is a friend. More than a friend. He's a brother who knows his siblings, their strengths and weaknesses, and he has a way of working with both. Making us look good. Making us feel good. Making us work hard and like it.*

*He's the Wizard of Oz, Frank Baum behind the curtain in the Emerald City that is TRB. All that motion you see? He makes it happen.*

*In fact, he is TRB. Which is why we love him.*

**Joe Schofer**







It is an immense pleasure and honor to have the privilege to work with Tom on TRB Committee activities. His broad and far-reaching knowledge allows him to relate so well with so many areas of transportation. He is uniquely positioned to facilitate a diverse group of Transportation Research professionals. His open mind, guidance and assistance throughout the year with TRB committee chairing responsibilities is so helpful and refreshing, it makes chairing a TRB committee a fun thing to do, not a burden on our regular workload. Tom is a "walking encyclopedia" when it comes down to TRB Committees, whether to provide a helping hand, or to remind Chairs of important timelines. Without Tom, TRB Committees would not be as successful as they are. We owe him quite a bit, and will forever be grateful. Keep up the good work Tom!

**Guy Rousseau**

Through my days as a committee chair, Tom was my "better half" -- the superior half of leading the committee to have real impact on transportation research. He's knows what needs to be done and how best to get it done. Thank you, Tom.

**Johanna Zmud**

## The Human Touch

Tom is such a genuine and caring person. Whether encouraging development of some activity or concept, explaining the process steps, or commiserating over the loss of loved ones, he listens with not only his mind but his heart. It's why so many who work with him call him a friend.

*Before smart phones were invented, you knew if you sent Tom an email or left him a phone message, you would hear back from him the very same day (very impressive track record for the times). But when technology caught up with Tom (I am sure they had Tom in mind during the invention stages of the smart phone), things changed. Tom is now available day or night; weekdays or weekends; whether you are calling from the US or another country: Tom will be with you in a moment – and he always is!!! Tom has increased the speed of communication, problem identification, and alternative action answers – we are very lucky to have Tom's willingness to be there for us – if there is a performance measure for responsiveness to issues – Tom is the "state of the art"*

**Kate Lawson**

My life has been enriched through my work with TRB and Tom Palmerlee has been a significant part of that. I wish I knew who pointed Tom my way so I could say thank you. And I am really glad to say THANK YOU! to Tom. He's a joy to work with and I look forward to what we can cook up next.

**Leni Oman**

*Ideas he does plant  
Without any slant  
For he is deeply caring  
About information sharing.*

*He is a man who loves brevity  
But he's is not short on levity  
He always has an open mind  
One who's caring and kind.*

*Soft spoken but firm is he  
As a silent mover at TRB  
A gentle giant is he  
This is our Tom Palmerlee.*

**Shashi Nambisan**

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## Thank you, Tom!

*I have had the privilege to work with Tom on many different projects over the years, including helping with numerous conference and workshop proceedings. I benefited from his guidance, knowledge, organization, and hard work as Chair of the Policy and Organization Group. I have continued to benefit from his wisdom and help as Chair of the Technical Activities Council. Tom always has time to help with questions, noodle on ideas, and provide suggestions. He is an all-around outstanding person and I feel very lucky to know and work with him.*

**Katie Turnbull**

With his knowledge, encouragement, initiative, and support, information management practices in the transportation community have continued evolve. You may not find him listed as co-author on many papers but he is there, behind the scenes, listening, suggesting, encouraging, and helping put change into action.

Tom is not retiring and we're definitely not saying goodbye. We just wanted to take a moment to let him know his work is valuable to us and how much we appreciate him. This is only a representative sample of the lives he's touched. Multiply it a thousand-fold to all the committee members and friends; all the federal, state, local, and private partners; his co-workers; and those he's just happened upon and engaged in a hallway conversation.... then you may begin to see the impact he has had on practice.

***Thank you, Tom, for being you and for supporting us.***

***Thank you for that charming smile that keeps us going.  
We'd recognize it anytime, anywhere!***

