

TRB Annual Meeting 2008
Committee on Library and Information Science for Transportation – ABG40
Transportation Research Thesaurus (TRT) Subcommittee Meeting
January 14, 2008
Washington Hilton, Grant Room

Present: Bob Cullen, Matthew Barrett, Paul Burley, Pat DeSalvo (Chair), Rita Evans (Recorder), Ben Gibbon, Joyce Koeneman, Jim McDonald, Leni Oman, Barbara Post, Guy Rosseau, Sue Sillick, Sandy Tucker, Amanda Wilson, Ken Winter

1. Opening remarks and introductions – Sandy Tucker

Pat DeSalvo said that changes in administration and management of the TRT over the past year make this an ideal time to review and look ahead.

2. History and evolution of the TRT and Subcommittee, scope and current usage, relationship to NCHRP 20-79 – Barbara Post, Sandy Tucker

The first TRT project in 1993, undertaken by David Batty, Gail Batty, Mary Roy, and Michael Kleiber merged terms from the index field in TRIS. The result was about 10,000 approved terms. Facets were then identified to organize terms in a hierarchical structure. The team developed proprietary software using dBase to manage the terms. The second phase involved converting TRIS index terms into TRT terms. TRB began using the TRT in 1998. In 2000, mapping of terms was done; while it was not as precise as hoped, it did work.

While the NCHRP project was complete, the TRT is a living document and Barbara found TRB funding (about \$12,000-15,000 per year) to support maintenance and updating by contract lexicographer Michael Kleiber. LIST proposed integrating TRT into TRIS to allow TRIS to be on web. The TRT is available on TRB's website and can be downloaded.

The TRT Subcommittee was formed to devise a procedure for updating TRT by reviewing terms for inclusion; an oversight group had been envisioned in early planning for the TRT but was never implemented. NTL indicated its interest in managing the TRT in conjunction with the TRT subcommittee. TRB receives new, uncontrolled terms. Barbara can send those to NTL as well as lists of terms users are inputting during searches so those can be considered for inclusion.

SCOR has approved funding to add definitions to some TRT terms.

Sue Sillick chaired a panel charged with expanding TRT to include definitions of terms that exist in both the TRT and the AASHTO glossary and/or other authoritative sources. The panel refined the problem statement via a conference call. Requests for letters of interest were sent to six recommended consultants. The panel received three responses and selected a potential contractor at a meeting held at TRB in December 2007. The panel has made recommendations for revisions to the proposal and will review the contractor's response.

The official version of the TRT will reside on an NTL server on Data Harmony. This mirrors what is at TRB and is the version that the public sees. The TRT is downloadable (XML) and new terms also can be downloaded. Ken Winter asked if there's an automatic way to be notified when there are new terms to eliminate the human element of having to remember to look or to ask TRB to send something.

3. Role of the NTL and changes in the administration and management of the TRT – Amanda Wilson

In February 2007, NTL began discussions with Barbara Post about making the transition to NTL maintenance. They have worked with Michael Kleiber and have asked Tamer El-Diraby, Guy Rosseau, and Anwarul Islam to join the subcommittee to add ontology and related expertise.

Any candidate terms will be reviewed by NTL staff, with two catalogers from the USDOT Library involved.

Records of proposed changes will be reported on a quarterly basis to the subcommittee which will approve or disapprove.

WSDOT staff wrote a white paper, "Aligning the TRT with Expanded Transportation Business Needs," in September 2007. It examines how to broaden TRT usage beyond indexing for TRIS. TRT now has about 9,400 terms.

4. Approval process for TRT terms, specifically the technical review process of the TRT Subcommittee – All

Pat DeSalvo asked about the scope of terms. The subcommittee will see any proposed Candidate Terms

Joyce Koeneman said that a term won't be considered as a Candidate Term unless NTL designates it as such. She assured everyone, however, that "candidate terms" identified by indexers from UC Berkeley, for example, will not be treated as "uncontrolled terms" or put into a batch with "uncontrolled terms."

Leni Oman asked why there are two systems hosting the TRT, TRB and NTL (with Data Harmony)? Why aren't terms sent directly to NTL? Barbara responded that this all ties back to the original NCHRP project requirements and what was funded by SCOR. The maintenance module for the TRT is totally integrated into TRIS and allows indexers to directly access the TRT. Barbara sends Candidate Terms and Uncontrolled Terms to Amanda at NTL monthly. She can also report to NTL which uncontrolled terms are being input most often. Leni reiterated her concern about confusion resulting from having two systems managed by two different entities. Barbara has asked that NTL notify TRB when a Candidate Term from TRIS is demoted to Uncontrolled Term if the subcommittee decides not to accept it as Candidate Term. Leni said there is great benefit in having only one public face for the TRT regardless of whether it is hosted in a variety of places.

Barbara noted that removing the TRT from TRB would be very problematic because TRB is using it in a variety of ways such as a means of leading to searches on TRIS, RiP (TRT is third most frequent path by which users get to RiP), etc. She would be very reluctant to remove TRT's obvious presence from TRB's website.

Joyce said again that "The" TRT is the one that resides on Data Harmony at NTL where it is not available to the public.

Ken Winter noted that some of this discussion might be an issue of communication and noted that automating the communication of changes could be a much better way to proceed than relying on person-to-person communication which is subject to error, omission, etc.

Joyce said there are no official "Candidate Terms" in Data Harmony. Barbara may need to provide a list of Candidate Terms suggested during the past year.

Pat DeSalvo asked if there are other sources of candidate terms, such as TRB committees or AASHTO committees. Tie usage to the operations side and it could make a better argument for using it. Leni and Amanda noted that making inquiries to a group or committee, as opposed to an individual, can minimize bias.

Ken Winter asked where the index terms on state DOT report title pages come from, and Barbara and Sandy Tucker replied that they are supposed to be taken from TRT; that was one of the original selling points to get TRT funding. Could a process be developed so state DOT administrators are aware of the TRT and can suggest candidate terms (this would be one way to deal with the complaint that, "there's nothing in the TRT that adequately covers the concepts in this report.") Ken suggested developing a standard Title Page building device (form) that would be integrated with the TRT.

DOT editors may also be sources for terms. Technical experts may not be the right people to suggest terms.

Pat returned to the topic of the content of reports for candidate terms. What should be in reports? Some context, why was term suggested, where would it fit into hierarchy, etc. would be a great help to subcommittee when making decisions.

Pat asked about effective mechanisms for subcommittee communication. Barbara will investigate using TRB Wet Board software. Andy Everett asked if we could access Data Harmony and Joyce said yes, Notes fields can be added, and there can be read-only access; Joyce will investigate further and see what capability there is although this would not necessarily replace other communication channels.

Rita asked the subcommittee to consider, "Does the Subcommittee need to develop a summary of points to consider for review so that everyone uses same criteria?" which was taken from Approval Process draft from NTL. Leni said that competent catalogers could use some help on "Rules of the Road" and it would greatly reduce number of

inappropriate Candidate Terms being submitted. Amanda and Joyce agreed to draft something. Joyce noted that the thesaurus is for transportation, it is not an all-encompassing vocabulary and additions should be made with that in mind. Perhaps some front ends tools such as drop-down menus could be developed for users.

Rita asked about the functionality of Data Harmony and why it was selected. Joyce said that it provided flexibility, allows for multiple thesauri and presented a better pricing model than other software. Sandy noted that Oracle has a thesaurus module that can be used with the TRT. The TRT can be downloaded from NTL or TRB.

By March, NTL will have first set of terms for review to subcommittee.

Paul asked about the need for “Replacement Term” – if you adopt a new term, how do you go back and make changes or notify users that the change has occurred? Blogs were suggested. Paul said the discussion should be kept public so we don’t lose earlier decisions or points to consider

5. Other roles of the TRT Subcommittee

Other, long-term roles for the subcommittee were discussed including compiling best practices, marketing, and conducting a survey of TRT users.

Sandy will investigate having a meeting of the subcommittee on Saturday, June 14, in the morning in Seattle in conjunction with SLA’s Annual Conference. LIST is tentatively scheduled to meet in Seattle that afternoon.

The meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,
Rita Evans