



# Transportation Vanguard Award 2020 Nomination Form

## Who is being nominated?

Last Name: Jones		First Name: Aaron		Date: September 8, 2020	
Email: N/A – Deceased			Position Title: Special Projects Manager		
Department: Maryland Department of Transportation State Highway Administration				Phone: N/A – Deceased	
Street Address: 707 N. Calvert St.		City: Baltimore	State: MD	Zip code: 21202	
AASHTO Committee Membership (optional): <a href="#">Click here to enter text.</a>					

## Who is nominating this person?

Last Name: Tim		First Name: Smith		Date: September 8, 2020	
Email: TSmith2@mdot.maryland.gov			Position Title: Administrator		
Department: Maryland Department of Transportation State Highway Administration				Phone: 410-545-0400	
Street Address: 707 N. Calvert St.		City: Baltimore	State: MD	Zip code: 21202	
Endorsement of Member Department Secretary/Director (signature): 					

### Instructions:

Using a maximum of 2 additional single-sided pages, please explain why this individual should be selected as the 2020 Transportation Vanguard Award recipient. Please include as much specific information about the candidate as possible, including special projects, personal attributes, dedication, etc.

Send nominations by **September 30, 2020**, via e-mail to [jdawkins@aaashto.org](mailto:jdawkins@aaashto.org). Nominations must be submitted as a **single file** in Microsoft Word format using **TVA2020\_LastName\_FirstName.doc** as the file name.

## AASHTO Vanguard Award

### Maryland Department of Transportation State Highway Administration (MDOT SHA)

Nominee: Aaron Jones, Innovation and Special Projects Manager, Office of Policy and Research  
The Maryland Department of Transportation State Highway Administration (MDOT SHA) nominates the late Aaron Jones, who died suddenly in July at age 38, because of his commitment to innovation and his successful implementation of Maryland's dynamic TRAC/RIDES program encouraging students to become engineers and future transportation professionals.

In the words of MDOT SHA Administrator Tim Smith, "Aaron's commitment to bringing new ideas, his dedication to a wonderfully inspiring program, and most of all his love of young people and his faith in them show how much he accomplished and how many young people he set on their own transportation journeys. In my book that makes him an outstanding candidate for this coveted award."

Aaron Jones was the driving force behind Maryland's participation in AASHTO's TRAC and RIDES programs. Aaron started small, first working with middle and high schools near MDOT SHA's Baltimore headquarters, then gradually expanding, adding schools from across the State and later attracting elementary schools to participate.

Appreciating that departments of transportation need to join America's quest for new technology and solutions, Aaron pioneered major MDOT SHA initiatives that energized transportation workers to find better ways to improve the State's highways.

The initiative dates to a previous administration. In 2015, then-Administrator Greg Johnson made one of his focus areas creating a culture of innovation. He assigned the lead to the Office of Policy Research (OPR), where Aaron worked. Aaron became MDOT SHA's first innovations manager.

Under Mr. Johnson's leadership, Aaron energized the State Transportation Innovation Council (STIC) in coordination with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). MDOT SHA formed a new STIC membership and work plan. MDOT SHA also worked closely with industry partners through the Maryland Quality Initiative (MdQI) to form an innovations subcommittee, which Aaron co-chaired. Aaron sought federal grants, soliciting ideas and preparing applications, in the process working closely with MDOT SHA's federal partners. His efforts were successful: MDOT SHA received federal grant money each year for the last five years.

In 2018, Greg Slater became administrator, building on Greg Johnson's work by establishing four pillars for MDOT SHA: Modernization, Innovation, Customer Experience, and Communication. He asked OPR to revive MDOT SHA's TRAC program to show middle and high school students what transportation and civil engineers do and to generate their interest in careers at MDOT SHA.

Administrator Slater challenged OPR with a goal to form school teams to compete in the first year of the AASHTO National Bridge Challenge. Aaron worked with his contacts in education and outreach to introduce this new program to teachers, principals, and school board members. His warmth and his ability to find new approaches yielded an overwhelmingly positive response.

By the end of MDOT SHA's third year in TRAC, Maryland produced three winning teams (from grade levels 7-8, 9-10, and 11-12) out of a total of 18 national winning teams in the 2020 National Bridge Challenge.

He is warmly remembered by key partners.

"We enjoyed every interaction working with Mr. Aaron Jones; he was a kind heart, a genuine listener, a problem solver, and a true human spirit; I considered him a trustworthy partner and a growing friend," said Mark Sutherland, Community Partnerships Director of the Chesapeake Lighthouse Foundation.

Aaron's crusade to make Maryland transportation more innovative found a new outlet in 2019. Last year, then-Chief Engineer Tim Smith conceived an internal innovation showcase to provide MDOT SHA team members from every department and every part of the State with new techniques in maintenance, construction and traffic management. The showcase would let employees share their inventions, workarounds and ideas throughout the organization. Aaron stepped forward to make the very first showcase a success.

He defined its vision, vital to the initial planning, and developed a framework to display equipment, material use, device deployment, and IT solutions so MDOT SHA staff could examine the exhibits and discuss them with their inventors. He led logistical efforts, securing a facility and launching a website. Most important, Aaron repeatedly reached out to employees and ensured sizable participation in this first MDOT SHA event of its kind.

Feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Participants wrote that their innovations were valued. Ideas got shared. The efforts will allow the program to return after the end of the COVID-19 emergency.

"The outlook for future years is bright, thanks in large part to the leadership of Aaron Jones," concludes Michael Michalski, Director of the MDOT SHA Office of Maintenance.

Aaron Jones' legacy includes accomplishments through the Maryland State Transportation Innovation Council. These include securing an impressive six STIC grants; advancing 35 innovations through rounds of an FHWA Every Day Counts program; creating an innovation exhibit at MdQI; starting a website where State innovation efforts are published; and leading FHWA state innovation forums.

Said Marisela Tavarez of the FHWA Maryland Division, "Under Aaron Jones' leadership, all Maryland transportation stakeholders embraced innovation and made it a permanent tool in their project delivery. His professionalism and positive attitude made him a pleasure to work with, and the relationships that he established with everyone involved with innovation at the federal, State, and local level made everyone feel the spark of innovation and creativity."

For these reasons, MDOT SHA proudly nominates Aaron Jones, and asks that AASHTO salute his accomplishments by bestowing the AASHTO Vanguard Award.