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Transportation Vanguard Award 2020 Nomination Form

***Who is being nominated?***

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Last Name: Kopinski** | **First Name: Eric** | **Date: August 31, 2020** |
| **Email: eric.kopinski@modot.mo.gov** | **Position Title: I-270 North Deputy Project Director** |
| **Department: St. Louis District – Design**  | **Phone: (314) 415-0964** |
| **Street Address: 1590 Woodlake Drive** | **City: Chesterfield** | **State: MO** | **Zip code: 63017** |
| **AASHTO Committee Membership (optional):** Click here to enter text. |

***Who is nominating this person?***

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Last Name: Wolf** | **First Name: Justin** | **Date: August 31, 2020** |
| **Email: justin.wolf@modot.mo.gov** | **Position Title: I-270 North Project Director** |
| **Department: St. Louis District - Design** | **Phone: (314) 453-5057** |
| **Street Address: 1590 Woodlake Drive** | **City: Chesterfield** | **State: MO** | **Zip code: 63017** |
| **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@aashto.org****.** Nominations must be submitted **as a single file** in Microsoft Word format using ***TVA2020\_*** ***LastName\_FirstName.doc*** as the file name.

**2020 AASHTO Transportation Vanguard Award Nomination**

**Eric Kopinski, Missouri DOT**

Throughout his career Eric Kopinski has dedicated his time to investigating and developing innovative solutions related to traffic management. His commitment to excellence and the acceleration of ideas that improve the way that traffic is managed brings customer service and safety to the forefront of all that he does. Since the beginning of his career with the Missouri Department of Transportation (MoDOT) in 2009 as a Construction Inspector in the St. Louis District, Eric Kopinski has demonstrated all the characteristics of a true vanguard and has the track record to prove it. He exemplifies a commitment to innovation, an understanding of the positive outcomes that derive from teamwork and collaboration, and a commitment to excellence in achieving creative and transformational outcomes. He is an excellent candidate to receive the AASHTO Transportation Vanguard Award 2020. Just a glimpse into his vibrant career will convince you of that as well.

When Eric joined the I-270 North team as the Deputy Director in October 2018, he immediately recognized the opportunity the $278 million project brought to north St. Louis County and cities such as Ferguson to provide employment and educational opportunities to a highly diverse population. Eric began working with the team to develop contractual language to incorporate innovative requirements into the Request for Proposal, requiring the contractor to have a robust community outreach program. The community outreach component includes yearly meetings with stakeholders to discuss Disadvantaged Business Enterprises (DBE) and Workforce Diversity (WFD) goals, a Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) component to introduce students to engineering and other employment opportunities in transportation, and contractual language driving the contractor to exercise cultural competence to maximize public outreach to the communities along I-270.

Eric has accomplished much in his career that is innovative, sets a standard for excellence, and demonstrates the value of collaboration and trust. A recent example of this is his push to bring Predictive Analytics to the I-270 North Design-Build Project. He has been instrumental in researching and ultimately guiding implementation for this innovative approach to transportation management that effectively and efficiently uses statistics and modeling techniques to determine future performance. In addition, Eric and the team wanted to ensure that their goal of increasing the use of Transportation Systems Management and Operations (TSMO) to greater degrees than ever before, came to fruition.

Through countless hours of research that began in 2019, Eric and a Senior Traffic Studies Specialist on the I-270 North Project, Ploisongsaeng Intaratip, began to move closer to the goal of using predicative analytics on the project. A major part of that forward movement was a wide-reaching effort to do research and gain input from others. During his research he found that two co-workers had recently utilized a Technology Transfer (T2) grant to visit the RTC of Southern Nevada in the Las Vegas region to learn about a new technology they were using that employed artificial intelligence (AI) to predict traffic conditions and vehicle crashes. This predictive analytics program had been shown to identify crashes more rapidly and more accurately than Las Vegas’ current procedure, predict locations where incidents were most likely to occur, and identify the time frame within hours of when they occurred. That this was a relatively new technique applied in a unique way did not deter Eric. Always striving to innovate, Eric and his team saw an opportunity to use the flexibility and adaptability of predictive systems within the ever-changing conditions of a major construction project on an Interstate highway. Previous applications were system-wide and less targeted.

“That’s who Eric is,” said Dave Simmons, MoDOT Design Liaison Engineer, who worked with him on several projects, including I-270 North. “His creativity in developing and creating performance-based contract language to achieve innovative solutions to difficult problems has no bounds. He refuses to be satisfied and he stays focused. He also never rests on his laurels and he is always looking for the next opportunity to improve a process, often by leveraging private industry expertise.” That focus on partnerships, collaboration and building effective relationships with everyone also solidifies Eric’s position as a vanguard and helped to move the Predictive Analytics project forward. While the team knew what they wanted to do, Eric’s strong relationships both within MoDOT and across the country, helped them gain both the guidance and direction that they needed to select the right private industry partner.

“Because Eric is such a strong collaborator, he had a lot of good relationships that he built and maintained over the years. Those relationships were within MoDOT but also across the country in Washington, D. C. where he completed a one-year fellowship with AASHTO in 2018. That helped a lot when we were trying to decide what type of platform would work best,” said Ploisongsaeng Intaratip, who worked closely with Eric on the project.

“Eric is impressive in so many areas; leadership, transformative thinking, strong work ethic and enthusiasm. One of his most valuable attributes is his dedication to teamwork and the positivity that he brings to every team. That goes a long way toward gaining support for finding new, innovative ways to do the work that we do,” said Mike Castro, MoDOT St. Louis Construction and Materials Engineer who worked with Eric on the Route 364 Design-Build project in St. Charles, Mo.

His tireless push for innovation not only showed itself when Predictive Analytics was implemented on the I-270 North Project, but also in his tireless effort to secure funding from the Missouri Department of Transportation’s St. Louis District, its Central Office Highway Safety and Traffic Division, and executive management for initial funding for the innovative approach. That is the ultimate example of Eric’s dedication to public service, commitment to excellence and innovation, and his dedication to applying the best strategies possible to meet the goals of traffic management. He will do whatever it takes including working long hours, researching for months and months and even locating and securing funding through grants, in order to bring innovative ideas to the forefront. “Eric is an excellent engineer who continuously searches for win-win solutions. He does not get discouraged when faced with challenges, but instead tirelessly perseveres to find solutions that provide value to MoDOT and our partners. He continuously fosters partnering and works to keep the I-270 North team cohesive, creating an atmosphere where the entire design-build team is driven to search for innovative solutions,” said I-270 North Project Director Justin Wolf.