



GA DOT's Support of DBE Programs

For 32 years, the Georgia Department of Transportation has maintained a vigorous program to assist minority and women-owned businesses in participating in state contracts. Known since 1987 as the Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) program, thousands of Georgia minority and women business owners have participated and hundreds of millions of dollars have been paid to qualified DBE firms for work on transportation infrastructure projects.

By federal law, DBE status is available to recognized minority groups and those defined as having experienced social or economic disadvantage. DBE firms play an important role in the work of Georgia DOT each year and also are often used by other government agencies throughout the state.

DBE status does not guarantee success. Once certified, it is the responsibility of the DBE firm to compete in the marketplace for work. Like any company, they must offer the Department and Georgia's taxpayers the best pricing, efficient work and a quality product.

The Department's current DBE participation goal is 12 percent; for the past three years, DBE firms received 9.7 percent of contract dollars. Georgia DOT's DBE goal, which is reviewed and approved by the Federal Highway Administration and the U.S. Department of Transportation before it can become effective, is proposed to rise to 15 percent for the next three years. Each time the Department sets a new DBE participation goal, an inclusive round of public outreach is conducted to solicit input from those groups most impacted by the goal. This year, five public meetings were held across Georgia. Public input, participation and opinions were sought as these meetings provide valuable, important information that helps us make program improvements and determine meaningful new DBE participation goals for the next three years.

Periodically, Georgia DOT – at its own initiative – sponsors what are known as DBE Disparity Studies. These are efforts to examine program performance, successes, shortcomings and areas where improvement is needed. This spring, the Department concluded just such a DBE Disparity Study. It lasted for 18 months; we learned there are areas for improvement. For instance, despite the fact that nearly \$250 million in DOT business went to DBE firms from 2009-2011, the study showed that businesses owned by African Americans accounted for just 2.4 percent of that amount. So the Department now will develop new efforts to engage DBE firms to ensure they are made aware of potential contracts; have the tools they need to actively bid on the work; and know contacts at other companies to forge partnerships and alliances.

Georgia DOT is committed to its DBE program and to the state's qualified DBE firms. The Department's new 15 goal percent will be the highest in the Southeastern United States. Within the constraints of federal regulations and Georgia's absolute and unwavering low-bid statutory requirement, we strive each day to broaden the horizon and extend the reach of our DBE program. There is always more that we can do. We constantly seek suggestions, input, dialogue and constructive criticism to improve our DBE efforts.

Keith Golden is Commissioner of the Georgia Department of Transportation.