

## WSDOT's Traffic Management Center Internship Program

Stuck in traffic on the freeway today? With growing populations and the same amount of roads, freeway congestion is increasingly becoming a common problem. While building more roads may help solve freeway traffic, it is highly costly. One solution is to manage the freeways and use their capacities as efficiently as possible. This role is assigned to the freeway flow operators at the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT). During my internship as a Flow Operator at the WSDOT Traffic Management Center (TMC), I assisted in regulating the freeway flow in the Seattle area.



### **The WSDOT Traffic Management Center in Shoreline, Washington**

As a flow operator, there are three primary tasks that must be maintained. The first task involves finding incidents that are blocking the freeway and communicating that to the public. Using closed circuit television cameras, flow operators are able to visually verify incidents on the freeways. Communication with the public is done by posting messages through WSDOT's website, variable message signs, and highway advisory radio transmitters. The second task is to maintain safety by reporting locations of accidents to radio dispatch. The timely reporting of incident locations will aid emergency services in arriving at the scene in a timely fashion. WSDOT's incident response teams are also dispatched through the radio to clear blocking incidents and restore capacity to the freeways. The third primary task is to regulate the flow of traffic as congestion builds up. This is done by utilizing the onramp meters in heavy traffic areas. The meters will assist in releasing vehicles onto the freeway as fast as possible while preserving the flow on the mainline. These essential tasks help keep the freeways flowing and relieve the magnitude of traffic jams.



**WSDOT's flow engineers Christina Strand and Jerry Drescher monitor the freeway traffic conditions**

The WSDOT maintains TMCs across the state, including Shoreline, Tacoma, Bellingham, Vancouver, Yakima, Spokane, and Wenatchee with a winter operations center on Snoqualmie Pass. The TMCs are in operation 24 hours a day, seven days a week to help clear roads and keep traffic moving safely. The TMC 24-hour communications systems are also a critical link in our participation with the nationwide Amber Alert missing child system.

*TransNow partners with the WSDOT to provide further financial assistance to interns at the TMC. Tuition scholarships are awarded to interns provided the tuition operating fee is not already paid by other scholarships or grants.*