The Administrative Guidance for RFI Respondents specified a procedure for having questions on the RFI answered. Questions are to be directed to NYSDOT Contact Person identified in the RFI. Questions received by close of business November 20, 2008 and their answers, were to be posted to the NYSDOT’s website at the web address shown in the RFI. This is that posting. This posting has also been e-mailed to all parties who registered interest.

Questions may continue to be submitted, and this posting may be amended as a result, but as stated in the RFI there is no guarantee that any questions received after November 20, 2008 will be addressed prior to the RFI due date.

Q1: Can we assume that the intent of releasing the RFI is to issue an RFP specifically to select the host of the Center for Research on Energy and Sustainable Transportation (CREST)?

A1: The CREST Request for Information (RFI) was released to garner information to guide the Department’s pre-procurement planning should it decide to issue a Request for Proposals. Should the Department make a procurement decision and release an RFP, one purpose of that solicitation could be to seek proposals only from organizations applying to be the administrative host of CREST. Proposals in response to a possible RFP will be expected to contain in part an annotated list of other organizations which will be the initial members of the proposed consortium. Selection of the winning proposal could be based on criteria such as, which proposal has the best team (host + members) and the best approach to meeting the Department’s technology transfer goals.

Q2: Is NYSDOT looking for responses to the questions in the RFI to come from universities, or could a response be submitted by a university department or center, or by an individual faculty member? Would multiple responses from a single university organization be accepted for the RFI?

A2. The purpose of the RFI is to collect information and opinions, so a wide net is being cast. Responses to the RFI may therefore come from universities, a university department or center, an individual faculty member, or other individuals / institutions. Responses to the RFI could come from out-of-state entities yet some sort of physical presence within New York state might be desirable.

After all responses to the CREST RFI have been considered (with possibly follow-up interviews), a subsequent release of a Request for Proposals (RFP) may be anticipated. Responses to any CREST RFP released by the Department must be from organizations legally capable of entering into a contract with NYSDOT.
Q3: What is the expected mission and goals for CREST? What kind of research is the most appreciated or urgent for this center?
A3: NYSDOT expects a multi-year contract with CREST. The nature of the research will probably change over time. Energy and sustainable transportation issues facing NYSDOT today center around climate change and reducing the transportation system’s reliance on petroleum. NYSDOT’s research program is generally applied research, with a strong focus on benefits to New York State. Basic research is typically left to the federal government to sponsor.

Q4: What kind of research facility and space is required for CREST?
A4: This is a difficult question to answer. Both soft and hard research will be done. In some cases a laboratory may be required; if for example, physical testing of lightweight material is part of the research.

Q5: Because energy and sustainability are hot topics in multi-disciplinary, how do you classify them related to transportation?
A5: The Department’s goal is to reduce the carbon footprint of the NYS transportation sector and reduce reliance on petroleum, while supporting the State’s economy and quality of life. Any research that helps us with this goal will be considered.

While NYSDOT will issue RFPs for specific research projects, the Department is open to the ideas of the consortium members for potential research. Consortium members must understand when suggesting research topics that NYSDOT cannot guarantee that the member providing the idea will be awarded the work. In each case, an RFP based on the idea will be issued and all members may compete.

Q6: Will the selected Host be responsible for the development of the RFPs for specific research projects?
A6: No, NYSDOT will develop the RFPs for specific research projects.

Q7: Will the selected Host be responsible for assisting in the member proposal evaluations for the specific research projects?
A7: No, NYSDOT alone will evaluate specific research proposals.

Q8: Is CREST intended to replace TIRC?
A8: The NYSDOT contract with the Transportation Infrastructure Research Consortium (TIRC) hosted by Cornell University has expired, although research underway by TIRC is continuing to its conclusion. TIRC was a consortium of primarily academic institutions. NYSDOT has a similar contract about to expire with a research consortium comprised primarily of businesses. This consortium is hosted by the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA). CREST will replace these two consortia, but will do more than replicate them in kind. For example: CREST has a focus on energy and sustainable transportation; will likely include academic institutions and businesses as members; will have a
greater emphasis on technology transfer; and CREST will likely accept new members during its existence.

Q9: When is it expected that the Department’s contract with the University Transportation Research Center (UTRC) will expire?
A9: NYSDOT expects to have a contract with the University Transportation Research Center (UTRC) until it is no longer the USDOT designated UTC for Federal Region 2. UTRC has held this designation for many years. It is reasonable to think that they may hold the designation for many more years, but periodically they must compete for their designation.

Q10: If the University Transportation Research Center (UTRC) remains the federally designated UTC for Region 2 under the new administration, will DOT contract for research and energy transportation through the UTRC instead of establishing the CREST?
A10: NYSDOT intends to establish CREST even if UTRC remains the designated UTC for Federal Region 2.

Q11: Will the host of CREST be able to compete for specific research projects, along with the other members of the consortium? Is the organization selected as a host permitted to bid on the RFPs for the specific research projects or are the two functions (host vs. member) expected to be kept separate?
A11: Yes. The host will be permitted to compete for the specific research projects, but neither the host nor any member will be required to submit a proposal. The Department would prefer that the host maintain objectivity to potentially serve as a go-between the Department and a Principal Investigator when performance issues arise.

Q12: Will the host also be a member, eligible to complete for subcontract projects?
A12: Yes, unless the host chooses not to do so.

Q13: What will be the breadth of research undertaken? For example, could it include something mechanical like designing a new diesel engine and something like improving throughput at a toll plaza?
A13: The breadth could include all modes of transportation and the two examples in the question include the types of research which might be sought, although the design of a new diesel engine is more likely to be left to a national research program. (see Q17.)

Q14: Will the host play any role in selecting the member organizations or will selection be conducted solely by the Department?
A14: When and if an RFP is issued to select the best proposed consortium (host+ members), it is anticipated that responses will be expected only from prospective hosts respond to the RFP. In preparing their response, prospective hosts may first recruit prospective members, and then describe the members’ qualifications in their
proposal. Thus at this stage, the host may select the members whom will be part of
the proposal.

Once the new CREST consortium is under contract, RFPs for specific research
projects will be offered to the host and all the members of CREST. NYSDOT,
without the host’s involvement, will select decide which is the best proposal.

On occasion and only for a relatively small value project that NYSDOT requires a
quick assessment, provision may be made for the host to select a member who is
willing and able to perform the work on NYSDOT’s abbreviated time schedule.

Q15: How will the member organizations be selected/qualified? Will the Department
issue an RFP or RFQ? As each specific research project will established through a
separate RFP does this mean that the member organizations will effectively be on a
“back-drop” contract (e.g. similar to NYS’s “Mini-Bid” list for IT services)?
A15: The Department has not made a decision yet to issue an RFP to select the
consortium. Should the Department release an RFP to select a CREST host, it may
require that responses propose members to be included in the CREST consortium.
If and once the new CREST consortium is established, RFPs for specific research
projects will typically be issued to the CREST members through the CREST host.
If required by law, an RFQ will be issued for a specific research project.

Q16: Would you please explain RFI question # 4: What credit, if any, should be given for
proposed CREST members whom the Department already has access to through
UTRC?
A16: NYSDOT expects to be weighing the breadth, depth and diversity of the expertise
and experience of the proposed members of CREST, when differentiating among
competing proposals to become the CREST consortium. Because both CREST and
UTRC members will be competing for specific research studies, NYSDOT already
has access to the expertise and experience of UTRC members.

Competition among members is also expected to yield better proposals for specific
research studies. The larger the combined pool of members between both consortia,
the greater the potential competition. Adding a current UTRC member to CREST
does not increase the combined pool of members.

Countering the above, if a current UTRC member were to become a member of
CREST, this might increase collaborations and strengthen future research.

These considerations raise the question about how to weigh the added value of a
CREST proposal including a UTRC member. For example:

If some of the proposed members are already available to NYSDOT by virtue of
those members being members of UTRC, then it could be argued that from
NYSDOT’s perspective there is no added value to including a current UTRC
member in a proposed CREST consortium. If you concur with that argument, then you would probably favor zero credit being given.

If you believe there are synergistic effects of a current UTRC member becoming a member of CREST, thus adding value to the proposal, then your response would indicate this. Depending on the degree of this synergistic effect, you might suggest that a current UTRC member’s expertise and experience not be discounted at all, or if discounted, it should not be fully discounted.

Q17: Will the RFPs for specific research projects be issued only to the selected member organizations plus UTRC or will they be open to any organization to respond?
A17: The Department’s intent is to issue the task-specific RFPs only to CREST and UTRC, but NYSDOT reserves the right to open the competition further, should this be in the best interest of the State of New York.

Q18: Please explain what is meant by “the host will then enter into a subcontract with the member to perform the research”. Does this mean that the member organization will subcontract the administrative and technology transfer tasks to the host or does it mean that the host will subcontract the research to the member organization?
A18: The subcontract(s) between the host and the member will at least cover the scope of work for specific research projects. A prospective host, in competing to become the CREST consortium may propose an approach to technology transfer which involves the members. If that is the case, technology transfer tasks may be included in the subcontract.

Q19: What is the estimated value of the work to be performed by the host?
A19: The CREST RFP, if issued, will select a host and consortium using a Best Value process, wherein cost is one of the selection criteria (the lower the better). Proposals may be asked to include a price schedule. For example, a proposal may propose a fixed annual cost for technology transfer activities and general administrative function, plus a unit cost for each specific research project placed under contract. This being the case, NYSDOT will not bias future responses by suggesting a value.

Q20: What procedure is envisioned to be used to select the subcontractor for each of the projects programmed? Will NYSDOT personnel be involved in selecting the subcontractor for each of the projects? Will the host institution be involved in the selection process? If the answer to Question A above is yes, what procedure is required for the host to fairly compete with other members? We believe that the answers to these questions will have an impact on the response to RFI question 13 about the weight of technical expertise of the host in evaluating proposals.
A20: NYSDOT alone will evaluate the proposals submitted in response to an RFP for a specific research project. The RFP will include the selection criteria for that research. Therefore for specific research projects the role of the host is strictly
administrative (unless the host also responds to the RFP) and expertise on energy and sustainable transportation is probably not required. The host, however, is expected to lead a strong technology transfer program. In this capacity expertise on energy and sustainable transportation may be required.

Q21: *I was wondering whether the response is expected to include background information about the proposing institution (e.g. previous research experience, experience with organizing conferences, experience handling research contracts, etc). The reason I am asking is that the RFI mentions that the response could be up to 24 pages, which seems to be more than what would be needed to simply answer the questions outlined.*

A21: *The RFI is not the place to provide background information. Nor is the RFI a competition among respondents. Therefore, succinct answers are welcomed. The twenty-four (24) pages stated in the RFI is an outside limit. It is expected that most responses will be less than ten (10) pages.*