



TRANSPORTATION AGENCY FOR MONTEREY COUNTY

# Memorandum

**To:** Todd Muck, Deputy Executive Director  
**From:** Christina Watson, Principal Transportation Planner  
**Meeting Date:** August 24, 2016  
**Subject:** American Public Transportation Association Rail Conference

On June 20-22, I attended the American Public Transportation Association Rail Conference in Phoenix, Arizona. This was an excellent networking opportunity with rail experts and transportation officials from around the country. For all rail modes – urban, commuter, high-speed, and intercity – this technical conference features sessions on technology, operations, maintenance, safety and security, planning, finance, capital projects, and workforce development.

Sessions I attended this year included:

- **Opening General Session: Where Public Transportation Goes, Community Grows**
  - This welcome session highlighted the importance of transit to communities and to Phoenix in particular, where light rail is very successful and expanding.
- **Positive Train Control (PTC) Implementation and Operation**
  - PTC is a special challenge for railroads, with funding not the least of the issues. Speakers discussed lessons from the field on PTC implementation and operation.
- **General Session: U.S. Department of Transportation Update**
  - The new acting Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Administrator, Carolyn Flowers, talked about how the U.S. DOT is preparing to meet the challenges of the next 30 years, dealing with aging infrastructure and growing demand, investing in workforce development and new technologies, and the FTA's safety role.
- **Mega Capital Projects**
  - Speakers presented issues pertaining to project delivery, construction management, fire and water protection, and automation for the New York Long Island Railroad (LIRR) East Side Access, the London Crossrail, and the Honolulu Rail projects.
- **Valley Metro Technical Tour: Transit Oriented Development Tour**
  - A progressive tour of the latest in award-winning TOD and adaptive reuse projects in central and downtown Phoenix highlighted the creative minds of planners, developers, and architects at the forefront of growth and development along the Valley Metro Rail line. This tour demonstrated how in-fill developments are taking advantage of the opportunities along the light rail corridor, addressing urban sprawl and land use issues in the Phoenix area.
- **Funding, Finance, and Partnering Strategies for Public Transportation**
  - This session discussed revenue sources and financing tools including naming rights, public private partnerships and local funding options.

- **General Session: Investment Needs at America's Rail Systems**
  - Nuria Fernandez, Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) General Manager, moderated a panel of transit agency CEOs to discuss revenue gaps that result when identified investment requirements outpace available funding. The national state-of-good repair backlog exceeds \$86 billion, and is increasing each year. At the same time, rail systems play a vital role in the health of regional economies, and forward-looking trends will place still greater demands on these systems. The panel stressed the urgent need for federal and other investments in the rehabilitation and maintenance of America's urban transit and passenger rail systems, and the vital need to keep these systems reliable, efficient, safe, and secure.
- **New and Improved Intercity & High-Speed Corridors**
  - The panel discussed how to plan for, develop, and implement new and improved high-speed and higher-speed passenger rail service. Topics included transitioning management of intercity operations from Amtrak to a regional agency and negotiating with corridor owners about acquisition of rights to own or use their corridors.
- **International Lessons in Intercity & High-Speed Rail and Application to the U.S.**
  - This session provided information on how speed-rail programs have been initiated and integrated into existing conventional intercity and urban transit networks, including urban, commuter, and regional rail systems. Discussions included how Spain, Germany and Switzerland planned and developed these systems incrementally and the improvements being made today to make passenger rail a viable and competitive mobility option in a variety of corridors. Chad Edison, Deputy Secretary for Passenger Rail, California State Transportation Agency (CalSTA), presented the network integration strategies proposed for the next Statewide Rail Plan.
- **Closing General Session: On Track for the Future**
  - Michael Rogers calls himself a "practical futurist". He is a technology pioneer, author, and journalist, who spoke engagingly about how transportation is changing in the face of technological upgrades, demographic changes, and sustainability. He addressed:
    - **Technology:** the "sharing economy", internet connectivity, the "internet of things", the iWatch and Google Glass, and "smart infrastructure".
    - **Demographics:** transportation preferences of millennials and "post millennials" (telecommuting and virtual meetings) and the increase in "extreme commuters" (over 90 minutes spent commuting per day).
    - **Sustainability:** climate change and the resource demands associated with economic growth, technology improvements, and population increases.
- **FTA Workshop: Capital Investment Grants (CIG) Program**
  - Although TAMC is not in the pipeline for a CIG grant (formerly known as "New Starts"), I attended to see what changes the new federal authorization bill has wrought. Of relevance is the increase in the Small Starts project cost limit to \$300 million seeking under \$100 million in CIG funds, and no longer requires weekend service. The CIG program now also allows joint commuter and intercity projects.

Videos are available on the conference website, <http://www.apta.com/mc/rail/Pages/default.aspx>. In-depth reports on specific topics can be found here: <http://www.tcrponline.org/SitePages/rail-conference.aspx>.