

Memorandum

To: Todd Muck, Deputy Executive Director
From: Christina Watson, Principal Transportation Planner
Meeting Date: August 25, 2021
Subject: 2021 APTA Rail Conference

On June 8-9, 2021, I participated in the virtual joint American Public Transportation Association (APTA)/ UITP (Union Internationale des Transports Publics, the International Association of Public Transport) Rail Conference. Sessions I attended included the following:

- **Opening Keynote with Rishad Tobaccowala**, Author, “Restoring the Soul of Business: Staying Human in the Age of Data”.
 - Key points: 5 characteristics that great leaders share: capability/competency, integrity, empathy, vulnerability, and inspiration.
 - Good leaders take time to learn new skills, whether it’s an hour a day or a week a quarter.
- **Your Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DE&I) Journey: Beginning, Development, and Beyond**
 - Speakers noted that DE&I is not a new issue, but 2020 put it into high relief and on the front burner for transit agencies worldwide. Many agencies changed the organization structure in reaction to information received through DE&I efforts.
- **Ridership/Revenue Recovery in the Post COVID World**
 - Despite expectations of a long slow return to usual, many urban transit agencies are experiencing a resurgence in ridership. One trend to note is a higher-than expected ridership for off-peak recreational trips.
- **Zero Emission Rail Innovations**
 - Panelists explored various emerging rail technologies, including battery-operated and hydrogen-powered train locomotives.
- **Federal Partners Panel**
 - This panel reviewed the funding and technical assistance available for rail projects, as well as safety and research and development programs.
- **Revenue Ideas for a Recovering Economy**
 - Revenue ideas discussed include public private partnerships (P3), real estate/joint development, tax increment financing, congestion pricing, and a joint investment partnership agreement (JIPA).

- **Transit Expansion in Times of Transition: Capital Investment Grants (CIG)**
 - The agencies represented on the panel had significant ridership impacts due to the COVID pandemic, and the recovery shows a changing ridership trend towards more mid-day and off-peak travel. Meanwhile, CIG grants place a high importance on ridership estimates.
- **Leveraging your Existing Rail Network for Zero Emissions**
 - As technology advances, transportation projects are evolving expectations for how to reduce emissions via battery and/or hydrogen power, with a boost of solar power at the hydrogen power plant. One interesting note is that electric power isn't always "clean", nor always reliable, and hydrogen power needs a lot of water, which can be a political and cost issue during drought conditions. Holistic perspectives are encouraged.
- **The Future of E-TOD: What Have We Learned About Equitable TOD to Build Back Better**
 - Equitable TOD builds equitable communities, maximizes ridership, and serves core markets. COVID has shown us who are the essential workers and what are the essential destinations.
- **Closing Plenary: The State of Rail Today and Where We are Going**
 - As the world emerges from the pandemic, mobility patterns and preferences will change. Transit challenges include attracting new riders and an increased focus on the customer experience in the context of sustainability and global climate change, economic development, and social equity.

The final program of the conference is available on the website,
<https://rail.aptaconferences.com/full-program/>.