

## 2011 Outlook: Inform and Inspire for Success

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I am executive director of one of the largest fixed route bus agencies in southern California, chair of the California Transportation Association (CTA), board chair for Access Services, and vice president of transportation management for Veolia Transportation, in addition to my member-at-large seat on the APTA Executive Committee. These varied assignments give me numerous perspectives from which to view public transportation and consider where it's going in 2011.

The U.S. public transit industry faced significant—for some agencies, unprecedented—challenges in 2010. While the economy is experiencing what looks like the beginnings of a turnaround, the growth we're seeing is very slow and tenuous and we're faced with a new tone in Washington.

Examining some core areas for focus in the coming year is necessary if we are to take advantage of this forward motion and maximize our very limited and stressed resources—namely, money and time.

Messaging and outreach combined take the first priority. Elected officials would not make a funding or legislative decision in a transit organization's favor if the only thing they know about said agency is coming from local media. This year is the time for transit systems to enhance profiles for governing board members, agency executives, and transit suppliers, accessing available resources, and shaking hands.

Our various funding partners are demonstrating a strong "anti-spending" mood. Now more than ever, we need to deliver the powerful message about the benefits of investment in public transportation, owning our roles in fuel conservation, environmental protection, and a superior quality of life.

Resources to help us strengthen that voice are available at both the local and national levels. For example, you're reading one right now: *Passenger Transport*, one of many APTA publications that inform and advise local transit operators and vendors about issues that affect the industry and how to educate the public about them.

Through national associations like APTA and state-level bodies like CTA, we can unify our voices and pool resources for the benefit of all. They provide data, statistics, talking points, demographics, public opinion, and the tools to decipher and incorporate all of these things into the image we present to our communities and our elected leadership.

### Working in Unison

Joining hands and marching forward in unison will achieve the results we need, most specifically informed legislation, tax initiatives, and dedicated transit funding.

California's recent passage of Proposition 22 directly illustrates this principle and also shows how similar challenges facing multiple public bodies—cities, transportation agencies, first responders—can open doors among them and strengthen our ability to successfully achieve our objectives. (More information on the Proposition 22 collaboration is available [online](#).)

While the current moment is an information turning point, it is also a human crossroads. Like so many other public service industries, public transportation is facing a steady egress of a strong and established leadership to retirement. And while this compaction of talent at the top takes place, we need to look ahead to recruits and new leaders who will move the transit industry into the next phase.

In order to succeed, that new pool of talent needs to be filled by leaders who have been tried and tested by the industry, as well as by private professionals whose diverse experiences will advance the industry into new business models and technologies. That new talent also needs to be buoyed by an industry culture that not only considers diversity in hiring, but imbues it into its culture through mentoring and networking across social and cultural differences.

Recruitment isn't the only issue taking center stage. Retention of those hard-won recruits is also of primary importance. As we move to expand our workforce, it's vital to ensure an industry environment that embraces differences of opinion, encourages discourse, and not only allows, but actively rewards new approaches to familiar challenges. Otherwise we end up playing a numbers game, fulfilling hiring goals, but then losing that new and diverse talent to more exciting and more welcoming career paths.

Mentoring plays a big role in retaining those future leaders and helping them feel invested in an industry that touches so many lives. Allowing time for networking and collaboration is part of that investment process, keeping good ideas and talent in the industry and preparing us for the new challenges we'll face in 2011 and beyond.

Between the messaging about politics, leadership, diversity, culture, and collaboration is one common theme—people. The challenges we face for 2011 will focus on the human element of our industry: not in how we grow and shape that element, but how we can adapt as it grows and shapes us. It means espousing flexibility and walking new paths willingly and together.

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