

2017 Northeast Association of State Transportation Officials' Conference ([NASTO](#)) highlights workforce challenges & opportunities

The Northeast Transportation Workforce Center (NETWC), hosted by the University of Vermont [Transportation Research Center](#), brought its exhibit to the 2017 NASTO conference in

Philadelphia, PA, July 10-12. This year, under the leadership of NASTO President [Leslie Richards](#) (PADOT), the challenges and opportunities facing the transportation workforce was highlighted in both a set of panels and in the opening remarks of AASHTO president David Bernhardt, which are reprinted with permission below. An excellent discussion, facilitated by former USDOT secretary [Mary Peters](#), featured leaders from NE state DOTs and



FHWA, and was followed by a second panel, also facilitated by Mary Peters, of students from the Philadelphia region, pursuing academic paths leading to hoped-for careers in the field. It was an excellent format stimulating much conversation and connections for future action.

2017 [NASTO](#) Conference: *'Transportation Matters'* opening address by Commissioner David Bernhardt (ME) [President AASHTO \(07/11/2017\)](#)

Good morning and welcome to the 2017 Northeast Association of State Transportation Officials' Conference. I want to thank [Pennsylvania DOT](#) Secretary [Leslie Richards](#) and the City of Philadelphia for being gracious hosts for this year's conference.



Over the next two days, we will discuss the latest transportation issues and developments in the Northeast Region and across the country, and have meaningful conversations about workforce development and diversification, freight, AV, IT and more within the transportation industry.

I have said it before, and I will say it every chance I get, [Transportation matters](#) more today than ever before, throughout our country and across the globe. But transportation is taken for granted. Americans have developed a basic – and fair – expectation that they can get to and from work, appointments, school, a movie and dinner, all in a timely and safe manner. They expect that supermarket shelves will be full, that raw products can get to the manufacturing facility to produce the goods we all want, and that what they just ordered on-line will get to their house in a matter of days.

A strong transportation infrastructure network is vital to keep our country competitive, and strategic investment in the maintenance and upgrade of our transportation infrastructure is critical to sustain our nation's competitiveness in today's global economy.

To ensure the needs of our customers can be met, the transportation industry must continue to develop workforce initiatives that attract and retain a diverse workforce, including youth, veterans, women and underserved populations. Nearly half of the current transportation workforce in the U.S. will be eligible to retire within the next decade. The US DOE and [US](#)

DOT projected that the transportation industry will need to hire more than 4 million workers through the year 2022 to meet the future workforce demand. Their analysis also indicated that the annual job openings could be more than 65% larger than the number of students who are completing related educational programs annually across selected transportation occupation groups. This will result in the public and private sectors competing for the same smaller pool of eligible workers every year.

As the projected demand for freight movement increases over the coming decades due to population growth, **it will rest with future transportation industry workforce to find new and innovative solutions to our intermodal freight capacity constraints. It is imperative that we train a workforce that can assist in designing and implementing vital improvements to the connections between rail ports, intermodal facilities and the national transportation system. We must hire diverse thinkers – those willing to look beyond our traditional borders – regionally, nationally and globally – to help provide American businesses with access to markets through new and upgraded transportation networks.**

In addition to recruiting, training and retaining a diverse transportation workforce, State DOTs will need to forge strong partnerships at the state level (for instance with their state departments of economic development), as well as with regional and national public and private stakeholders. These partnerships must allow for the prioritization of transportation projects that not only strengthen the current transportation network, but also provide for the strategic, vital upgrades necessary to keep our nation's businesses competitive for generations to come.



Mary Peters, former Secretary of Transportation, moderates the 2017 NASTO panel on promoting diversity in the workforce with Leslie Richards (PennDOT), Stephanie Pollack (MassDOT), Victoria Sheehan (NH DOT), and Christopher Lawson (FHWA), followed by a student response panel.

I believe that transportation matters more than all other factors combined when it comes to economic development. Working with my Governor, Maine is moving beyond the traditional model of supporting economic development solely through contracts with construction companies and creating jobs by employing private sector employees to build roads and bridges. Over the last year, we have advanced more proactive and collaborative approaches to transportation infrastructure investment, in an effort to further drive economic development in our state.

I have partnered with the Commissioner of our Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) – as well as other state agencies, local official and business leaders across the state - to promote how transportation investments, locally and regionally, can spur economic development. These partners are working with us to educate the public of the benefits of reducing transportation logistics costs to make Maine businesses more competitive across the world.

High ranking representatives from [MaineDOT](#) and [MaineDECD](#) (and other agencies if necessary) routinely co-attend meetings with Maine companies – and companies looking to locate in Maine - to ensure that critical transportation infrastructure needs are being addressed. DECD representatives help promote our DOT BPI and MPI initiatives (where businesses and municipalities can assume

portions of the cost of a state project to increase the project's work plan priority). Private stakeholders are brought in to assist in the planning for projects, such as the expansion of the [International Marine Terminal](#) in Portland, Maine.

We are also starting to look at commodity flows and the incorporation of freight cost reductions to help drive asset management decisions, as it is clear that understanding the logistical flow of commodities make for more informed decisions. For example, we must fully understand the value of commodities flowing on certain routes, not just the measure of the volume of traffic, in order to prioritize the investment in the infrastructure.

And we are paying special attention on how to regionally address intermodal freight capacity and improving connections between rail, ports, intermodal facilities and highways. We are looking at ways to take advantage of new investment and funding opportunities, including partnerships with the private sector, and we are looking beyond our state borders to support and create freight networks that assist our businesses at the local, regional and national and global levels, today and for the future.

Currently we are doing things such as working with the State of Connecticut on regional cooperation around freight intermodal, promoting the [National Marine Highway](#) with the Port of NY/NJ and forging partnerships with North Atlantic and Arctic countries to promote smoother movement of freight across the world.



The landscape of the Northeast region varies substantially. A recent report by the [Northeast Transportation Workforce Center](#) housed at the [University of Vermont Transportation Research Center](#) found that of the eleven states in the US Northeast region – as well as the District of Columbia – our region covers approximately 5% of the land in the United States. However, almost 16% of the US population lives in this region. Four of the top 25 US cities in terms of population are in our region, but conversely there are two states in our region with populations that do not exceed 1,000,000 people (and several more under 3 million).

Even still, we all grapple with similar issues – our limited federal – and state - funding for highway construction and maintenance, as well as for bridges, constrains the movement of goods and people and hinders the growth of local and regional economies. Limited funding for transit in rural areas makes citizen increasingly vulnerable. **Shrinking workforces threaten our ability to meet the growing demands of our industry and fulfill the transportation infrastructure needs of our customers.**

Stable funding is needed to allow for a more systematic approach to address these issues, and states must partner to find new opportunities that work not only in urban centers, but in rural parts of our region as well. Investments in transportation infrastructure, particularly in intermodal transportation projects, and in diverse workforce development initiatives, must strategically look at the economic benefits to the region and nation.

For example, would investment in a navigational dredge in a Maine port reduce the cost of some goods for residents of New England and Canada? Which investments in Northeast airports could reduce the cost of doing business for the entire region? Where could investments in the rail network reduce congestion on the I-95, making vehicular travel safer for everyone, while reducing emissions

and improving the environment for our future generations? Will investments at an intermodal facility in Connecticut reduce logistical costs for Northeast manufacturing companies, making our country more competitive in today's and tomorrow's global economy?

And how can our region work collaboratively to increase transportation career awareness to attract a sustainable, diverse workforce? Can we build and enhance early education STEM and CTE curriculums (such as [TRAC and RIDES](#)) to entice students to get interested in transportation industry careers at a young age? How do we collaborate with community colleges and universities to provide qualified workers to the industry? What roles do and should private stakeholders have in recruiting and training workers? Are their opportunities for regional cooperation for internships and apprenticeships? How does NASTO take a proactive role in communicating our workforce challenges and educating the public on our future workforce needs?

Transportation Matters. We, as transportation officials, have a duty to improve efficiencies and provide a safe, reliable and first class transportation network that makes Americans proud. We must work collectively to focus our efforts, find creative solutions, invest strategically, hire and train our future workforce, and drive our nation's economy forward. Transportation Matters; it is up to us to work every day to prove that it does.

NASTO 2017 Diversity Program (<http://nasto.org/2017-nasto-conference/>)

WEDNESDAY, JULY 12		
7:00 a.m. – 8:00 a.m.	Breakfast with Sponsors & Exhibitors <i>Sponsored by: AECOM</i>	Columbus Ballroom
7:00 a.m. – 8:15 a.m.	ARTBA Breakfast <i>(by invitation only)</i>	Admiral's Quarters
7:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.	Registration	Grand Ballroom Foyer
8:30 a.m. – 9:30 a.m.	2018 NASTO Presentation and AASHTO Awards Ceremony <i>Dave Bernhardt, AASHTO; Bud Wright, AASHTO</i>	Grand Ballroom
9:30 a.m. – 10:15 a.m.	Plenary Session 5: Diversity Event – Professional Panel <i>Leslie Richards, Pennsylvania Department of Transportation; Christopher Lawson, Federal Highway Administration; Jennifer Cohan, Delaware Department of Transportation; Victoria Sheehan, New Hampshire Department of Transportation; Stephanie Pollack, Massachusetts Department of Transportation; Mary Peters, Mary Peters Consulting</i>	Grand Ballroom
10:15 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.	Break with Sponsors & Exhibitors	Columbus Ballroom
10:30 a.m. – 11:15 a.m.	Plenary Session 6: Diversity Event – Student Panel <i>Oforiwaah Pee, University of Pennsylvania School of Design; Mable Bakalil, Temple University; Carrie Sauer, University of Pennsylvania School of Design</i>	Grand Ballroom
11:15 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.	Networking & Boxed Lunches	Grand Ballroom Foyer
1:00 p.m.	Adjourn	