

# CONVERGE CHICAGO

WTS ANNUAL CONFERENCE  
★ ★ 2015 ★ ★

## Stick-to-itiveness | Life-work Integration | Reboot and Refuel

These are just a few of the many phrases that are now at the forefront of my mind after attending the 2015 WTS Annual Conference. Phrases learned from some incredible women, each with unique obstacles, environments, and challenges, yet common successes as women in both life and in the transportation industry.

As a first time WTS conference attendee, I was a bit uncertain of what to expect. The program's technical tours and scheduled sessions had significant appeal on paper, and I was honored to be representing our chapter through our sponsorship. However landing in Chicago, a city I'd never been, and knowing only a handful of San Diego chapter members who were also attending, I was nervous. My nerves were quickly calmed on my first technical tour (to the O'Hare Airport) where I immediately observed the caliber of men and women whom I would be surrounded by for the duration of the conference. This intimate tour of the airfield and control tower was the first of many incredible experiences I had over the course of the conference. I also had firsthand experience riding the 'bus on shoulder' service provided by CTA, dining and networking with chapter peers as well as industry peers from across the country, and participating in numerous engaging sessions led by a variety of inspiring speakers. The highlight of the conference for me was the opportunity to listen to Erin Brockovich speak not only to the entire conference during the keynote lunch session, but also to take the time after her session to meet and speak directly with all of us who were interested. Erin is clearly a woman who embodies many of the qualities WTS promotes.

As women seeking to advance our careers in transportation, I think we are often led to feel overwhelmed, inadequate, or incapable by others around us. We convince ourselves that we have to 'do it all' and in doing so neglect to maintain perspective and balance "of it all". Multiple speakers throughout the conference highlighted the importance of maintaining clarity of purpose, and acknowledging that learning is a continuous process. We must have a plan/vision for going forward, but must not develop that plan in isolation. The term 'work-life balance' should be replaced with 'life-work integration' (Angela Caddell, Assistant Vice President of BNSF Railway). This simple modification to this common phrase really opened my eyes to the impact your outside life can and should have on your work success. Allison Kim, PE, shared her story in a session titled "What Does Your Inner Leader Look Like?" Allison is a civil engineer who had over-

worked herself in her career for years without recognizing the impact it was having on physical wellbeing. After being diagnosed with and beating cancer, she knew that she needed to find a new approach to how she worked. She had a new understanding of the importance of taking the time to recharge/refuel herself, without which her body would not survive. She learned that balance means different things to different people at different times in life and that as women we need to be extra cautious not to burn ourselves out by trying to do it all, all the time, and all on our own. Instead, we need to be aware of what others see in us, send the correct systems, and earn that seat at the table. Certainly these are messages that will stick with me and have added significant value to how I'll approach my life and career.

Erin Brockovich and Vernice "FlyGirl" Armour both talked about the importance of acknowledging obstacles and living within your heart and gut. As someone new to the transportation industry and from a professional background very different from many others within this industry, I certainly have my share of obstacles. I have a lot to learn about the industry, but know that I will be successful if I have a plan for going forward, stick to it, and surround myself with a network of intelligent, supportive, and diverse women and men. Attending this conference, being a part of the chapter as we received multiple awards, and seeing firsthand the impact WTS can have on the advancement of women was an honor. It was a very busy couple of days (almost too busy, as I was only able to be one place at a time and certainly would have liked to attend several of the other sessions that took place simultaneously). I am grateful I was able to extend the trip beyond the conference to gain a better appreciation of the transit system and city of Chicago. Thank you for having provided me this opportunity and for being such a strong, supportive chapter. I look forward to the continued relationship and sharing our chapter with other men and women who understand our mission.



from the perspective of  
*Amanda Denham*  
2015 Essay Contest Winner

from the perspective of

*Mimi Morisaki*

**Vice President, WTS San Diego State  
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Upon first arriving to the 2015 WTS Annual Conference in Chicago, I was told to get to the sessions early because the Conference was officially sold out. Many attendees were surprised to hear this and questioned why this specific Conference was generating so much buzz. Nevertheless, a positive tone was set for the duration of the Conference.

The WTS Annual Conference was likely well attended due to the quality of keynote speakers and panelists that were scheduled to speak, not to mention the great location of the city bordering Lake Michigan. Panelists included representatives from Chicago and leaders from innovative transportation cities. High profile transportation leaders, such as United States Secretary of Transportation Anthony Foxx were also in attendance. In addition to the many high profile transportation professionals, students were also there to accept scholarship awards and make connections with influential conference attendees.

Consisting of technical tours, professional development sessions, panel discussions, and keynote speakers, the Conference ran smoothly. While many sessions were going on at once, there were a few instances where every conference-goer gathered for keynote speakers. These sessions included superstars, Erin Brockovich and Vernice “FlyGirl” Armour, along with a panel discussion with women leaders in the rail industry.

Topics of other sessions included innovative transportation ideas, such as countywide bikesharing programs, commuter bus systems that ride on freeway shoulders, and transportation funding strategies.

A personal favorite of mine was having the opportunity to go on a tour of Chicago’s bikeshare program, Divvy. Lately, there has been a cultural shift in maintaining physical health and reducing GHG emissions through the provision of active transportation infrastructure. Arguably, the biggest provision of active transportation infrastructure has been the development of bikeshare programs throughout the country, including Chicago’s own Divvy Bikeshare Program. On the tour, we learned that Divvy has over 466 stations (as of May 21, 2015) and is continuing to add more. Most of the 466 stations were implemented throughout Chicago at the same time to create an instant network for riders. The tour also provided more technical details behind each bikeway design. For example, flexible bollards are being used to buffer bikeways that share a road with a high volume of automobiles; other roads are painted with a bike lane and a buffer mark on the inside of the bike lane to caution riders from getting “doored” (as seen in the picture).

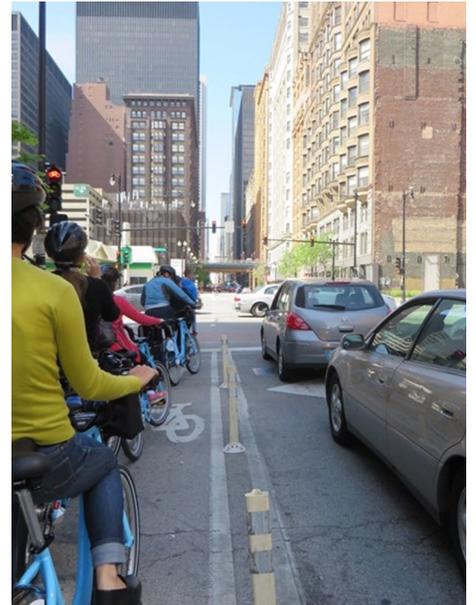
While tours allow for interactive learning, conference staples include listening to panel discussions. While each discussion was informational, attendees like myself especially appreciated the fact



that the panelists were willing to stay after their presentations to answer a few specific questions. It was almost nerve-racking to be asking high-level professionals their opinion on a transportation sales tax but even still, they were willing to share their two-cents.

When preparing for Chicago, the thought that attending a conference full of powerful women was intimidating; however, after networking with elite professionals, listening to empowering keynote speeches, and learning techniques from the sessions, I found that every single person that attended the conference was genuine and supportive of the women in our industry.

Though the sessions I attended were geared toward learning skills I could use toward building my career in San Diego, the biggest takeaway from the Conference was stated by a WTS Board Director: “Women should help advance other women’s careers as her own career progresses.” That remark was truly unique to me and I know that lesson will stick with young women like myself as we grow in our field. I left the 2015 Chicago WTS Annual Conference with ideas for professional development sessions that can be pursued by the WTS SDSU Chapter and a feeling of inspiration and confidence as an up-and-coming transportation professional.



***“What lives behind us and before us rarely matters compared to what lies within us.” Erin Brockovich***