

Lupe Valdez: Keeping UP with the Communities

MEMBER PROFILE



Lupe Valdez (UP Director of Public Affairs, WTS-LA member), 2014

The Omaha-based Union Pacific Railroad (UP) is the largest railroad network in the United States, with more than 47,000 employees, 8,000 locomotives, and 32,000 route-miles in 23 states west of Chicago and New Orleans.

And as UP Director of Public Affairs, WTS-LA member Lupe Valdez is the face of UP for anyone in Southern California who needs to talk to the railroad.

“The biggest challenge local governments and organizations face with any company—particularly with one that travels through your community—is finding the right person to talk with to resolve an issue.

“I am that person for UP in Southern California. I handle communities from Santa Barbara to Imperial Valley. From air quality to train horns at odd hours to overgrowth near the tracks to illegal dumping, I work with elected officials and local communities to straighten things out.

“I also meet with elected officials about projects and programs where there will be a rail component. A prime example of that is grade separation. Grade separations are actually quite an important issue as our population and freight traffic increase. No matter what the issue is, though, we try to be very responsive to our communities.”

With UP since 2005, Valdez began her career at the Southern California Rapid Transit District (RTD) and the Los Angeles Transportation Commission (LACTC), later known as Metro. After Metro, she handled public affairs for the South Coast Air Quality Management District and then the Southern California Regional Rail Authority.



*Union Pacific train traversing the grandeur of Cajon Pass,
Photo © John Livzey, 2016*

Today, in addition to her work at UP, she also serves as a board member for the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce. Back when she was at the LACTC, though, something very interesting happened that changed her professional life forever.

"When I joined the LACTC, I remember someone called and said I should go to a meeting and check out this group with a strange name, the Women's Transportation Seminar. So I went. And I still remember it well.

"We went to Chinatown to a restaurant called the Velvet Turtle. And the group was so small we could all sit around one table. There were probably only seven or eight of us in total, definitely not ten people. And I remember Ginger Gherardi was the chair. But as small as the meeting was, it was critically important for me. It was the very first time I saw women in leadership positions in transportation. I thought, 'Wow, there are careers in this field for women! This is pretty cool!'

"Before that, I had never thought of transportation as a career; I had thought of it as just a job. But that meeting and subsequent WTS-LA meetings gave me exposure to transportation as a career. And I'm still a member today because WTS-LA still provides the same opportunity for me to meet other women in transportation and learn about the pressing transportation issues of today."

The Union Pacific Railroad is the largest railroad network in the United States. And through her work as Director of Public Affairs in Southern California, WTS-LA member Lupe Valdez connects the railroad to the communities it serves.

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