

Martha Welborne: Keeping Mobility on Plan in Los Angeles County

MEMBER PROFILE



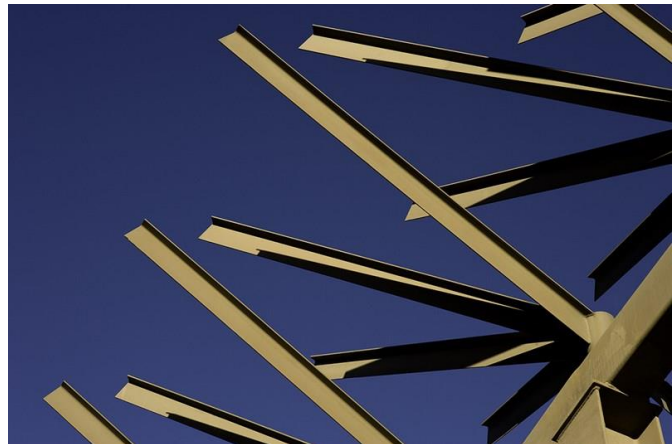
Martha Welborne (Metro Chief Planning Officer), Photo © John Livzey, 2015

To be an effective planner in Los Angeles County, you've got to be a Renaissance woman. Fortunately for the residents of Los Angeles, Metro Chief Planning Officer, Martha Welborne fits the bill perfectly.

"I lead a staff of more than 200 people in planning the long-range mobility future of the county. The planning group also carries out all of the early design and environmental analysis of the various transit corridors, including the 12 transit projects specified in Measure R. And that keeps us very, very busy. But we have many other things going on as well.

"We have capital programming, grants, and a unit that takes on unexpected initiatives that come our way. For example, 3 years ago Metro bought Union Station and we've been tasked with doing a master plan of the 42-acre property. A pivotal transit hub right now, Union Station will only become more important when high-speed rail becomes a reality."

Welborne and her team have also garnered great notice lately for yet another project they are hard at work developing—unifying the look of Metro rail stations. According to a recent article in the *Los Angeles Times*, "The system's 80 train stops play host to more than one thousand design variations, from architectural differences to a range of trash cans and paint colors. In Chinatown, Gold Line riders see pagodas; in Highland Park, chairs that resemble dice. The Norwalk Green Line station is bee-themed, including honeycomb tiles. As a part of the county's nascent rail boom, which over the next decade will double the number of Metro train stations, officials have adopted one signature look."



Gold Line East Station Canopy, Photo © John Livzey, 2015

Welborne and her team seek to standardize and unify the design for all future stations and the system as a whole. According to Welborne, the designs will help passengers with wayfinding as well as making maintenance easier and cheaper for Metro. Though a daunting task to define an entire system—Welborne likened the decision to "a minefield"—Welborne and her team press on.

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Welborne earned an architecture degree from the University of Notre Dame and then received her Master of Architecture and Master in City Planning from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. After graduation, Welborne performed urban design work, handling everything from transit projects to campus master plans. Then, she obtained a grant to study a Brazilian transit system. So, Welborne led a mission that included then-mayor Richard Riordan and other transportation decision makers to Brazil to reconnoiter their rubber-tired rapid bus system that operates as if it were light rail. That proved to be a very important mission.

“We came back and tested it and everyone loved it. So the first two routes of Metro Rapid were installed and became operational. Within two months, they were the busiest bus routes in the county. So I worked on the outside of Metro, but on Metro projects. And that’s how I got to know everyone at Metro. I took a break from transportation and ran the Grand Avenue project (an urban development project in downtown Los Angeles) for ten years. Then the planning officer at Metro retired and they recruited me. I thought it was an amazing opportunity to transform the county and make this a much better and more sustainable place to live.”

While at Metro, WTS-LA reached out to Welborne, inviting her to speak at a monthly program. It was one of the first speaking engagements of her tenure.

“I was very happy to accept WTS-LA’s invitation to speak. It was a real opportunity to learn more about the organization. And what I learned is that WTS is a great organization that has helped many people. Though I have tremendous time constraints, I get involved as much as I can. For example, I had a wonderful time serving as co-emcee with Doug Failing for last year’s awards dinner. And I look forward to continuing my involvement in the chapter.”

Today, Welborne serves as a Director-At-Large for the chapter.

Only a true Renaissance woman could effectively plan the future of mobility for Metro and Los Angeles. Fortunately, in Martha Welborne, Metro found the perfect person.