

Hilda Solis, A Woman of Firsts, Addresses WTS Los Angeles

COMMITTEE REPORT



Hilda L. Solis (Los Angeles County Supervisor), Photos © John Livzey, 2015

The use of transportation infrastructure to create opportunities for the community it serves is one of the major goals that Los Angeles County Supervisor Hilda L. Solis described on March 6 during her address to WTS Los Angeles.

“Transportation to me is more than getting someone from point A to point B,” said Solis, former United States Secretary of Labor from 2009 to 2013 and the first Latina member of a President’s cabinet. “Transportation means creating equality in opportunities, equality in supporting our families; its building touches our neighborhoods.”

While the importance of transportation to Los Angeles County formed the core of her talk, Solis also the importance of community input into the making of transportation decisions and the importance of diversity in the transportation industry and government.

“I appreciate what your organization stands for,” she said. “I was gratified to see half the audience represented by the other gender. I was also pleased to see that the president of this organization [Amanda Smith] is so young but that she also has a prominent position in her organization.”

“I know we need to maintain and support our infrastructure,” added the Supervisor, who also sits on the Board of Los Angeles Metro. “Coming back from Washington, D.C., I can tell you that this country has a lot of infrastructure issues. Here our issues include cracks in roadways created by the great amount of cars and trucks that use our streets and highways. [Improved] infrastructure also means getting someone from Claremont to downtown in a timely matter.”

“Now that I am driving again, I’m driving the HOV lanes from El Monte—that’s where I live now—I can see why we are trying to address



your traffic issues,” added the four-term United States Congresswoman. “I can see there is a lot more that justifies our attention.

Noting that Metro has done a lot to increase public transportation, Solis noted how fortunate Los Angeles is to have funding for these projects. But, she cautioned, “That may end if we cannot prove that we are responsible to our constituents.”

One way Solis sees government being responsible, is to have housing near the transportation centers.



“In the future, maybe our riders will walk,” she said. “Maybe they can travel without getting in their car. So I am constantly thinking about how we can help people getting to that job, to that appointment, to college. Rail is not enough.”

To meet that responsibility, she wants transportation planning to involve the people it serves.

“We need to include everyone in that discussion, to look at this holistically,” she emphasized. “If people take 20 minutes to walk to a bus, we need to make sure that [the walk] is safe, it is pleasant, it is well lit. For me, it is always about being mindful of who is our client. For me, it is always the public.”

“We must have opportunities to discuss transportation’s future before projects open in our communities,” she said. “That is the most important thing to me, being able to hear other voices, being sure that we can hear from the affected communities. That is important because these are public funds. We are all in this together.”

Solis, the first Latina elected to the California State Senate, cited this attention to public input as essential to building the next phase of the Metro system.

“When we go to the public for help on a new Measure R, it will be about, ‘Hilda, how did you spend that money in that past?’ We need to be mindful of that as we move forward to other projects,” she pointed out.

Supervisor Solis also raised the need for local jurisdictions to collaborate on dispersing transportation funds.



“I hope to get away from parts of the cities, parts of the counties fighting over funds,” she said. “We all want to see transit. We want to see light rail. We want to see these projects count. We want to see these projects lead somewhere. We cannot expect that ‘if we build it, they will come.’ That is not necessarily the case.”

Solis returned to the theme of including women in transportation decision making.

“I was happy to see that in my first meetings at Metro I met many women who have been elevated to those positions,” she said. “I have met women in science and engineering. We need to remove those barriers for disadvantaged women, for women of color.”

“When I look at this room I feel good,” she said. “All eyes are on Los Angeles. There is definitely something in the wind. I am optimistic because I see so much talent here.”

