

METRANS and WTS-LA Present Dinner and Thinks



*Grace Crunican (Co-author of *Boots on the Ground, Flats in the Boardroom: Transportation Women Tell Their Stories* and BART General Manager), Photos © John Livzey, 2016*

Sometimes devouring a good book is just not enough. But participants at the standing-room-only March 23, 2016, dinner program and panel discussion got to do more. The capacity crowd of 150 industry practitioners and students from USC and Cal State University, Long Beach had the opportunity to consume the wit and wisdom from the book *Boots on the Ground, Flats in the Boardroom: Transportation Women Tell Their Stories* and interview one of its authors, two of its participants, and two other experts on its subject.

Hosted jointly by WTS-LA and METRANS, a USC-based transportation center that seeks to “solve transportation problems of large metropolitan regions through interdisciplinary research, education and outreach,” the program was moderated by book co-author and BART general manager Grace Crunican and featured CDM Smith vice president Dana Hook, former FAA Airports Division manager LaVerne Reid, KOA Corporation senior transportation planner Mengzhao Hu, and professor and vice dean for Academic Programs at the USC Viterbi School of Engineering James E. Moore, II. By all accounts, the networking dinner, panel discussion, audience Q&A, and dessert reception provided a fantastic forum to discuss women in transportation and their careers.



“I was honored to be invited by Metrans and WTS,” explains Foothill Transit Director of Finance Michelle Caldwell, who introduced moderator Crunican. “I am so impressed that the women in the book chose to tell their personal stories in an effort to improve the transportation industry for ALL women. Even though I have been in transportation for 33 years, I learned some strategies from the book that I can use today.”

“It is valuable to learn about how successful executives have traversed their careers,” adds Gayla Kraetsch Hartsough, Ph.D., president of KH Consulting Group. “Career pathways are rarely straight and each of the panelists shared compelling and personal stories about their career journeys. Sometimes the best way to get ahead is to take a lateral move, or even a lesser job, to gain new skills or address



personal needs. In addition, it is rare to have such a powerful panel of successful women executives in the transportation field—again each serving as important role models for future generations of women and men working in transportation.”

Cal State University, Long Beach student Radhika Naik points out that “this event told us what is usually *not* told - that when things don’t go as planned, you can take alternative paths. Keep your focus and you will reach your destination. Both speakers, La Verne Francis Reid and Dana Hook, made a great impact on me as they shared stories of how they tried to

balance their personal life and achieve successful careers. Their stories provided helpful insight in how to use day-to-day skills in dealing with expected and unexpected challenges while shaping their careers.”

Developed by METRANS assistant director Victoria Deguzman and part of her *Practitioner Speaker Series* for students, the program provided exceptional wisdom and practical career advice for everyone—gender, age, discipline, and ethnicity notwithstanding. In a METRANS article on the event, USC master’s degree candidate Oscar Monge wrote, “Coming from a male perspective, I see the stories that were shared as vital to my development as a young urban planner. I would not be able to empathize with the life experiences of professional women if it were not by listening to stories like the ones shared today ... Furthermore, I was expecting my academic background in planning to limit my ability to participate with transportation practitioners. To my surprise, however, the event was not about the technicalities in transportation, but rather about students and our future development as professionals ... The moderator and panelists discussed the intersections between personal and professional lives, importance of networking, risk-taking, and the important and universal role of negotiation. They offered insights on what we, as young professionals, ought to do now and plan to do in the future for a successful career track.”

WTS-LA knows this book and its participants well. The chapter recently hosted a program featuring the book, its co-authors, and some of its participants. For the uninitiated, however, *Boots on the Ground, Flats in the Boardroom* details the rise of 18 pioneering women—in their own words—in the transportation industry and presents their wisdom in a Studs Terkel-like format. Co-authored by Crunican and former MassDOT/MBTA board member Liz Levin, *Boots on the Ground, Flats in the Boardroom* covers virtually every discipline the transportation industry offers. From the woman who led the USDOT through a most difficult financial period to the woman who ran the FAA during 9/11 to the woman who set an injury/fatality-free standard at the FRA, *Boots on the Ground, Flats in the Boardroom* is packed with anecdotes that entertain and enlighten, inform and encourage, instruct and inspire.



Sometimes devouring a good book is not enough. Fortunately, through the auspices of METRANS and WTS Los Angeles, students and industry practitioners didn’t have to settle for just reading *Boots on the Ground, Flats in the Boardroom*. On March 23, they met one of its authors and two of its subjects, along with two other transportation leaders dedicated to the advancement of women. Our warmest thanks to the USC Sol Price School of Public Policy for creating the videos.