

It Was A Very Good Year ... For the California WTS Chapters



American anthropologist Margaret Mead famously said, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.” For almost 30 years, the non-profit California WTS chapters have been changing their world, and improving ours.

In 1985, the first California WTS chapter was chartered in Los Angeles. Its mission? Advancing women in transportation. On that day, only one woman—the very first to do so—served on a Los Angeles transportation commission. Another owned a small business (with a male employee “fronting” in the CEO role to preserve the sensibilities of her clients) that would go on to serve the transportation sector for several decades. Slowly at first, but gaining traction in the late 1990s, women became California Secretaries of Business, Transportation and Housing; DOT general managers; Caltrans district directors; transit, freight, and commuter rail executives; port CEOs and chief harbor engineers; airport general managers; directors of transportation think tanks; small business owners; and global consulting firm executives. Although women and men in the transportation sector acknowledge that there is still a long way to go to achieve solid representation for women in transportation and other technical fields, 2013 marked strong successes for the California WTS chapters in the Inland Empire, Los Angeles, Orange County, Sacramento, San Diego, and San Francisco.



With more than 1200 members—one quarter of the total WTS members in the US, Canada and Britain—the women and men who belong to the six California chapters range from state transportation officials to local and regional transportation agency general managers and CEOs. They include *Fortune 500* senior executives, entry- and mid-level career women, university faculty and students, legislators, writers, economists and attorneys representing every transportation mode and discipline.

Chapters also have strong ties to local business groups whose economic fortunes are predicated on the need for a sound transportation infrastructure.

Monthly speakers at chapter events include federal and regional transportation leaders discussing issues such as the greening of America’s largest ports and the emergence of local funding and determinism in developing transportation systems.

In addition to providing a wealth of opportunities for early and mid-career women to hone leadership skills at the chapter level and to network with and be mentored by leaders in our industry, the six California chapters have shone through outreach to high schools and universities. They have encouraged younger students to pursue transportation careers and introduced college and graduate students to internship opportunities, future employers, and the latest issues of the industry. Forging strong relationships with local high schools, chapters have sponsored career days with up to 200 girls in attendance, hosted a highly respected transportation academy, and underwritten event fees for as many as 25 students at each monthly program.



Even more remarkably, in 2013 the six California chapters awarded \$170,500 in scholarships to college, graduate, and high school students in transportation careers academies.

Perhaps the handful of women and men who founded the first California WTS chapter knew they were going to drive a whole new kind of more equitable transportation infrastructure. Or perhaps they could only guess at the changes that six chapters would engender over the next three decades. Either way, they were that small group of thoughtful, committed citizens who changed our world.