

Judi Masuda Meets Transportation Demands in an Electrifying Career



*Judi Masuda (Former City of Santa Monica transportation demand programs manager and former WTS-LA first vice president),
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Some people are ahead of their time. But a select few are way ahead of everyone's time and understanding of future possibilities. Former City of Santa Monica transportation demand programs manager and former WTS-LA first vice president Judi Masuda is one such person. A champion of alternative-fuel vehicles long before they were well known or fashionable, Masuda used her prescient expertise to advance Pasadena and Santa Monica.

"What I did in Santa Monica is very similar to what I did in Pasadena. They needed assistance with trip reduction and in working with developers and residents to reduce congestion, and traffic and parking demand. It was very challenging. But we were ahead of the curve in terms of electric vehicles in Pasadena. I had every electric vehicle available back in the 90s. The car companies were fighting for Pasadena, because they wanted the publicity. So we leveraged that to entice them to install the necessary infrastructure for an electric-vehicle program. They had implemented it in Los Angeles, but they wanted Pasadena next. So we developed the second-largest electric vehicle infrastructure behind Los Angeles." She uses that expertise and vision today as a consultant to Los Angeles County Metro. Focusing on Metro's Sustainability Program, she works closely with contracted consultants to develop innovative approaches to lower the agency's divisional "carbon footprint." She also works with several sustainable local agencies, cities, and institutions to increase electric vehicle charging and compressed natural gas station infrastructure.



The City of Santa Monica asked Masuda to join its Planning and Community Development Department in 2012 to assist with the implementation of the city's Land Use and Circulation Element, a "community vision" to integrate traffic management and land use through trip reduction.

"In Santa Monica, the sustainability and environment director asked me if I would take the lead in developing the infrastructure and locate station sites. But Santa Monica is over 70 percent multifamily/mixed use developments. Trying to get charging stations and develop infrastructure was very difficult because there wasn't very much available space. Parking was so dense, particularly downtown. So the challenge was to work with the residents and the businesses to find workable solutions for everyone. But that was just parking. We also had to locate electric-vehicle charging stations, because you can't just put them on the streets. Santa Monica had a very high percentage of electric vehicles. The

registration rate of 3.6 percent for all electric cars was the highest in the United States outside of two towns in the Silicon Valley. So demand for charging stations was great; it still is. So that was a very real and exciting challenge.”

Though helping municipalities implement trip/congestion reduction programs is near to her heart, another aspect of transportation is equally important—education.

“I’m a guest lecturer at USC for a transportation planning course. Everything that’s taught in that class is what I do. So that’s really easy for me and I’ve been working with the professor for 20 years. In fact, when he’s out of town, I substitute teach his class. It’s thrilling for me because these students just don’t know about transportation yet. They haven’t thought about the nuts and bolts of the work. But there are also some wonderful surprises. One of my USC interns actually wrote a \$53 million TIGER grant. Ford (Motor Company) even sent someone to work with him on the budget. He attended the University of Michigan Transportation Research Institute SMART Conference with me to present our project. People told me that if he had his own business they’d work for him; he was only 20 years old! So it’s very rewarding. I also work with students at the Art Center College of Design - Transportation Systems Graduate Program. They have a new transportation systems program and the students invite me to work with them in designing bike paths and various transportation-related programs. And they invite me to attend and review their graduate projects. Working with students in transportation is very gratifying.”

But Masuda also sees another element of her transportation career as rewarding—WTS-LA.

“I attended a WTS event early in my career. I don’t even remember who invited me. I heard a woman named Miyamoto speak and I was so impressed with what she said. I knew some of the participants at the program and I just wanted to be a part of it. But there were two aspects of WTS-LA that touched me in particular. First, WTS-LA raised money for scholarships. I come from a very poor background, very poor. When I heard they did that, it gave me the opportunity to give back. So I developed the Adopt-a-School program. We were the first WTS chapter in the nation to have one. So helping students, particularly ones without great means, is very dear to me. I even went on to chair the WTS National Scholarship Committee in later years.

“But WTS-LA also helped me come out of my shell. I learned to speak publicly and to develop the tools I had. And that happened through the selfless support of the board and our president at the time, Alexandra Spencer. Though she doesn’t like me to recognize her publicly for her many contributions, she taught me leadership. And being able to put myself out there in front of the chapter and do my job so well came from the confidence I gained working with her and the board. But that also had profound results in a way I had never anticipated.

“Through this confidence I helped staff the U.S. Secretary of Transportation Norman Mineta during fundraising functions in Los Angeles. Years later, I seized another opportunity to ask if the Secretary could include an early morning coffee with the WTS-LA Chapter. We were all thrilled when he accepted! He also honored us with taped ‘opening remarks’ for the WTS-LA-hosted National Conference in Long Beach. So gaining confidence through WTS-LA helped me reach the national stage. But there is one thing that touched me that stands out over everything else.

“I can’t tell you how many young Asian students have come up to me and said, ‘I am so proud to see an Asian, with an Asian name, as a leader in a top position in WTS-LA. It gives me hope.’ I still get emotional about that now.”