

## Rachel Lindt: How WTS-LA Is Supposed to Work



*Rachel Lindt (Transportation Planner with AECOM), Photos by John Livzey, 2017*

If you could design exactly how WTS-LA could help a young graduate student, Rachel Lindt's experience would be the prototypical plan. Today, she serves as a planner with WTS-LA Platinum Partner AECOM in the Downtown LA transportation planning group, where she gets to use both her planning acumen and her art background. And she is getting to do extraordinary work.

"One of the coolest things about AECOM is that I get to work on a range of projects. You can work on a feasibility study one day and an alternative analysis of transit-corridor projects the next, and then an environmental review the next day. That's the benefit of working at a large firm. But my passion, the area where I've honed in on, is planning and designing urban environments that improve quality of life for everyone. These range from active transportation [transportation involving physical human action] and complete streets [a roadway planned and designed to consider the safe, convenient access and mobility of all roadway users of all ages and abilities], and first-last mile connections [transportation involving the first and last quarter mile of a trip]. I'm drawn to these areas because I'm interested in people—the user experience and how improvements really feel on the ground. For me, it's the intersection between transportation, land use, and urban design."

Ms. Lindt also credits her location for providing a target-rich environment for her transportation passions.

"Los Angeles is the crucible for everything. It's a really exciting time to be here, particularly in Downtown LA, as there are so many opportunities to improve access and shape the environment. There's so much development happening and so many ways to improve the streetscape and ultimately affect peoples' relationship with the city. So, the next frontier will be extending the Downtown LA model of an affordable, sustainable place for folks to live, work, and play to the rest of Los Angeles. It's a challenging, yet exciting time to be working in Los Angeles."

At present, Ms. Lindt is finishing up a feasibility study that analyzes route options for extending the Metro Crenshaw/LAX Line (a light rail line that will run from the existing Metro Expo Line at Crenshaw Station south to connect to the Metro Green Line, and eventually LAX) north to connect to the Metro Red Line, a transit line that runs through the densest, most populous part of the city, to Hollywood/Highland Station. To say the least, she's enjoying it as a theoretical assignment. But she's also enjoying it for a more visceral reason.

"As a transit rider myself, I find having options for getting around to be really important. I take the commuter bus from Culver City to Downtown LA almost every day, but I also have the option of taking the Metro Expo Line, thanks to the extension to Santa Monica, which opened last year. If you're stuck in your



car on a congested freeway or street, that's no fun. But the people-watching on transit is fantastic, as is the ability to read a book, listen to a podcast or just stare out the window. Transit gives me a chance to have some nice solitary moments before I get into work. That's pretty incredible for Los Angeles."

Ms. Lindt credits her passion for transportation and the user experience to her initial calling to become a planner.

"My undergraduate degree is in Fine Art. I made my way to planning through the idea of public

participation, social interaction, and community. I was doing that kind of work in my art practice, but I realized that I could have a greater impact by approaching it through planning. I was always interested in urban design, but in grad school at UCLA [Luskin School of Public Affairs] I realized that transportation really shapes the environment. If I can make streetscapes more livable, and design safer, more inclusive streets, this will in turn create a better public realm and cities overall. In the long run, I want to bridge that gap between transportation and urban design, while using my artistic background to creatively engage with communities. Right now, though, I'm just trying to gain as many skills as I can."

Without question, Ms. Lindt's background and career plans are striking. But what's equally striking is how she got to where she is today.

"Back in 2014, I was at UCLA and going into my second year with a dual concentration in design and development and transportation policy and planning. I learned about a scholarship at WTS-LA. So, I applied. And I won the [WTS-LA Richard G. Newman] AECOM Scholarship. At the awards dinner, they sat me at the AECOM table and it turned out that I knew [AECOM VP] Ray Sosa from another job I had had. So, I went up to him and said hello and he asked me what I was up to. I told him I was graduating and that I was doing transportation and design. He said we should stay in touch. One year later, I'm working at AECOM, thanks to connections I made through WTS-LA. And that's how it happens. That's one of those beautiful stories where it all works out the way it's supposed to. Of course, from there, it was only natural to join the local chapter.

"I thought joining WTS-LA would be a good way to get involved in the greater network of transportation professionals. And it has had a domino effect. Once you're in this space, it's really easy to get involved with all of these other opportunities. For example, I joined the mentoring program and had a great mentor in STV VP Mark Peterson. I was in between graduating and getting my job at AECOM and he really helped me professionally. Later, I started sitting on the Transportation Resume Book (TRB) Committee and I've done that for the past two years. So, it's safe to say my experience and connections have grown. But one of the most profound experiences I have had so far has been working with the TRB Committee.

"One of the things I really enjoyed while working on the TRB was meeting with students. I came to transportation through a circuitous path. And I like to share that with students so that they see that there is no single path to the profession. Sharing my experience and shedding light on the fact that transportation encompasses many different disciplines has been great. Being able to communicate important life lessons like that to students is one of the things I love most about working with the TRB Committee."

If you could design exactly how WTS-LA could help a young graduate student find the transportation career she loves, Rachel Lindt's experience would be the prototypical plan.