

## When it comes to transportation, I'm going public...



*Lisa Karwoski, PE, WTS-LA President (Mott MacDonald), Photo © John Livzey*

Mile's Law posits that, "Where you stand depends on where you sit." Well, where I have been sitting lately has markedly changed where I stand on a very important perception about Los Angeles. For almost a century we have been disparaged everywhere from radio to late-night television to academia as being hopelessly automobile-centric. I am happy to report that that is just not true anymore. How do I know? Because I have done the unthinkable. I live in Los Angeles and I no longer own a car. That's right. I sold it. And now I rely completely on public transportation. What I have reaffirmed is this: our transit system is phenomenal. We are no longer car-dependent, and I know this from experience.

Being able to live downtown has made this much easier. Downtown is the hub of our public transportation system, and I can walk (yes, I said walk) a couple of blocks to hop on a train that will take me directly, or almost directly, to where I want to go. And while I've achieved a degree of mastery of the train system, I look forward to learning the bus system and having my expectations rise even further. Yes, it may take a little longer to get to some places, but I find the use of public transportation to be relaxing and less stressful than driving in our congested city. It's a good thing! I read, I listen to podcasts, and I check emails—it has changed my life. I feel much more engaged in my city, much more a part of its fabric because I am interacting not only with the city but with its people, in a different way, on a daily basis.

But what about Uber and Lyft and the plethora of other rider-sharing options that keep appearing? To be honest, I just don't use them that much. In fact, I use them about the same amount as I did when I owned my car. I'm certainly glad they are there, but they are just one option in a cornucopia of transportation possibilities in our city. And guess what—they're changing, too.

Aiming to expand shared mobility to low-income populations, Metro has partnered with Via in a one-year pilot program partly funded by the Federal Transit Administration to partner ride-sharing services with transit to provide first-mile/last-mile connectivity. In addition, UberPool and Lyft are providing public transportation riders with an option for discounted first-mile/last-mile trips that connect to transit. In Denver, Uber also now lists "Transit" on its app, "where a quick tap produces a list of bus or train routes as well as the expected fare price and end-to-end directions." So, rather than seeing them as competitors, ride-sharing services are starting to view public transportation as an integral part of a city's greater transportation web. This is a stunning moment in transportation history. But what has been a revelation to me is now pretty much the norm for an entirely different stratum.

Young people growing up in Los Angeles today take transit. Many must. But others are finding out that it's actually a fantastic way to traverse our city. Transit-oriented development is burgeoning as others understand the value and convenience of living close to transit, and that has driven up property values near transit. In short, it is all working just as the urban planners said it would. We now have a world-class transit system, one that rivals the great capitals of Europe and—dare I say it—New York City. Will cars

ever disappear from Los Angeles? Of course not. That is definitely not in the cards. But the change is permanent, and it's something that we must all take advantage of and support. So, here's what I would like you to do.

Ride it! Vow to take public transportation once a week. Take it somewhere, anywhere. Whether it's to work, to play, to a ballgame, to check out downtown, or just to ride from the mountains to the sea; take public transportation in Los Angeles and learn how extensive and beautiful the trip can be and how fascinating our city is from a new perspective. Make a day of it. See a part of the city that you've never been to—the aquarium, the beach, Universal, museums! Many women and men at Metro and elsewhere have toiled tirelessly to design and implement a comprehensive system to get us from Point A to B and back home again, and the best way you can acknowledge their considerable accomplishment is to test it out. Ride the system and learn how wonderful it can be and encourage others to do the same.

Los Angeles has changed. Yes, we are still the car capital of the world and I doubt that we'll lose that moniker soon. But from where I stand right now—and where I sit every morning—we are fast gaining a dual reputation as a great city with many transportation and transit options. Don't believe me? Then grab a TAP card and hop the nearest bus or subway. Where you stand can dramatically change once you take a transit seat.