

Congratulations to John Bulinski, WTS-LA Honorable Ray LaHood Award Recipient



John Bulinski (2020 WTS-LA Honorable Ray LaHood Award Recipient)

Walking the walk on the road less traveled...

Caltrans District 7 Director John Bulinski believes in a level playing field. But it's more than just a belief. For him, it's an action plan. Each year, WTS-LA recognizes a man with the Honorable Ray LaHood award because he is someone who, "seeks out opportunities to advance and advocate for women in his own organization, and actively ensures that women are able to compete for key positions of authority within that organizations." In addition, that man must contribute directly to advancing women and minorities through programs or opportunities and must make a meaningful, considerable contribution to the transportation industry. For more than 30 years at Caltrans, that's exactly what John Bulinski has done.

As District 7 Director, Bulinski oversees nearly 3,000 employees, manages 1,400 freeway and highway miles, and handles a budget of over \$2 billion. That's almost like being president of a small nation. Even more astounding is that in addition to keeping one of the most challenging and important Caltrans districts moving, Bulinski uses his position as a platform to ensure equality, fairness, and opportunity regardless of race, gender, or ethnicity.

Within nine months of taking the District 7 reins, Bulinski advanced and supported the first Women in Caltrans Empowerment Meeting, an event that established development goals for improving workplace gender diversity. A phenomenal success, the meeting is now held quarterly and has already helped advance women's careers. In addition, Bulinski strongly encourages his staff—both male and female—to join outside organizations like WTS-LA that promote equality. And he advises them to get involved. That's not hollow advice. He himself is a WTS-LA Director-at-Large. But his commitment doesn't end there. He fully supports internal forums for women and minorities to get together and work on their growth through brown-bag lunches, mentorship programs, and more. But for Bulinski, actions like this are nothing new, as his track record demonstrates clearly. Here are some examples.

When he served with Caltrans District 2, he championed the careers of numerous women, promoting them on merit and leadership ability. During his District 8 tenure, he helped two women advance to executive team positions while actively mentoring several others, encouraging all to become leaders within their spheres of influence. And he is credited with promoting California's first-ever female Maintenance Manager II to Deputy District Director for Maintenance. In other firsts, he promoted women to the roles of Deputy District Director for Administration and the Chief Deputy District Director. And in District 7 today, five of the eleven permanent deputies are women. But when it comes to advancement of women and minorities, Bulinski is not only relentless, he's also creative.

He regularly advocates for women and minorities to enhance their skills through assignments external to District 7, assignments that help develop employees' skills and make them more competitive for promotion. For example, Bulinski helped secure an acting position for a Staff Services Manager II as the Deputy District Director for Administration in District 12 and a special assignment for a project manager to assist Caltrans HQ in developing implementation guidance for Senate Bill 743. Assignments like these provide invaluable knowledge, exposure, and experience.

Finally, one of the most compelling examples of his advocacy is how he has handled the Covid-19 crisis. Bulinski's compassion and concern for his staff is boundless, as he demonstrates in numerous ways, including ensuring that his staff regularly receives the latest health and safety operational protocols and employee support and benefit information. He also proactively facilitated District 7's work-from-home protocols by expediting the purchase of laptops and mobile phones to minimize exposure and protect his employees, their families, and countless others indirectly. In short, he's done everything he can to make sure his employees and their families are safe, a feature of his leadership throughout his career.

Some people believe in a level playing field. But others take action in that regard. 2020 WTS-LA Honorable Ray LaHood Award winner John Bulinski takes action every day to level the playing field in the transportation industry, as he has for his entire 30-year Caltrans career.