Multi-modal Ideas Inspire ADOT’s New Director

“What we need to do in this State is craft a vision for the 21st Century,” says newly appointed Director of the Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT), Mary E. Peters.

“We need to be thinking multi-modal. And, in a partnership effort, we must develop long range plans that consider our transportation needs for at least the next twenty years,” Mary adds.

Her chief objective as ADOT’s newest director include being more accessible to the citizens of Arizona. She wants to provide them with a transportation vision and acquire a stable funding mechanism. The funding effort will soon be vital to the agency as thirty percent of ADOT’s funding comes from a source that expired in 2003.

She issued a challenge that won’t be easy or simple to meet, but is crucial in her commitment. Setting goals and achieving them is not new to ADOT’s new chief.

Skills To Excel

Mary began her career with ADOT just prior to the voter approved Proposition 301, which gave the agency the funding needed to develop large-scale projects for a growing state. She was hired as a secretary in the Construction Services, but has been able to develop the skills needed at the agency grew. In 1999 she was named Deputy Director for both the Administrative and Operations divisions. Earlier this year, Mary took over as ADOT’s Director, which seemed like a natural progression. Was it difficult climbing the ladder of an agency managed mostly by men? “Yes, in some ways,” she says. “It may have been harder, but it was and is double. You must establish credibility.” The acknowledgment that not being an engineer was even tougher than overcoming the obstacle of being a woman, Mary chose to overcome that professional roadblock.

“If you do your homework by researching and staying on top of things, you will gain credibility because you offer validity and evidence of your opinions.”

Developing Alternatives

Reflecting on past experiences, Mary states that participating in Governor Fife Symington’s appointed Alternative Transportation Systems Task Force was a pivotal experience. The group’s focus was to improve alternatives to the single-occupant vehicle in an effort to relieve traffic congestion and improve air quality.

“Through this group, I met a lot of individuals in the alternative modes area and became familiar with how important it is for continued and improved mobility,” Mary says.

“I’d like to see us (ADOT) become a ‘transportation’ agency with multi-modal efforts, not just be considered a ‘highway’ agency,” Mary states. “We can no longer rely on highways as an exclusive system of travel in Maricopa County. I’d like to see us establish transit corridors that will accommodate high-speed buses and possibly rail.”

According to Mary, she’d like to first build out and accelerate the current freeway system to a minimum configuration. Then she wants to use the additional capacity to develop other options that would support alternative modes. “We need to look at this area as a region, not a composite of cities in order to be successful,” she adds.

Next, she envisions establishing five key transit corridors in the Phoenix area for future transportation development: the southwest Valley, I-17 corridor, Scottsdale/NE Valley, southeast Valley (Goodyear, Chandler), and the Mesa area.

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RPTA’s New Chairman Speaks Out

In July, Phoenix Mayor Skip Rimsa takes his turn at the helm of the Regional Public Transportation Authority’s Board of Directors for the next 12 months. In this role, he will guide regional transportation efforts for member cities and towns and Maricopa County.

Rimsa was elected as mayor in 1994, then again in 1998 for a four-year term. His philosophy on developing the future of Phoenix is in line with further development and enhancement of transportation in the region. His goals are to renew neighborhoods; expand the economy and protect families. Mobility is important to the success of all these goals.

“I am tremendously excited to be the new Chairman for RPTA,” says Rimsa. Although he realizes that there are many challenges in the coming year, there is one area where he’d like to focus his efforts. For the past six months, RPTA and other agency staff have been working on a Board-directed plan examining the viability of regionalization of the DART system. Currently, varying DART systems exist in the Valley that present a confusing array of transportation choices for passengers. “Staff has done an excellent job laying the groundwork for us to get this done, so now it’s up to us to finish the job.”

While not performing endless mayoral duties for the citizens of Phoenix, Rimsa leads a very active life at home with his wife and five children. Among the five are a set of triplets who just turned two years old.

To ‘get away from it all,’ Rimsa returns to Alaska each year for a hunting expedition, where he and his brother served as guides in his earlier days. And, in his spare time, the Mayor likes to restore old cars and trucks. Perhaps you’ve seen him drive down the streets of Phoenix in his yellow ’56 Ford pickup.

Mayor Rimsa is shown looking at the clean burning LNG fuel system.

Mayor Skip Rimsa kicked off the American’s Public Transit Association (APTA) Convention in Phoenix last May with the unveiling of the first of 55 new fueling natural gas (NG) buses. Delivery will be complete this fall.

Serving as replacement for aging diesel buses, the new LNG buses are low-floor and easily accessible for persons with disabilities.
A First for Arizona

HB 2565
New Transit Bill

“The bill is a home-run for our local jurisdictions and a stronger commitment from the state for jurisdictions additional transit needs and the ability to leverage those funds against federal funding for additional project development.”

On Friday, May 29, Governor Doug Ducey signed into law HB 2565 allowing for approximately $80 million in new transit funding statewide. The bill, authored by State Representative Les Stukenberg (R-Mesa), is the first major transit funding mechanism of its kind.

Because the bulk of excess state revenue flows into school capital finance and tax relief programs, funding for other worthy projects was scarce this year. Also, previous attempts at funding transit through lottery or Powerball revenues have consistently come up short.

Enter Representative Stukenberg, a long-time champion of public transit. Along with her support, Arizona Transit Association (ATA) President John Anderson and Executive Director Jim Shimpan were able to enact legislation that used higher than expected federal transportation act revenues to trigger state vehicle license tax (VLT) revenues for transportation and transit purposes throughout the state. The net effect holds harmless existing highway and freeway projects while giving local jurisdictions additional transit needs and the ability to leverage those funds against federal funding for additional project development.

Doug Ducey, Executive Director of the Regional Public Transportation Authority says: “The bill is a home-run for our local jurisdictions and a stronger commitment from the state for transit.”

Doug also adds: “We should all applaud the tireless work of Representative Stukenberg and the leadership of the Arizona Transit Association.”

Legislation secured on one front can be taken away on another. Concerned for years about dwindling lottery revenues and problems within the administration of the State Lottery, legislators passed HB 2138 that places on the November ballot, a measure to do away with the lottery. Arizona cities and towns, the Heritage Fund, and many other current worthy programs including transit, are funded through lottery revenues.

Programs driven by these measures face extinction or severe curtailment should voters say “no” to the lottery in November. ☐
Valley Residents “Air” Opinions and Commute Behaviors

RPTA contracts with WestGroup Marketing Research to conduct a survey that measures participation in and reactions to the trip reduction and Clean Air Campaign programs. Here are a few results according to the 1998 survey:

- Nearly 60% of residents have taken action to try to reduce air pollution as a result of hearing about it.
- Fourteen percent of all residents use an alternate mode exclusively, which is up from 11 percent in 1995.
- Valley workers using an alternate mode (carpool, bus, bike, walk, telecommute, or compressed work week) at least one day a week is 45%.
- The number of employed individuals who telecommute has increased by 38% in the past five years going from 19,000 to more than 30,000.
- The number of alternate mode users has increased by 60% (or 208,000 Valley commuters) since 1993, while the number of employed people in Maricopa County has increased by only 37%.
- Alternate mode usage in the Valley the past year is estimated in 36,200 fewer trips being made, which translates into a savings of 50 million fewer miles traveled each day and 30,250 tons of pollution from being emitted.
- The number one suggested change for an increase in alternate mode usage is an improved transit system.

A complete report of the survey is available by contacting Valley Metro at (602) 262-7433 and asking for the 1998 Clean Air Campaign and TRP Annual Survey.

(continued from page 1)

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"We need to look at predating a transportation consider so that we have the opportunity to build solutions," she adds.

In addition, she wants to link other areas across the state so travelers and tourists can quickly and easily reach some of the state’s most popular areas. Laker would include north to the Grand Canyon, west to Los Angeles, south to Tucson and beyond.

Planning the Future Together

As far as local planning goes, she defines ADOT’s relationship with RPTA. "Although it’s courteous, I’d like to see us working more closely together on long range plans for both regional and statewide efforts," she states.

Why state-wide? She believes local leaders, such as bus connections with state-wide alternate mode systems, will be vital for the mobility of travelers.

Public opinion of ADOT has not always been favorable in the past, but the new director says they have turned around and have put a positive spin on their ideas. ADOT generates reports establishing costs and revenues of the transportation system more each year for the public to review. In addition, the agency has been able to meet and exceed chlorine dioxide of accelerated highway projects. All in all, she feels their integrity is being restored.

“We see one of the hot spots of highway construction in the country, and that gives us a certain prestige we can all be proud of,” she adds.

Many has clearly defined the next steps that are needed to meet the challenges she has set before her staff and herself. "The first thing we need to do is build more public support for public transportation. We need to educate, inform and involve others. Next, we need to plan so that we are not taking away future opportunities. Third, I’d like to form a long-term partnership group of key transportation people for developing the long range transportation plan." She hopes to get this group together in the next 12 months to discussion can begin on how to establish the next wave of transportation funding before this one expires.

As far as immediate plans, she hopes to encourage a safer working environment for all ADOT employees by promoting the importance of awareness at all times.

She also realizes that decisions made now will definitely impact all of us who plan a future in Arizona.

"I realize the economic impact mobility can make. Transportation directly affects quality-of-life too and I want to see my family stay here," she adds.
Clean Air Luncheon
Honors Organizations & Individuals

More than 200 leaders from Valley businesses, government and civic groups gathered for the 1998 Awards Luncheon at the Ritz Carlton Hotel on June 19 to recognize outstanding efforts in the Clean Air Campaign and Trip.
Calendar of Events

Dates to Remember:

July 21: Regional Bicycle Task Force; Maricopa Association of Governments; 302 N. 1st Ave.; 1:00 p.m. Cornillon room.

July 20: Transportation Review Committee, Maricopa Association of Governments; 302 N. 1st Ave.; 10:00 a.m. Biscary room.

September 21: Phoenix/Glendale Major Investment Study Open House to present findings and discuss progress of second phase. Glendale Community College Student Union; 6000 West Olive Avenue (59th Avenue/Cliff); Presentations given at 11:30 a.m. and 6:30 p.m.

September 22: Phoenix/Glendale Major Investment Study Open House; Phoenix Public Library - Metrotown, 36050 N. Long Drive East (at the intersection of Long Drive East and Long Drive South); Presentations given at 11:30 a.m. and 6:30 p.m.

October 1 & 2: Livable Cities Conference, Phoenix. Do your streets look, feel, and act like places for people? If the answer is "no," then this conference is for you. For more information call Monterey Management Group, Valley Metro, 94-184-4

In Brief

Destinations is available in audio tape and in braille. If you know of anyone who might be interested in receiving Destinations in either format, please call RPTA's Audio & Braille Department at 303-1847. Destinations is the official newsletter of the Regional Public Transportation Authority (RPTA). It is published with a circulation of approximately 6,000. We welcome your letters, comments and suggestions.

The RPTA is a political subdivision of Arizona created by a coalition of elected officials and interested citizens in 1985 through the passage of Proposition 303. Membership is open to all municipalities in Maricopa County and the County government. The mission of RPTA is to promote the social and economic well-being of communities through efficient and effective regional transit systems as a valuable and significant component of the transportation network.

To receive future copies of Destinations please write or call:
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The RPTA wants Destinations to address transit in a way that meets the needs of its readers. Please take a moment to give us your recommendations for future issues of Destinations, or you may e-mail us:
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