

InfrastructureUSA

Guest on THE INFRA BLOG

**Laura Barrett, Executive Director, The Transportation Equity Network (TEN)
Conversation with Steve Anderson, Managing Director, InfrastructureUSA**

Transportation Equity Network: Working for equal representation

The Transportation Equity Network or TEN is a project of Gamaliel, which is a large faith based organization in 60 different cities throughout the U.S. But TEN is even larger than Gamaliel. We've been around for about ten years and we have about 350 affiliates in 41 states. We basically work to make sure that low-income people have a voice in all of the transportation debates that are taking place around this country. You know with jobs and infrastructure being such a huge issue right now as people are debating, how do we get out of this mess we're in with the economy. Making sure that low-income people, people of color, women, and minorities are represented in those states; it's been really a full time job for us, so we've been working very hard over the last couple of years to really raise-up those voices.

The issues

We work on local issues, on making sure there's enough money for public transit on the local level. We've participated in several key transportation funding fights, including one here in St. Louis, which passed by a large margin and restored the service to 2,000 bus stops, that had been cut, and was cut for several months due to a huge funding cap here in St. Louis but we worked with the voters to get them out on that.

We also work on making sure that minorities and women are represented when transit is being built. We've worked on that in a variety of cities, in Kansas City, the Christopher Bond Bridge, was built using the Missouri Model, which makes sure that some of the work hours are dedicated to low-income people and that allows them to get into the construction trades, start to have a good paying construction career, which then completely transforms their families, and helps to transform neighborhoods as well. Some of the folks that ended up working on the Christopher Bond Bridge in Kansas City, had health insurance for the first time in their lives. They were able to take care of their children who had asthma. They were able to have a regular paycheck and bring that to their families. While we're building this transportation we really can make a difference for the people whose neighborhood it's going into. That's one thing TEN looks at.

We also work to make sure that when decisions are being made that folks are there, so they get to voice what they think about the decision the city or state is contemplating. Right now they're working on issues around both Green Bay and

Appleton and are looking at cuts to their transit funding because they are over their federal limit. We are working to find a fix for that as well. We work on a real variety of things, but mostly it's just about making sure that there's enough buses and trains so that people can get to work and have access to jobs, education and worship.

The Transportation Bill

Our congressional representatives are keenly aware that we need a new Transportation Authorization Bill. That's been something we've talked about with Representative Mica who's the head of the Transportation Committee, Representative Carnahan, Representative Cleaver. Many folks have been pretty frustrated by the pace, and the senate as well, Senator Boxer, and others in the Senate really interested in making sure we get a bill through. When you poll people, in terms of what they think about transportation, it's pretty clear to see that most folks are really supportive of more public transit. They want to make sure that walking and biking is supported and that we're building walk-able and livable cities; which includes having plenty of transportation so that people can get around without their cars. That's what people are really interested in seeing. Some of our politicians are really interested in this. The problem is that we got caught up in, "we're going to find a change first, and then we are going to have health care, and then we're going to fix so and so."

Now it looks like the President is going forward and saying that he is going to support a transportation bill. Representative Mica is saying that he is going to try and get something under the Committee, so it's under the process. We stand ready to work and make sure that low-income people are represented in that debate. It has been a long painful process that has been put on hold for quite a few years. We want to see a transportation bill passed soon, that is fair and that actually provides more resources for low-income communities such as walking, biking, complete streets and more funding for public transit.

More jobs

We have been lifting up the importance of creating jobs through creating more transit. It's actually one of the very best job creators in this country. You can get transit projects up and going really quickly and get folks out to work fairly quickly. I agree that the whole debate has been caught up in how we are going to pay for it. You know TEN doesn't have all of the answers on that but what we do think is that when we're looking at ways to pay for the system it shouldn't unfairly impact low-income people.

Unfortunately, everything that we've been trying to do in this country has been doing just that. Rather than looking at our income tax system and thinking about what's a fair progressive way to pay for this system, it ended up looking at things like the gas tax, which is going to affect low-income folks and rural folks far more

than it is going to affect others. We think it's just really important to think about the equity and the revenue stream and then also to come up with a large enough revenue stream that we can actually have a game changer. And think about how we can do some signature projects that are going to make a real difference for our areas, and lift our area out of it's economic malaise and also put lots of people to work. And we think the answer to that is really building far more transit than has been built so far. We have a study that we wrote, "*More Transit Equals More Jobs*", which is on our website at www.transportationequity.org which takes a look at how we've been able to create more jobs through transit. I think it would be a valuable resource for folks that are reading or listening.

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