



PWC transportation speakers see improvements on the way

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"The people on the panel are the doers and thinkers of today, the men and women who are working hard to improve the nation's transportation infrastructure," said William Fife, P.E., head of The Fife Group, reprising his role as moderator of the annual "Transportation Forum - Regional Update," presented to a capacity crowd by Professional Women in Construction (PWC) on July 28 at the General Society of Mechanics & Tradesmen.

Karen Rae, deputy administrator, Federal Railroad Administration, spoke of the Northeast Corridor (NEC) Passenger Rail Corridor Investment Plan, a proposed \$2.5 billion investment for higher-speed services. The plan would examine the interrelationships of a broader regional rail system within the larger transportation network. Said Rae, "The goal is not just speed but travel time - connecting major population centers, corridors in 11 megaregions across the U.S. that are critical to the nation's transportation system. The President...wants to connect 80% of the nation's population to rail and into these rail networks."

The newly appointed commissioner of the NYS Dept. of Transportation, Joan McDonald, noted the 20-year successes of the region since ISTEA (Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act) was first enacted "to give all of us confidence that we will address ... challenges head on." Pointing out that "we have embraced technology with EZpass and state of the art traffic management centers, we have led the way in advancing mega projects - AirTrain, East Side access, LIE HOV lanes and the 7 line extension," she said that "transportation investments are job creators." Telling the audience that projects in Long Island, New York City and the Hudson Valley will soon go out to bid, she concluded that, "The New York State Department of Transportation looks forward to partnering and continuing to invest in innovation, technology and infrastructure." She also noted the governor's commitment to expanding opportunities for W/MBEs.

Veronique Hakim, executive director, NJ Turnpike Authority, said, "I am proud to lead the NJ Turnpike Authority...in the midst of a \$7 billion capital program...there's no shortage of opportunities for work by engineers, architects, contractors and suppliers during these difficult economic times." Hakim spoke of large scale projects adding lanes to the Turnpike and Parkway and smaller projects expanding interchanges and rehabilitating bridges.

She said, "Since firms are looking for work, we've also seen great competition for...our projects."

James Weinstein, executive director, N.J. Transit, gave an overview of the \$1.2 billion capital program for FY 2012, saying that despite an overall decrease in federal funding, the agency is increasing its State-of-Good-Repair investment "to maintain the state's transit infrastructure and enhance reliability and safety, and to support our ongoing fleet modernization effort."

He noted that projects are supported by \$217 million in the capital program. He said too that N.J. Transit dedicated more than 10% of its contracts to DBEs last year and that the agency hopes to increase the numbers this year.

Michael Horodniceanu, president, MTA Capital Construction, stressed the importance of having "clearly defined estimates" by thoroughly understanding the existing conditions and accounting for risks. As he said, "We had to develop a clear understanding of our construction environment for each project."

Horodniceanu said that partnering with contractors and sharing the risk with them created a "win/win result." For example, by creating an incentive for the contractor to finish early the MTA saved money and the contractor got a bonus. Upcoming contracts include the Second Avenue Subway, East Side Access and the No. 7 Extension.

He also noted that the MTA has a Small Business Mentoring Program and an overall DBE goal on federally funded procurement of 17%; on locally funded procurements, 10% goals for both MBEs and WBEs.

Shown (front row from left) are: Veronique Hakim, N.J. Turnpike Authority; Joan McDonald, NYSDOT; Karen Rae, Federal Railroad Admin. Shown (back row from left) are: William Fife, P.E., The Fife Group; Michael Horodniceanu, MTACC; James Weinstein, N.J. Transit; Lenore Janis, PWC. Photograph by Calvin Lee

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