



## WTS International: Attract, Connect, Sustain, Advance

WTS International exists to connect transportation professionals, and to help prepare the next generation of the mobility workforce. But it takes everyone to create change, says Lindsay Shelton-Gross

By Lindsay Shelton-Gross • December 7, 2022 • Read time: 6 mins



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Founded in 1977, the Women's Transportation Seminar was created to give women employed in the transportation industry a safe and inclusive space to convene and network. At the time, women were not permitted to maintain a separate professional organisation that was unrelated to education, thus the 'seminar' piece of our legal name.

In 2022, we're known as WTS International: a thriving and almost 50-year-old organisation with over 8,000 members. We have long supported and advocated for women working in all modes and at all levels of transportation through our educational programming, leadership training, networking and

events, corporate partnerships, mentorship opportunities, advocacy, WTS Foundation scholarships, and the phenomenal grassroots and local work of our 67 chapters and six region councils. Our mission: attract, connect, sustain, and advance women and the under-represented in the industry.

Together, WTS members are a crucial voice in the sector and a valuable resource in undertaking the massive amount of work required to resolve pressing issues in transportation today, including equity, diversity and inclusion; workforce development and retention; student education and engagement; and broader topics concerning women in the workplace - like family and caregiver leave policies, gender-based pay inequities, and more. Along with the issues of today, we consider the issues of tomorrow: elevating our international programming and new initiatives over the coming years in alignment with our 'OneWTS' Strategic Plan.

## Attract

WTS exists not only to connect transportation professionals, but also to help prepare the next generation of the mobility workforce. Through the WTS Foundation, we provide multiple scholarship opportunities to students who are exploring a variety of career paths – engineering, planning, technology and research, community engagement, communications, public service, and more. In 2021 alone, we provided over \$600,000 to high school, community college, trade school, and undergraduate and graduate-level students.

Innovation moves quickly. WTS strives to promote career opportunities not only in traditional civil engineering and planning; but also options in intelligent transportation, mastering topics and technologies in automation, big data, cybersecurity and electrification. We welcome the opportunity to hear from hiring experts about the required skillsets of a technologically advanced workforce and commit to our role in connecting job-seekers with a new generation of employers – including transportation start-ups, advanced research facilities, and data and security companies.

Next June, the WTS Foundation hosts the WTS Capital Summit, formerly known as the DC Summit, for the first time since 2019. This immersive summer programme brings students from around North America to the Washington, DC metropolitan area for a week of hands-on introductions to transportation career opportunities and leadership skills development, technical tours of our nation's transportation systems, visits to federal agencies and the US Congress, and much more. From 24-29 June 2023, students will convene for transformative experiences in both DC and Baltimore, and build lifelong relationships with professional mentors and fellow attendees.

## Connect

Convening the under-represented brings power to a collective voice. Connecting high-level leaders allows for an exchange of ideas around not only new technologies, but also business operations, change management, and strategic planning and implementation. WTS members also value chapter-based and international-level networking events, whether virtual or in-person. This includes holiday gatherings and happy hours, but also our Executive and Women's Business Owners Roundtables, online meet-ups for our LGBTQIA+ community, and more.

This past year, WTS established multiple specialised standing committees, international and foundation boards of directors-chaired groups that focus on our most important organisational priorities. For the 2022-24 board term, committee leaders solicited applications from member volunteers to participate and help craft these priorities and plans of action. This includes our International Committees on Workforce Development, Legislation, Chapter Operations, DBE and Small Business, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, and others.

## Sustain

It is crucial that the transportation workforce sees leaders that look like themselves. Diversity is vital to employee retention, and WTS is investing in partnerships with forward-thinking organisations to ensure and prepare for a diverse future for our sector, from entry-level workers through management; including multimodal transportation groups; educational associations; federal, state, and local agencies; and others. Our commitment to diversity is also reflected today at the top levels of leadership in our own organisation, with the most diverse board of directors ever assembled under the guidance of Jannet Walker-Ford, WTS International's first Black chair.

Additionally, our organisation has invested in a number of partnerships and partnered events, including the MobilityXX initiative and conferences on transit, road infrastructure, public policy, small business support, aviation, DEI initiatives, and technology, like the 2022 ITS World Congress in Los Angeles. WTS International also maintains standing memorandums of understanding with the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO), American Public Transportation Association (APTA), American Road & Transportation Builders Association (ARTBA), Conference of Minority Transportation Officials (COMTO), Eno Center for Transportation and Transportation Research Board (TRB).

The WTS International Workforce Development Task Force is chartered to explore industry partnerships and recruitment initiatives spanning all modes. A subcommittee of the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Standing Committee, our DBE/Small Business group works to provide a support network for women business owners to learn, grow, and promote their businesses and leadership careers; and provides a support network for women business owners. Recently, the DBE Subcommittee formulated comments for WTS International's submission for the USDOT's Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) on Disadvantaged Business Enterprise and Airport Concession Disadvantaged Business Enterprise Program Implementation Modifications.

## Advance



Jannet Walker-Ford, WTS International chair

WTS International's legislative and advocacy efforts promote the support of comprehensive transportation policy and funding, as well as support decisions that increase equity and access for the workforce and the communities we serve.

Our Signature Leadership Training, designed for executive-level and mid-career professionals, is an annual programme that gathers cohorts of transportation professionals in Washington, DC.

Additionally, WTS International offers Chapter Leader Development, hosted in a different North American city each year, where chapter officers gather to meet and learn about their volunteer commitments and topics in association and organisational management.

Generations of women have found their place with WTS International, including leaders in the USDOT, Federal Transit Administration, state and local departments of transportation, and associations like IBTTA, ARTBA, AASHTO, TRB, APTA, ITS America and others. If you are a member, thank you for your continued commitment to advancing women who advance transportation. If you are not yet a member, I welcome you to join us in our mission. As an inclusive organisation, membership with WTS International is open to all; and it takes everyone to effect change. We welcome you as your whole self. ITS

• Find more at [www.wtsinternational.org](http://www.wtsinternational.org)

**About the Author:**

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## The great intersection: equity and transportation

WTS International's annual conferences gather approximately 1,000 attendees each year. On 10-12 May next year, join WTS in Atlanta as we explore our 2023 theme 'The Great Intersection: Equity and Transportation'. Atlanta is a city known for its vibrant history and modern progress in equity and inclusion — in transportation and beyond. The focus of our next conference will highlight conversations inclusive of all opinions, backgrounds and experiences. Session breakouts will focus on all modes of mobility, including surface and roads, transit, bicycle and pedestrian, freight, aviation, maritime, ports, micromobility and other active modes of transportation. We strongly encourage diversity and inclusion across modes when considering speakers for panels and presentations, and abstracts that highlight equity.

Track topics for the conference include Social and Environmental Sustainability for an Equitable Future, Moving People and Goods: An Inclusive Approach, Inclusive Management for Workforce Investments, Career Development for Inclusive Representation, and our Student Track. 2023 conference session abstracts are due 16 December, 2022. Additionally, WTS International has recently announced the host cities for our future annual conferences, including New Orleans, Louisiana in 2024; Toronto, Canada in 2025; Los Angeles, California in 2026; and Washington, DC for our 50th anniversary in 2027.

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