



Spring 2022 Issue

PRESIDENT'S WELCOME

Greetings COMTO Members, Friends, and Supporters

Welcome to COMTO CT's first Chapter newsletter!

Conference of Minority Transportation Officials (COMTO) is known as the leading voice of diversity in transportation, and the COMTO CT Chapter has established strategies to promote diversity, equity and inclusion in the industry. Over the past year our Chapter has hosted an informative webinar on CTDOT potential subcontracting opportunities for MWDBE from upcoming projects in the Departments' Five-Year Capital Improvement Plan. Other activities include COMTO CT collaborations with partners to provide a flagger training program for minorities, which has graduated over 30 participants so far, and co-hosting the Transportation and Climate Initiative Program (TCI-P) informational session discussing the potential benefits of the program to provide investments for an equitable, cleaner, and more resilient transportation system for Connecticut communities. We are off to a great start in 2022, the Chapter hosted a panel discussion with Connecticut Transportation Executive leaders from the CTDOT, CT Division of FHWA and DMV who shared strategies that their agencies are taking on to provide and retain a more diverse, equitable and inclusive environment for the transportation workforce. We also are looking forward this year to implementing our new mentorship program, and encourage you to volunteer your time as a mentor to inspire the upcoming transportation leaders! Economic vitality is in the future for our transportation industry with the passing of Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), a once-in-a generation investment, which will give our transportation industry the boost needed to substantially improve our infrastructure system, as well as the ability to provide more jobs, and contracting opportunities to local Historically Underutilized Businesses. Our chapter would not be possible without the incredible support of our board of directors, volunteers, members, and corporate event sponsors! Feel free to reach out to me at ctchapter@comtoct.org, or any of COMTO CT leadership if you have any questions or ideas you want to share with us. Thanks, and look forward to connecting with you at an upcoming event.

Best regards,
Sharon Okoye, COMTO CT President

COMTO CT Has A New Website!

Check out us out at www.comtoct.org

Huge thank you to Heather Matthews of Savvy Gal Technical Solutions for building the website!

www.linkedin.com/company/savvy-gal-technical-solutions

COMTO CT Members on the Move!

The Connecticut Conference of Minority Transportation Officials (COMTO CT) was one of five professional organizations presenting at the "The Lunch and Learn, Transportation Professional Organizations", hosted by Connecticut Department of Transportation Deputy Commissioner Garrett Eucalitto to encourage CTDOT employee participation in professional organizations.

Other organizations participating included:

- WTS CT (Women's Transportation Seminar)
- ITE (Institute of Transportation Engineers)
- American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE)
- Construction Management Association of America (CMAA)



Active COMTO CT Member Garrett Eucalitto, Connecticut Department of Transportation Deputy Commissioner



Celebrating Women Who Move The Nation

The Conference of Minority Transportation Officials (COMTO) hosted its 11th Annual Celebrating Women Who Move the Nation Awards Breakfast on March 16, 2022, in Washington, DC. CT Chapter's, treasurer Tamara Smith was in attendance to celebrate with other transportation officials. COMTO CT congratulates the 2022 honorees - 16 phenomenal women who are leading and advancing America's transportation infrastructure.

COMTO CT IS LOOKING FOR VOLUNTEERS!

Interested?

Let us know by emailing us at CTChapter@comtoct.org

A View from the Top: Executive Transportation Leaders Perspectives on Achieving a More Diverse and Sustainable Transportation Workforce – January 26, 2022

COMTO CT's panel session featured discussions from Connecticut's Transportation public sector executives Amy Jackson-Grove, Federal Highway (FHWA) Connecticut Division Administrator, Joseph Giulietti, Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT) Commissioner, and Sibongile Magubane, Connecticut Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) Commissioner.

Fostering diversity in the transportation industry is essential for agencies to achieve their mission. Strategic, intentional efforts for diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) ensures that the transportation industry has a workforce with variety of perspectives and skillsets needed to meet operational and customer service demands, provide public safety, as well as successfully solve complex challenges while keeping up with innovation. In addition, with the challenges the industry is experiencing with current and future labor force gaps due to attrition through retirement, retaining a diverse talent pipeline to fill these gaps, particularly talent from underrepresented groups, can address these challenges in order to meet the needs of agencies.



Some highlights of discussion from FHWA included: Having a Diversity Management Committee to promote open communication, provide an opportunity for all employees to participate, and identify challenges in the workplace; Establishing best practices to address unintended or unconscious biases in recruitment and hiring processes; using social media and other means to reach out to potential candidates, including HBCU colleges.

FHWA Administrator
Amy Jackson-Grove

Amy Jackson-Grove



Some highlights of discussion from CTDOT included: Current leadership being visible and accountable for fostering an inclusive environment, including DEI in hiring practices, as Department has first African American female working in Executive Office in agencies' 125 years; providing unintended and unconscious bias training and succession planning to fill retirement positions.

CTDOT Commissioner
Joseph Giulietti

Joseph Giulietti



Some highlights of discussion from DMV included: Building a diverse workforce reflective of communities served. Strategies for building skills; adopting tools that allow everyone to work together to cultivate more acceptance of inclusion; opportunities for cross-functional initiatives that allow employees exposure outside of their departments; community engagement and DEI in services to underserved communities and residents who cannot leverage on-line and in-person DMV services.

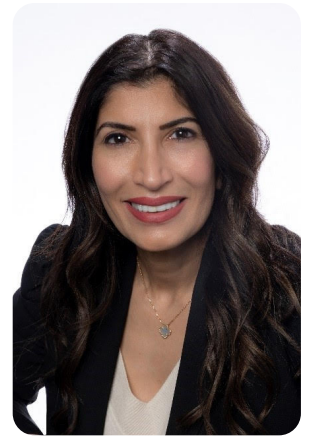
CT DMV Commissioner
Sibongile Magubane

Sibongile Magubane

Member Spotlight

COMTO CT celebrates our members who contribute to the diversity of our Chapter's membership profile.

Our member spotlight for May 2022 is Deepa Massand-Vaswani, BES, Inc. Northeast Transportation Engineers.



Deepa is the Chief Operations Officer (COO) of BES, Inc. and manages every aspect of the firm from the Administrative to Marketing to project coordination/management of significant contracts. She previously headed M. International (MI) Engineerings' (Bayside, New York) Marketing Division for over fourteen years while simultaneously being an active participant in the firm's diverse construction contracts. She graduated Summa Cum Laude from Columbia University Business School with a M.B.A. in Marketing and International Business, and is currently pursuing a Master of Science in Construction Management. Deepa also holds a Bachelor of Science in Architecture, Planning and Environmental Studies from the University College of London.

What inspired you to pursue a career in the transportation industry? I was born into the New York Engineering Industry; visiting my father's office building which housed his Civil/Engineering and Construction Management firms and visiting his "other office" or project site to see the accomplishments of his team. From a young age, I worked every summer in those offices, from organizing mechanical pencils and sweeping drafting boards to eventually getting my own drafting board on the Architectural Design floor and eventually winning contracts. Working in my father's Engineering firm those summers, seeing subways improved, walkways created, bridges rehabilitated, roadways reconstructed, and facilities upgraded brought home to me the wondrous nature of infrastructure and what it provides each of us. I was in awe of the vast possibilities of transportation growth and improvement and knew that I wanted to be a part of it.

How have you benefitted from being a COMTO member? COMTO has given me, as it has for all of its members, a vision of a diverse transportation industry and a strong platform for which to encourage and support the growth of equity and inclusion and achieve this vision. It has also provided me with a sense of community in which open discussion, mutual respect, and collaborative thinking are encouraged. Most importantly, it has given me unbridled enthusiasm for the future dynamic Transportation Industry comprised of a mosaic of people. I am honored to be a COMTO Member and look forward to helping COMTO to achieve our shared goals of diversity, equity and inclusion that can only result in an efficient, effective and innovative transportation environment.

What has been your biggest accomplishment? While it may not be my biggest accomplishment, it certainly is one that I take the greatest pride in since it marked a culmination of years of efforts and the barriers to entry along the way to achieve this were so high. It was the winning of a rehabilitation contract that earmarked the firm (Massand Engineering, LS, PC) as successfully transitioning from being a DBE to a strong contemporary amongst other Engineering firms in its genre. Just before I relocated to India in 2004, I worked day and night (as is often the case) on this proposal, our first to date as a Prime. The contract called for numerous rehabilitation contracts in the Bronx for over 30 structures, from streetways to parking complexes to residential high-rises. While it may not have been our biggest contract subsequently, it was my most significant one, distinguished by the first win that changed the company's image from that of a solid DBE support to a significant provider of Engineering services along with other large-scale NYC based firms. And for me personally, it embodied the intense efforts to surmount the hurdles we had faced in years before that propelled us to a space where we could an even greater impact the built environment and sustain people and their communities long term.

What words of wisdom or inspirational message would you give an upcoming transportation professional? I think the best tenets that I have learned and say to myself daily is to face adversity with a positive attitude, build trusting relationships and nurture others to the best of your abilities, always continue to learn and above all, know that the truest path to your goal is oftentimes the hardest. In my career to date and as a minority, as a woman and manager of a DBE business, I can only say that integrity, hard work and perseverance are key to making progress. It is also crucial I feel to never stop learning, pushing the boundaries of what one knows to keep up with changing technologies, new learnings and learn from the never-ending experience of others.

Deepa's father has proudly watched her career flourish, and when asked to describe his daughter, he noted:

"It has been one of the great joys of my life to watch Deepa carry forth our family's place in the Engineering and Construction Management Industry in the Northeast. I could never have imagined when I started our first firm in New York in 1973, that we would still occupy a place in this industry, and that the relationships and good work we performed over the years would carry over to the next generation. Since her days as an Architectural student, through her pursuit of an MBA, and then working as our Head of Marketing and regional COO, Deepa has pursued her career with a diligence and discipline that any Father and Professional would be proud of. The industry is in good hands with people like her at the helm..." - Nanik P. Massand, PE, Founder of The Massand Group of Companies

Deepa is married with three amazing kids and a very frisky Havanese dog called Bodhi (sattva). She is currently learning her fourth language (Italian), certified as a Pilates Instructor, loves anything design-related (from art to exterior architecture to interior furnishings). Deepa loves to bike, cook, bake and loves traveling and reading.

