

DISCOVER AND CULTIVATE THE NEW CHAMPIONS OF TRANSIT

LEADERSHIP APTA 2015

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Discovering and Cultivating the New Champions of Transit

Intro

Executives in the transit Industry are looking for the people they want to uphold and advance their future strategies and goals. Given the increased focus on building and promoting transit as an important cultural and economic necessity across all regions and demographics, it is important for executives within the transit industry to “Discover and Cultivate the New Champion of Transit”.

The future of transit, its growth, investment, preservation, and integration in thriving transportation networks requires the development of champions both internal and external to your organization. While this is not a new story, what is new are the evolving faces and roles of transit champions. Leaders are being asked to do more with new partners every day. Population trends are changing cities and transit ridership is growing. Leaders need partners to deliver the value promise of public transportation and their organizations.

As we look forward to the new trends of transit we can already see the sustainable results that are in progress and being achieved. Through interviews with industry leaders and an analysis of common traits of successful transit organizations the authors look at champions, their characteristics, and how successful leaders in the industry cultivate and develop them.

First Impressions

In October of 2014 at the annual meeting and expo of the American Public Transportation Association, the authors absorbed the enormity of the industry. Walking the expo floor of the George R. Brown Convention Center in Houston, Texas demonstrated the massive volume of contributors and beneficiaries to the transit industry in the form of suppliers, parts, vehicles, technology, and more. As the topic for this paper and its accompanying presentation took shape, the authors would reflect on those moments on the expo floor as the inspiration for this topic. Without transit, none of those people would have been in Houston. Without transit, thousands of jobs and industry products and services would not exist. The sheer size of the event and the volume of people begged the question, are industry partners engaging in the growth of transit? Are these the future champions of transit? If not, who are the future champions of transit?



1: Expo floor at the APTA Annual Meeting in Houston, TX. October 2014

Phone a Friend

In working through the process to develop the topic, the project team called Mike Terry, the CEO of the Indianapolis Public Transportation Corporation (IndyGo). Mr. Terry has been an integral leader in the transformation of public transportation in Indianapolis and Central Indiana, which has succeeded in the cultivation of champions from a broad spectrum of interests. The takeaway from that conversation was interest from Mr. Terry about the need for a toolkit to help chief executives develop champions from within and beyond their organizations.

The project team also discussed the idea with CEO's and General Managers at the Legislative conference in March 2015, where it was apparent that most top executives had different perspectives on new champions with some focusing on internal stakeholders while others on the external. One thing is apparent the need to have champions is important and recognized as an area for professional development among executives in the transit industry.

Acknowledgements

In order to gain perspective and understand the goals of executives in the transit industry, the authors engaged in several conversations with leaders around the country. Without the generosity of their time and sincere engagement, this paper would not have been possible. The insights gained through these conversations are the basis for the findings of the research presented in this document. The authors wish to acknowledge the following people for their contributions to this topic.

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Brad Miller – Panellas Suncoast Transit Authority

Keith Parker – Metropolitan Atlanta Regional Transit Authority

Elizabeth Presutti – Des Moines Area Regional Transit Authority

Eileen Rodriguez – MTA Long Island Rail Road

Marty Sennett – Lafayette Public Transportation Corporation (DBA Go City Bus)

Brian Smith – CityLink

Mike Terry – Indianapolis Public Transportation Corporation (DBA IndyGo)

Michael Townes – HNTB Corporation

Steven Van Oort – Des Moines Area Regional Transit Authority

Peter Varga – The Rapid

Phil Washington – Los Angeles Metro



2: Public transportation officials interviewed for this paper.

Two Recurring Themes

In the pursuit of understanding the characteristics of champions for transit, the authors encountered two consistent themes that contribute to the understanding of developing and cultivating champions. Chief among these themes, is that there is a difference between leaders and champions.

Leaders vs Champions

The line between leaders and champions is thin, but distinct. Leaders set the tone. They establish and push out the organization's vision. They engage with partners, business leaders and stakeholders. They advance and communicate the message and vision forward. Leaders develop and empower others to be the champions. In the big picture, leaders strive for the win – a win for all. Leaders are the mentors and build the relationships essential to success.

Champions embrace the vision and they tell their story. They make things happen and rally the troops by bringing passion and energy to the situation. A good example is at the Legislative conference in March of 2015, when APTA Chair Philip Washington established a vision for the nationally successful "Stand Up for Transportation Day." Washington challenged the APTA membership who responded by championing events around the country.



3: 2015 APTA Chair, Phil Washington, leads champions at Stand Up 4 Transportation event.

Champions embrace vision and share the story. Champions exist in a perpetual state of enlightened dissatisfaction, always looking for a new idea that will improve upon the current state of affairs. Typically, they have a long history of pursuing new ideas, attempting breakthroughs, and challenging the accepted.

The Big Tent

The second consistent theme that emerged in the research is the idea that transit is a “big tent” conversation. The identification and development of champions is key to the success of transit organizations and initiatives. One of the ways champions are cultivated is through engagement. Public transportation touches every strata of community and necessitates the need for an approach to engagement that is open to all voices. By using a tall pole, the tent rises higher and makes more room for others. A common theme in the discovery of understanding and cultivating champions comes from the spirit of the “big tent” approach to engagement. Leaders in the transit industry that have engaged diverse interests have gained exposure to new and different individual partners. These are the partners that are becoming public transportation’s next and future champions of transit.

In every interview the authors conducted the idea of engaging others from different levels within organizations and partners beyond traditional boundaries emerged. From this, the authors have surmised that an authentic approach to cultivating champions requires an open mindset to stretch and trust more than the usual suspects. This means that the leader needs to be equipped with an understanding for the characteristics of successful champions and concepts to help them engage those champions.



4: The “big tent” and the characteristics of champions.

Characteristics of Champions

The volume of interviews conducted by the authors presented a wide array of characteristics that industry leaders see or seek in champions. The team met over several weeks and combined and shared notes to look for common themes. After a grouping exercise focused on the key takeaways of each interview, the authors identified trends and the following characteristics emerged as common traits that effective champions possess. Effective champions:

- have **passion and have vision** to influence change;
- either seek or are already engaged in **evolving trends** and look for ways to articulate **benefits**;
- are authentically **collaborative**—constantly in search of new **partners** and ideas without concern of ownership or credit for the results;
- embrace **innovation** and demonstrate an ability and willingness to **engage** and communicate with others.

Case Studies

Passion and Vision

Barb Cline - Executive Director, Prairie Hills Transit

This case study is about the big vision and passion opportunity required of one person to initiate Public Transit within a region in South Dakota. We listened to an individual who was passionate about her community. She listened to her community member specifically the senior community who didn't have access to everyday necessities. Like going to the grocery store, to medical appointments to the local coffee shop without relying on friends and family. The need for transportation was a must. The residents were shut-ins and isolated, and that drove her to work with the local medical facility and with a borrowed van, and the passion and vision, Barb Cline provided access to the community. And now 26 years later she continues to have passion and vision for her region and now provides access to 15 communities being a part of the rural regional transportation system. By having the vision of accessibility and quality of life – she continues building a transportation network.



5: Barb Cline

The need for transportation is nothing new throughout the nation but it is every bit as important from big cities to rural areas.

Barb is a great example of a champion seeing that the aging community and finding a way to drive change in a community that did not fully embrace the need. Now Cline is leading the way in knowing the need to pull in the younger generation and understand their strengths. Cline is leveraging her vision for growing service with millennials and communicating with them through social media and targeted marketing. Here her passion and vision drives change.

Jeanine Kreig – Tri-Delta Transit

After 25 years at Tri-Delta Transit, Jeanie Kreig's passion for treating people the way I want to be treated is contagious. This approach to staff development has cultivated hundreds of champions for transit internal to her organization. She engages team members at all levels of the organization by meeting them where they are, on their terms, at all shifts. Over the years, some of Tri-Delta's most successful initiatives have come from within and developed just by "hanging out" with employees. The experience is empowering employees while she makes sure they have the tools and direction to succeed.



6: Jeanine Kreig

Kreig acknowledges that this approach has not proven 100% successful. There have been times when a champion has been identified and disappointed. But the experience doesn't stop Kreig

from continuing to seek partners, new ideas, leverage passion for success within the organization.

One of Kreig's proudest success stories is Tri-Delta's approach to the ESMS ISO 14001 program with FTA at Virginia Tech. The environment team comprised of the general manager, Kreig, and a receptionist allowed for the reception to blossom in a new role and direction that she never saw possible for her career. By taking ownership of the ESMS and taking classes to develop other skills Kreig helped develop a loyal champion who continues to grow in the transit industry.

Steve Van Oort – Des Moines Area Regional Transit

In talking with Steve Van Oort, he describe the qualities of a champion is one who is passionate for what they do. They are the ones that ask questions, know the history and are good listeners. Champions have a tendency to push the envelope but also do their research. Champions have the "can do" attitude.



Champions work diligently for their passion and with that we need to celebrate them more. We need to let them know they are doing a great job and the importance of what they are doing as for some champions, as some may not even know they were a champion. Great example of showcasing and acknowledging champions is DART's Leaders in Motion event. This event, through the

leadership from Elizabeth Presutti, DART General Manager, honors community champions who have helped build and advocated for DART and greater Des Moines region in creating a sustainable public transit system. An award luncheon is held with elected officials, key stakeholders and business leaders and the champions are honored through an award ceremony with speeches and presented a personalized handcrafted award.

Steve also touched on his firm beliefs in comprehensive and strategic plans and how he advocated for these at DART and during his term on the Ankeny City Council and Mayor of Ankeny, a suburb of Des Moines and a member community of DART. He described that knowing the plans for moving ahead helps lay the ground work Champion to shine from. As Champions can the take pieces of a plan in which they are passionate about and move it forward.

Steve describe his role as a DART commission member and past Commission Chair, as one who is constantly telling the transit story but also one that is flying the (transit) plane 20,000 feet higher than everyone else for all to see. By flying above the crowd, so to speak, provides the visibility and voice for others hear about all the good things DART and public transit is doing and the value it brings to the communities and region. By telling the transit story, you never know who is watching, maybe a new champion or even a watchdog who needs to hear about the good things we do from all levels.

Trends and Benefits

Kim Irwin – Health by Design

In a state not known for transit investment, Kim Irwin has emerged as a new champion for transit in Indiana. Originally focused on her day job as the executive director of Health by



7: Kim Irwin

Design, Kim gained interest in the transit issue as a condition a matter of improving community health outcomes through the built environment. What Kim found was the need for an organized voice of citizens and interested organizations to advocate from a diverse set of interests. She helped found ICAT, the Indiana Citizens Alliance for Transit, whose membership includes representation from health care, the environment, aging and disabilities, young professionals networking groups, faith based organizations and higher ed. ICAT is recognized today in Indiana as the leading voice for citizen based advocacy of transit in Indiana.

Kim was a leader in bring AARP to the table and connecting senior mobility and independence to the transit table.

Empowering a new champion, AARP was a powerful voice for change at the Indiana General Assembly.

Kim believes in the “Big Tent” concept of advocacy and engages passionately with a unique set of voices to promote transit investment.

Embrace Innovation

Paul Jabonski – San Diego Area of Governments

Paul watches folks within his organization keeping an eye for “champions”. Also looks towards organizations in common with his own that promote transit, such as the disability community, civic groups, etc.



8: Paul Jablonski

For internal champions Paul has an employee in the planning department that developed an app that allowed passengers to text a bus stop for real time information.

Now, when there are projects that involve passenger information, he has an employee that is now front and center on any project.

This developed through the employee being allowed to use their own skills and champion internally for the organization while having a

“I look for opportunities to empower and challenge employees by letting them pursue ideas they are passionate about.”

~ Paul Jabonski

leader that embraces innovation. Paul says “Its easy, you see these people (champions), they surface. Its fun to challenge them.”

Collaboration

Dave Kubicek – MTA-Long Island Rail Road

At the time of the authors’ interview with David Kubicek had recently joined the MTA-LIRR as Senior Vice President of Operations with past employment at DART, Dallas, TX and WMATA, Washington DC . With Kubicek it was quickly apparent that he consistently carries with him the traits of a Champion of Transit. He is someone who “Champions” as a common practice. He has a passion for his work and has played a big part as a champion in many visible efforts that we can look back on today.

In particular, we discussed the collaboration and innovation required during his time at DART to assist UTAH in the preparations for the 2002 Olympics. David brought up the “Drive for Gold” issued by Salt Lake Organizing Committee to call on America's Public Transit Agencies to come and assist.

In response to this call, Kubicek was instrumental in championing an effort to send 29 Light Rail Vehicles from DART to Utah in preparation for the games. The collaboration and innovation required to get through the logistics of this effort were extraordinary.



9: Dave Kubicek

Kubicek provided an excellent example of collaboration and Innovation by stating without fanfare “It took the cooperation of several railroads, including Union Pacific, Burlington North Santa Fe, Dallas/Garland/Northeastern (DGNO), plus Utah's own rail authority, to make the rail car loan possible. They all deserve a lot of credit," Kubicek said But that accomplishment was only half of the picture. Few people are aware that as monumental as is was to get 29 light rail cars into Utah, the other side of the coin was that the reverse had to happen in time for a new station opening back in Dallas. Again the important collaborative and innovative steps required to see this effort though were truly championed by Kubicek.

Nathanial Ford – Jacksonville Area Transit Authority

Nathanial Ford spoke about JATA’s major initiative overhauling their system – ROI, Route Optimization Initiative. This entailed reaching out to the entire community. Externally with business leaders, Stakeholders, Chambers, rotary, council members. As well as internally with operators, maintenance, administration, ensuring everyone knew of the changes and what the effects where going to be and the benefits. Through this outreach and collaboration they were able to pull off a complete transformation. Key things work better when we work together.



10: Nathanial Ford

Eileen Rodriguez – MTA-Long Island Rail Road

Continuing research on the collaborative nature of a champion, Eileen Rodriguez used the expected descriptive adjectives and qualities of people she views as champions: *Political, collaborative, bottom to top, transparent, and full disclosure.*

She spoke most in depth about a very visible (The US OPEN to be played at Bethpage Long Island) project she was assigned to someone who believed that she was ready for the challenge but had never done something like this ever before. From an internal perspective she found that by finding a single champion in each of the support areas of the LIRR, she was able to get the enthusiasm, knowledge and execution she needed to put the LIRR transportation plan into place to support this event. She uncovered these individuals by first listening to them and garnishing their input. She then decided who would have the same drive to commitment that she had and formulated her team. From an external perspective, she made sure to meet with local politicians and Union leaders to ensure that they understood that the benefit of a successful event would be advantageous to all.

It was discussed that as proof of the benefits of a champion one could look back at small local train station at Farmingdale used to as a hub for transporting people to and from Bethpage Golf course and now see the huge resurgence in its community and is actively and continually undergoing major expansion.

Engagement and Communication

Michael Townes – HNTB Corporation

Champions exhibit a propensity for engaging new and different partners. They also find new ways to engage partners that are well known. When leaders identify a champion, this creates an opportunity to trust someone else with your message. Former APTA Chair Michael Townes shared an experience from his days as CEO of Hampton Roads Transit. While local chambers of commerce are not new partners, trusting a “non-transit” partner with your message is concept that more and more leaders are embracing. This requires a two layered approach.

Layer one is communicating with partners in a language that they understand. At the time, the chamber in the Hampton Area had not taken a leadership role in supporting expansion of transit service in the area. To help grow their understanding, Townes engaged with chamber leadership on terms they could understand expressing the benefits of transit investment around job growth, employee mobility, and economic benefits. By presenting transit’s benefits in terms that were relevant to the chamber of commerce, this provided an incentive for them to engage and lead. While not a



11: Michael Townes

new story, the cultivation of champions does require leaders to tweak messaging in ways that compels a new partner to engage.

Layer two of the approach took effect when Townes then empowered and trusted the chamber to become a messenger about Hampton Roads Transit's initiatives. The industry talks regularly about the importance of engaging business leaders in the community by discussing plans, sharing ideas, and address needs. By building an understanding around how the business community could embrace transit, the business community could comfortably embrace the message. By going outside of his organization, seeking others who should be interested and trusting them with his message, Townes cultivated the chamber as an effective champion for change in Hampton Roads.

As a champion, the chamber then exhibited the same characteristics as Townes. With a clear understanding and framework for engagement, the chamber became a resource and link to other organizations partners to demonstrate the merits of further investment in Hampton Roads Transit. The chamber was able to leverage its network and relationships to engage others and communicate to different partners in the ways that made sense to them. The chamber as a new partner, stayed in its "sweet spot" focusing on the economic benefits of transit because that's what the business community cares about. To trust the chamber with a message that was relevant to the chamber is how the business community became a transit champion in Hampton Roads, VA.

Christopher Boylan – General Contractors Association of New York



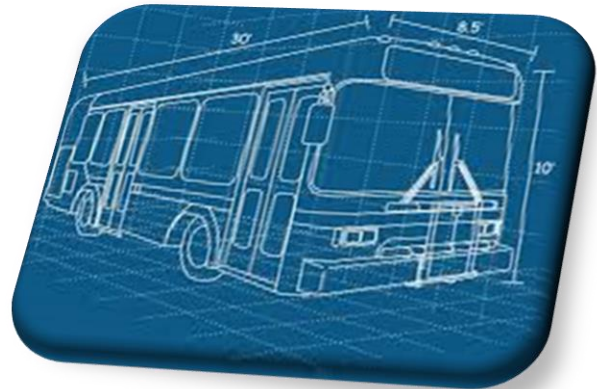
12: Christopher Boylan

Christopher Boylan discussed the challenges associated with innovation. He openly discussed his involvement with the evolution of the MTA's MetroCard from the outset of its inception through all the evolutions which are evident still to this day. On January 6, 1994, at two stations in Lower Manhattan, the MetroCard made its debut as riders at the IRT's City Hall stop and the BMT's Whitehall St. station could swipe in with the blue-and-yellow pieces of plastic. Amidst concerns over new technology, an incomplete initial roll-out, mixed use when traveling from subway to bus or vice versa, machine vandals, Chris Boylan stayed close to the visions he had to advance and improve upon this innovation. Mr. Boylan said criticism that the card was faltering had been premature, because many incentives could not be offered until the whole subway and bus system was outfitted to accept it.

Currently Railroad ticket vending machines for the Long Island Rail Road and Metro-North Railroad offer the option to purchase combined tickets/passes and MetroCards. Discount bulk fares are available. And the latest innovation is a cooperative between the Port Authority of NY/NJ and the MTA to produce JFK-AirTrain and Subway MetroCards. The Metropolitan Transportation Authority distributes 180 million of them - every year!

Blueprint to Cultivating Champions

With a better understanding of the characteristics about champions, how do executives and leaders go about developing partners as champions? The process of cultivating champions requires intentional effort to do so. As represented in the case studies, none of the profiles suggest that someone accidentally became a champion or that leaders coincidentally discovered a champion. There was purpose in the defined need and opportunity of each champion.



To provide a blue print to leaders in the transit industry, the authors of culled the following recommendations to serve as a guide to developing champions.

Continue developing champions to assist in attaining your goals and help your organization grow.

Champions have a Vision which ultimately becomes their cause. They then become passionate about the cause which they embrace in order to bring their vision to others. That passion isn't always about grandiose, life-altering, fancy-sounding big-name projects like creating a new Transit organization or purchasing a new fleet of equipment. A champion might be passionate about a new and more effective system which provides service, or a better way to compensate staff, or any of the million other little things, which, ultimately contribute to the overall improvement to the business and changes direction within their organization.

Begin to look for standout individuals within your organization

Champions are active energizers. They are willing to do what needs to be done in order to convert their passion to the point where others can see it and feel it—then draw from it and on it. A true champion, consciously or not, exudes enthusiasm. They're always excited to talk about their project. They're on the move, having fun and getting those around them pumped up. They are moving, on the move, getting things done, not waiting around.

Reference past major innovative changes

Although everybody gets down and has bad days, champions seem to just stay upbeat. They notice little things that contribute to the cause (and tell people that they've noticed); they appreciate the contributions of those around them, and joke in the face

of adversity. Their co-workers and advocates respond to that positive energy. Any meaningful project will have cynics and opponents. Effective champions do not let that stop them. They may steamroll through it or simply keep going. Later, the successful champion will get credit for their foresight. The champion does not give up as soon as someone says that their idea is stupid or will never work or has been tried ten times before and failed. Champions are all about continuing at full steam when the rest of the world seems apathetic and uninspired, when it feels like the champion is the only one who cares about the project. While most people are usually willing to stand pat with the status quo, effective champions keep things moving. Instead of laying down with the masses, they use positive energy, high levels of enthusiasm, vision and good communication to help bring the group up.

Recognize and remove limits or constraints that may be imposed

To take an idea from inception to effective implementation requires a lot more stamina than most people might expect. Generally, the excitement of a new concept or idea wears off quickly. Effective champions barely slow down at that point—they seem to take a deep mental breath, realize that the real work is just beginning and get on with it. Soon, everyone around them is getting on with it too. They push through the time when others would give up.

Earmark performers who have mastered “inside the box”

Effective champions totally, regularly, watch the details, which is very different from micromanaging. They see when people get things right and appreciate those successes. They notice the fine points of failure—spots on windows, less-than-enthusiastic phone service, spelling mistakes. They do not have any illusion that the details just get done. Big successes start with great visions, but they’re built on successful implementation of the little things. They embrace and put into practice this quote from the Dalai Lama, “Never neglect details. When everyone’s mind is dulled or distracted, the leader must be doubly vigilant”. Effective champions almost routinely find ways to let others know that they’ve noticed assistance or accomplishments, almost always in positive, “user-friendly ways that inspire those around them to be ever more diligent to detail.

Successful champions consistently take constructive advantage of resources that others—who often have far greater needs—seem to ignore, pooh-pooh, or put off using until later. These resources could include customers who want to help; staff interested in getting involved; or industry peers who could offer insight, or experience.

Meet your neighbors

Effective champions talk positively and affirmatively about their work with amazing regularity. Whether the project is a product or service they sell, a business they’re building or an internal process being put in place, the champion’s active communication

gets others excited and focused. Champions mention what they're working on at every appropriate opportunity. The mentions may be subtle but they are constantly inviting others to come out and visit, to experience the new product, to get others to enlist. They take advantage of every reason to get in front of the community (internal, external or both) by speaking to non-profits, students, government officials, business groups, family, friends; basically, anyone who will listen. Within the organization, they ask to get onto meeting agendas; they make announcements about achievements related to their project and so on.

Engage facilitators outside your organization

Successful champions take it as a given that they're responsible for accomplishing what needs to be done. They do not do all the work themselves but they start with the mindset that it's up to them to move things forward. They don't say, "someone else was supposed to do it, that their boss "kept them from making progress, that their peers "weren't supporting them, or their staff "wouldn't get on board. They never act like victims. Effective champions do not operate with the illusion that stuff is just going to happen. They either get the work effectively organized themselves, or, alternatively, they surround themselves with organized people.

Welcome the Next generation, the new and evolving faces

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The results separate an effective champion from a well-intended, hard-working, but less-effective, peer. The bottom line is that when successful champions take the lead, service gets better, innovations become the norm, staff morale improves, financial results brighten, and everyone wins.

Conclusion

The conversations and research conducted by the project team led to an understanding of 8 major characteristics of champions. Champions are passionate and have a vision about the some aspect of the transit industry related to that passion. They understand the various benefits of transit and embrace the new trends and partners. Champions are collaborative and embrace Innovation. They also exhibit strong skills of engagement and communication.

If you want to go fast, go alone.
If you want to go far, go together.

- African Proverb

The future of the transit industry, as has been with its past, is about the people. A constant need to serve an ever-changing society with mobility solutions that are safe, reliable and on time is about people. It's about the people that use public transportation and it's also about the people that deliver public transportation. As executive leaders in the transit industry, the

"The new transit CEO has to be good at operations, but they also have to be good at policy, communications, economic development, and relationships."

~ Phil Washington, LA Metro

CEO and General Manager role is changing. According to LA Metro CEO Phil Washington, "The new transit CEO has to be good at operations, but they also have to be good at policy, communications, economic development, and relationships." Overwhelmingly understood by leaders in public transportation is the recognition that to succeed in this new paradigm, leaders need to be well equipped with the skill of cultivating and developing champions in

order to fulfill this ever changing role and expectations of leaders. The leaders in this industry that are developing new champions to stay ahead of the game and the changing dynamics with technology, demographics, and the increase accessibility needs are and will be the industry leaders.



13: The 2015 Class of Leadership APTA--champions of transit.

Appendix A: Interview Questions

- How do you find and acknowledge a champion from within your organization? Do the results of these internal Champions result in real progress or change? What qualities do you look for in champions?
- Have you had success in finding a champion outside of your organization? What qualities to you find champions have? How did you discover and build upon that external relationship? What has been the value and impact of that external champion to your organization and career?
- As you look towards your future strategies and goals, who do you wish were your champions for transit? How important is that to you? What qualities/characteristics do they have? What do they bring to the table for you or how do they assist you in developing your strategies and reaching your goals?
- Recently, we have seen innovators like Uber and Lift, and Energy Saving/Going Green efforts, to a surge in mobile technology. How do you see the new technology providers and/or transit innovators becoming champions within the industry?
- Within our industry, do we effectively discover and cultivate the right champions? If so, what has this champion accomplished for your transit agency and community?