

Accelerate

November 2012

The quarterly newsletter for the Conference Of Minority Transportation Officials

“Winds of Change” COMTO Leaders Continue to Level the Playing Field



Dear COMTO Family,

We've got some celebrating to do! Over the last few weeks, we've seen the appointments of several long-time COMTO members to high-profile leadership positions in the transportation industry. Congratulations to those COMTO members who have been appointed to chief executive positions: **Ann Dawson-August** (Executive Director of Birmingham Jefferson County Transit Authority), **Nathaniel Ford** (CEO of Jacksonville Transportation Authority), **Keith Parker** (General Manager of MARTA)

and **Dr. Beverly Scott** (General Manager of MBTA). Also, we congratulate COMTO members who have been hired into senior executive positions: **Lee Burner** (Director of Bus Transportation for MARTA), **Debra Johnson** (Deputy COO of Los Angeles Metro), **Ferdinand Risco, Jr.** (Executive Director of Equal Opportunity and Diversity of MARTA) and **Kimberly Williams** (Vice President of the Office of Small Business of Houston METRO). Congratulations and very well done!

The success of each of these industry professionals is no surprise to the COMTO network or to those who know them and their passion for transportation.

“I have the pleasure of knowing each of the CEO appointees for a number of years. Their individual and collective successes speak to the tremendous strides made by people of color in an industry that is still challenged in respect to diversity and inclusion.” – **Shirley DeLibero**, Former Board Chair

Their success has not occurred in a vacuum. It's part of a sea change rippling through the industry that demands everyone have a seat at the table.

“A key element to the success of COMTO in advancing our mission is the full cadre of industry professionals ready, willing and able to serve in the senior level positions in all modes of transportation. We are so proud of the accomplishments of these individuals.” – **Julie Cunningham**, COMTO National President/CEO

Each of these appointments is testament to the mission of COMTO to ensure a **level playing field**. The reality is that the hiring pool for African-Americans, Latinos and other people of color is broad and deep — and a wise investment for the entire industry. These appointments are also proof positive that a rising tide lifts all boats.

We know you'll join us in congratulating these eight deserving COMTO members!

Robert Prince, Chairman of the Board

Chief Executive Appointments



Ann Dawson-August

Where She's Been:
Executive Director
Santee Wateree Regional
Transportation Authority
(South Carolina)

Where She's Going:
Executive Director
Birmingham Jefferson County Transit
Authority (Alabama)



Nathaniel Ford

Where He's Been:
Executive Director
MTA (San Francisco)

Where He's Going:
CEO
Jacksonville Transportation Authority
(Florida)



Keith Parker

Where He's Been:
President and CEO
VIA Metropolitan Transit
(San Antonio)

Where He's Going:
General Manager and CEO
MARTA (Atlanta)



Dr. Beverly Scott

Where She's Been:
General Manager
MARTA (Atlanta)

Where She's Going:
General Manager
MBTA (Boston)

see page 2 for biographies

SPECIAL EDITION

Chief Executive Appointments

Ann Dawson-August

Ann Dawson-August sees her recent appointment to Executive Director of the Birmingham Jefferson County Transit Authority, which serves the Birmingham area's 662,000 residents with 109 buses on 38 routes, as indicative of the "winds of change" that are moving across the nation. "We're finally seeing an increased recognition of individuals who have the skills and talent to move forward in the industry," she said. "It shows significant change that all these promotions are happening simultaneously."

Ms. Dawson-August's career in the transportation industry spans 32 years, and includes stints at both Santee Wateree Regional Transportation Authority and SEPTA. She's seen a lot of change in those three-plus decades, but she'd like to see more. "I'd like to see more individuals coming into the industry and making a lifetime career out of it. Too often, I see women and people of color come in and, after five to 10 years, they leave because it takes time to move into the senior-level positions. But if you look at all of these recent promotions, these are people who have been in the industry for 20 or 30 years. That's how we get into those leadership positions — by staying and proving ourselves."

Ms. Dawson-August sees COMTO as having an important role in developing that talent. "COMTO has allowed individuals who generally would not be able to network on senior levels to do that. It's allowed individuals from across the board to network with all levels of management and all sectors of the industry — from airports, to union officials, to maritime, to public transit. COMTO crosses industry barriers more so than other groups, so it allows more opportunity for learning and growth — and getting the leadership positions that are out there."

Nathaniel Ford

When **Nathaniel Ford** became CEO of the Jacksonville Transportation Authority this month, he took the helm with a rich 30-year history in the industry behind him... one that begins with him as a train conductor on the New York City subway to his becoming General Manager and CEO of two of the country's largest transportation agencies: MARTA and San Francisco Muni. "I can say with 100 percent conviction that integrity, tenacity and determination to give 150 percent were key to getting me where I am today," he said. "My appointment in October as Executive Director and CEO of the Jacksonville Transportation Authority was not made because the board had a quota to fill. It was because of my record. It does not matter what color you are if you are able to make the agency better than it was when you started."

This is possible, Mr. Ford added, because of pioneering minority transportation officials who "laid the foundation on which we now travel," and because of COMTO. "Without question, COMTO has provided me with an invaluable network of advisors and mentors," he said. "The offices I've held with COMTO leadership and the awards I was honored with helped raise my visibility." Mr. Ford believes it's critical for those who have climbed to the highest rungs of the industry ladder to help those still making their way. "To whom much is given, much is expected," he said. Thus, Mr. Ford mentors up-and-coming executives to help them reach their highest potential. "One of the first things I tell them is that the road to the top is not accomplished by luck; it's when preparation and track record meet opportunity," he said.

Jacksonville will be the host city of COMTO's 42nd National Meeting and Training Conference in July 2013 — so all of us will get to see the fruits of Mr. Ford's labors firsthand.

Keith Parker

This December, **Keith Parker** will become General Manager and CEO of MARTA, the nation's ninth largest transit system that serves half a million passengers daily in the Atlanta metro area. Mr. Parker is well known in the transit industry for his communicative leadership style and his diplomacy, namely

working with legislators and administrators from both political parties. Called a "rising transit star" by the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, Mr. Parker has served as head of the Vancouver, WA, transit system (hired at the young age of 32) and of the Charlotte, NC transit system.

Mr. Parker sees the recent promotion of himself and other people of color as a bellwether of change in how African Americans, Latinos and other minorities are viewed in terms of leadership roles. "These folks who have been promoted are people who have been in the industry a long time and who are very highly thought of," he said. "If you're one of the best and the brightest, it doesn't matter what gender or race you are. I think America is taking notice." As evidence, he noted how people of color — both men and women — are being represented in the largest and smallest systems in the country. "It really sets the stage for high achievers to do well. And because so many of us know what it's like to be the first people of color in these positions, we want to make sure the playing field is completely level so the best and the brightest can get the jobs."

He added that COMTO plays a significant role ensuring that the "best and the brightest" are noticed. "COMTO reminds people who are doing the hiring where the talent is. They really demand that search firms and recruiting firms have an inclusive process. People can't make those old comments they used to make: 'Oh, we'd hire a person of color if we could find one.' COMTO doesn't let that happen."

Dr. Beverly Scott

Dr. Beverly Scott will soon be leaving the nation's ninth largest transit system in Atlanta to head up the nation's fifth largest: Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA). Serving a population of roughly five million in 176 cities and towns covering an area of 3,249 square miles, MBTA totals an average of 1.3 million passenger trips weekly. Dr. Scott will be the first woman to head MBTA — familiar territory for her, as she was also the first woman to lead MARTA, a position she's held since 2007.

Dr. Scott is renowned throughout the United States and North America for her results-driven leadership style. She oversaw MARTA during the transit system's most challenging financial period and was not afraid to make tough decisions, such as spearheading more than \$100 million in deficit reduction measures. She also served as General Manager of the transit systems in Sacramento, CA and Rhode Island, and served on the National Infrastructure Advisory Council, to which she was appointed by President Barack Obama.

Dr. Scott said that COMTO has played a pivotal role in helping make her and her peers' promotions a reality. "Without the national leadership and advocacy, as well as laser focus on professional development at all levels — the board room executive suites, on the front line and in the pipeline — I doubt we would be seeing these current results," she said. "In my 30-plus years in our industry, it is finally beginning to feel like we're breaking through the 'exception to the rule' period."

But, she hastened to add, the journey is far from over. "It is all tremendously fragile. This is no time to rest on laurels. The need for and work of advancing and ensuring real diversity must vigorously continue."

Lee Burner

As MARTA's Director of Bus Transportation, **Lee Burner** manages a staff of more than 1,300 employees and a fleet of 530 buses. He brings with him a wealth of experience to the positions, having served as Vice President, Regional Manager, General Manager and Project Manager at various organizations and agencies, including MV Transportation, Jacksonville Transportation Authority, AECOM, First Transit and San Diego Transit. His responsibilities have spanned planning, organizing and managing operations and programs for public, specialized transit and passenger rail systems for more than 25 years.

Senior Executive Appointments



Lee Burner

Where He's Been:
Independent Consultant
Public Transit Consultants
& Construction, Inc.

Where He's Going:
Director of Bus Transportation
MARTA (Atlanta)



Debra Johnson

Where She's Been:
Director of Administration
Safety and Training
MTA (San Francisco)

Where She's Going:
Deputy Chief Operations Officer
Metro (Los Angeles)



Ferdinand Risco, Jr.

Where He's Been:
Inclusion and Diversity Manager
Metropolitan Transportation Authority
Metro North Railroad (NYC)

Where He's Going:
Executive Director
Office of Diversity
and Equal Opportunity
MARTA (Atlanta)



Kimberly Williams

Where She's Been:
Chief Administration Officer
METRO (Houston)

Where She's Going:
Vice President
Office of Small Business
METRO (Houston)



Congratulations!

...to all of our members
featured in this Special
Edition of **Accelerate**.

Julie Cunningham
National President/CEO, COMTO

Robert H. Prince, Jr.
National Chair, COMTO
Vice President, AECOM
Robert.prince@aecom.com

Senior Executive Appointments

Debra Johnson

Debra Johnson began her transportation career more than 20 years ago in a private sector consulting firm. Since then, she has held public transportation positions with San Francisco BART, Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority and WMATA. In 2007, she was hired by San Francisco MTA as Chief of Staff and Director of External Affairs, then went on to serve as director of administration, taxis and accessible services, followed by acting CEO. It is from there that she moved to Los Angeles this past July to become Metro's new Deputy Chief Operations Officer.

Ms. Johnson credits COMTO's focus on networking, training and succession planning with the recent trend of promotions. "COMTO is where the leaders of tomorrow interface with the leaders of today," she said. "We as COMTO members have been able to foster a network and gain exposure so when the positions come open at the upper levels, people know where to look to find qualified individuals to fill those roles." It's an extension of COMTO's mission "and why it was created back in the 1970s."

The relationship is a symbiotic one, she added. As COMTO helps people of color advance to leadership positions, the people of color in those leadership positions advance the mission of COMTO. "What's paramount is that we're helping to foster the goals of the organization by showcasing the importance of being at the table. When you're talking about the advancement of people of color, that's what matters here: that we're in the arena and we're at the table."

Ferdinand Risco, Jr.

Ferdinand Risco, Jr. serves as the Executive Director of Diversity and Equal Opportunity at MARTA, ensuring that the strategies and goals of the agency and its business units keep the playing field level in terms of equal employment opportunity, service delivery, access to MARTA services, DBEs and ADA. He also develops and implements diversity and inclusion initiatives and helps ensure that all of MARTA's decisions, activities, programs and services are equitable.

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Senior Executive Appointments

(continued from page 3)

Mr. Risco began his railroad career managing maintenance activities at Metropolitan Transportation Authority — Metro North Railroad in New York City, later becoming manager of the labor relations department and, eventually, inclusion and diversity manager.

He holds an MBA from the University of New Haven and is currently pursuing a doctorate of business administration specializing in leadership.

Kimberly Williams

As Houston METRO's new Vice President of the Office of Small Business, **Kimberly Williams** promotes business opportunities with METRO among the city's small business community. METRO boasts 1,230 buses and a 2.5 million people. Ms. Williams was promoted to the post after serving as Chief Administration Officer for the light-rail program.

Her career in transportation began as a legislative aide to former — U.S. Representative Barbara Rose Collins, who served on the House Public Works and Transportation Committee. Ms. Williams also served as Vice President of external relations for Texas Southern University and worked in Houston's city attorney's office, the California legislature and for the International Labor Office in Beijing, China.



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Washington, DC

Board Advisors

*To be appointed by the newly elected
Board of Directors.*



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12100 Sunset Hills Road, Suite 130, Reston, VA 20190
703.234.4072 | info@comto.org, www.comto.org

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COMTO Vision Statement

To see the diverse faces of America equally reflected in all levels of the transportation industry.

COMTO Mission Statement

To ensure a level playing field and maximum participation in the transportation industry for minority individuals, businesses, and communities of color through advocacy, information sharing, training, educational, and professional development.

COMTO Core Values

COMTO's core values are embodied in how we conduct business and how we interact with our stakeholders, including our members, customers, partners, and supporters. We affirm and are committed to the following core values: Advocacy, Diversity, Excellence, Inclusion, Innovation, Integrity, and Service.



The Conference Of Minority Transportation Officials

1875 I Street, NW, Ste. 500 | Washington, DC 20006 | 202.857.8064 o | 202.318.0364 f

Administrative Office | 12100 Sunset Hills Road, Ste. 130 | Reston, VA 20190 | 703.234.4072 o | 703.435.4390 f