

# Long Beach

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## Education And Training Core To Goods Movement Industry



### ■ Trade and Transportation

By Thomas O'Brien

This special section of the Long Beach Business Journal reflects the importance of goods movement to our local community, and highlights some of the key challenges confronting the industry. As the article by Dr. Genevieve Giuliano suggests, the industry responds to those challenges with the support of a strong research community. It's not surprising that Southern California is home to a collection of world-class, freight-focused researchers who help to shed light on why the supply chain behaves the way it does and how key stakeholders might be able to do things better.

A robust goods movement industry also depends on well-educated and trained professionals at all levels to keep the goods flowing. The industry can do on-the-job training, but it depends upon those of us in colleges and universities to make that job easier. That means turning out graduates with strong foundational skills in writing and math, as well as those with more specialized skills that directly feed into careers along the supply chain.

I'm proud to say that California State University, Long Beach has been recognized for its efforts in developing the next generation of freight and logistics professionals. In September, CSULB's Center for International Trade and Transportation (CITT) was named the Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) Southwest Regional Surface Transportation Workforce Development Center of Excellence. It's a long title with a big mission: to serve as a clearinghouse for information on education and training models for the wide range of transportation sectors and for all points on the educational spectrum. That means from kindergarten through retraining for advanced professionals. Oh yes, and all of that for an eight-state region: California, Arizona, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, Colorado, Oklahoma and Texas. It's not a small task. But it's an important one. And four other centers will be doing the same thing in other parts of the country.

There is good work being done across our region, but up to now there hasn't been a go-to entity responsible for bringing together the best efforts of federal, state, regional and local departments of transportation and education, schools and industry, and other public and private stakeholders involved in transportation planning, operations and education. We'll serve as a resource with broad-based knowledge of transportation workforce issues including effective training programs, lesson plans, and funding strategies. We will also help pilot innovative training and education programs in partnership with schools and industry and help facilitate their adoption throughout the Southwest and, by extension, the entire country.

We're not doing it alone. We have a team that includes our METRANS partners at the University of Southern California. We also have partners at Texas A&M University's Transportation Institute (TTI) and have brought on board experts with knowledge of cutting-edge approaches to developing new learning tools, analyzing labor markets and understanding the needs of today's market for transportation-related education, whether in engineering or logistics or one of the many other disciplines needed for mobility.

The timing is critical because the challenges are great – but so are the opportunities. At a recent forum in Washington, D.C., where the five regional centers were announced, the U.S. departments of transportation and education presented preliminary findings on a study of future transportation workforce needs. The analysis, conducted by Jobs for the Future and the Transportation Learning Center, identified occupational “hot spots” and assessed both the educational and work experiences needed for someone to be deemed competent to work in any of six different transportation sectors, including trucking and the maritime industry.

The study revealed a transportation workforce of over 4 million people in this country. This is a conservative estimate since the data excluded fields like warehousing that depend greatly upon transportation. It identified challenges in increasing the numbers of African Americans and Hispanics in transportation occupations and, at the same time, filling the ranks of the soon-to-be-retired in the transit and maritime industries.

And, despite the very real concerns about our state's economy, the study's author projects that California will have one of the highest rates of growth in transportation employment (18 percent) through 2020. States with key trade gateways and intermodal centers generally do well on the list. These include Louisiana and Texas. The biggest growth is expected to occur in North Dakota where the transport sector serves in large part a booming energy industry.

Another recent study, this one prepared by the American Association of State Highway Transportation Officials (AASHTO), looked at the state of the workforce in state transportation departments. Across the board, officials in states of varying size and location expressed concerns about their ability to recruit employees from an applicant pool without the right set of skills, retain workers who increasingly move between jobs more often than previous generations and adequately train workers, particularly to move into upper management. This latter phenomenon was discussed at the forum as the “buddy-to-boss” problem.

There is no one solution to all of these challenges. The transportation industry will solve some of the workforce needs on its own. It always has. Goods movement in particular has relied upon a lot of on-the-job training to get employees ready for constantly changing sets of conditions. In an often fragmented supply chain, there has also been a lot of mistrust of training from “the outside.”

But that's changing as employers of all kinds find a need for workers with strong foundational and analytical skills that need to be taught early in a student's educational career. That's why CITT recognizes the need to begin advertising transportation as a serious career pathway when children are fascinated by trucks, trains and ships and then identify opportunities for them to turn that interest into knowledge. Then it's our job to work with the employers to determine what skills are needed and to make sure the programs we offer fit the bill.

It's not an easy job, but it's a vital one. And it is my hope that the new resource we can bring to the table as a result of our recognition by the FHWA will help us demonstrate to the rest of the country the tremendous leadership, capacity and innovation in the goods movement industry here at home.

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