



**Session Two - Panel One:** Connecting Communities Through Robust Stakeholder Engagement

**Presenter:**

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**Presentation Title:** Bridging the Gap to Unite Communities

**Bio:** Credentialed by the American Institute of Certified Planners, Ms. Mendes has over 35 years of leadership experience in transportation consulting. She currently serves as Corporate President for Infrastructure and Mobility Equity at HNTB, where she previously served as Mid-Atlantic Division President and as the National Transit/Rail Market Sector Leader. She is the Chair of the Board of Directors of Rail-Volution, a national non-profit focused on building livable, equitable communities through transit and serves on the American Public Transportation Association Awards Committee.

Diana has been honored by several organizations for her contributions. These include the 2019 Conference of Minority Transportation Officials (COMTO) Executive of the Year, the American Road and Transportation Builders Association Ethel S. Birchland Lifetime Achievement Award in 2018, the 2018 COMTO Shirley A. DeLibero Women Who Move the Nation Award, and the 2005 Women's Transportation Seminar DC Chapter Woman of the Year. She was recognized in 2018 by the Washington Business Journal (Women Who Mean Business) and in 2021 she received the Virginia Business Women in Leadership Award.

Diana has a BA in Sociology from Mount Holyoke College, and a Master of City Planning from the University of Pennsylvania. She also holds a Certificate in Diversity and Inclusion from Cornell University.

**Presentation:** The transformational impact of transportation infrastructure investments is well documented, yet not always fully understood. Positive community "benefits" are routinely assumed as par for the course, spanning everything from enhanced access to opportunities, improved quality of life, and economic revitalization. While benefits undoubtedly accrue, not everyone and not all communities benefit equitably. A major contributing factor to this is that "benefits" are in the eye of the beholder as not all populations and communities define or view benefits in the same way, and while perhaps not intentional, one person's benefit sometimes can be another's misfortune. The resulting gap in benefits to all populations undermines the accrual of generational wealth and long-term community stability, while undermining economic sustainability.

Achieving more equitable outcomes requires intentional commitment to proactively think beyond the right-of-way and the traditional beneficiaries to tailor results to benefit a wider range of community interests and diverse populations. Bridging this gap in benefits requires

several fundamental changes in how we approach infrastructure planning and delivery, including policy and regulatory reforms, rethinking how we educate industry professionals, changing our approach to project development and implementation, and redefining how we measure success. It can be done, as illustrated by the accomplishments of agencies and project teams that are already working to transform how we can deliver the next generation of infrastructure in a way that unlocks more equitable, sustainable, and meritorious outcomes. A common key to unlocking these outcomes is a robust understanding of, and meaningful engagement with, all communities in new ways.