

SPECIAL FEATURE

A Day in the Life of a TRB Committee

KATHERINE F. TURNBULL

The author is Executive Associate Director, Texas A&M Transportation Institute, College Station, and Vice Chair of the Transportation Research Board Executive Committee.

[A veteran standing committee of the Transportation Research Board's Technical Activities Division guides a newly formed standing committee on a one-day tour of the Annual Meeting:]

Hey kid, welcome to the TRB family of almost 220 standing committees and task forces! It's great that you, a new committee, can shadow me today. You will learn a lot about a day in the life of a TRB committee. Let's get started!

I've been around for almost 40 years, but there are many committees that are even older than I am. You have probably heard that the standing committees are called the lifeblood of TRB—we take our responsibilities absolutely seriously.

Monday is a good day to show you around the Annual Meeting, but many of us began our work over the weekend, with workshops, meetings, and the orientation session for new attendees—I saw you there at one of the briefing tables.

My planning activities actually began shortly after last year's Annual Meeting—which is always in January and always in Washington, D.C. I issued a call for papers and posters in an emerging area of research. I also worked with two other committees to develop and submit a proposal for a crosscutting session and a nomination for a Blue Ribbon award to the Technical Activities Council (TAC).



(Photo, upper right:) Wendy Jia, Chair of the Rail Transit Committee, celebrates her committee's blue ribbon award for communications.

(Below:) TRB Executive Director Neil Pedersen *(right)* briefs the New Chairs Orientation session.



My active committee members and friends reviewed 40 papers and 20 poster abstracts that arrived on August 1. For me, that number is fairly typical, but some of our fellow committees received more than 100 papers. Following the review process, I developed two podium sessions featuring papers, a crosscutting session, and a poster session. Working with three other committees, I also cosponsored a hot topic session.

I know it's only 7 a.m., but my research subcommittee has a breakfast meeting. Oh, that's right—you came in from the West Coast, so it's superearly for you. Better have a second cup of coffee!

[A few hours later....]

The morning went by quickly. The first podium session was great, and it was inspiring to see the younger members actively involved. The speakers in the crosscutting session did an excellent job of addressing a timely topic in ways that will benefit researchers and practitioners alike.

Our section meeting over lunch provides an opportunity to hear about topics and priorities discussed by the TAC and to share experiences with our peers. Our TRB senior program officer is knowledgeable and capable—she will answer all your questions and will help with all your activities, as she does with mine.

[A committee meeting follows....]

My four-hour committee meeting kept a big agenda moving along. The discussion of key activities and initiatives was informative, including the planning for a 12th international conference later this year. Hearing from a few speakers on recent federal, state, and local legislation and programs was also enlightening. Even with four hours, I never have enough time to address all the hot topics.

We still have some time to visit the poster session before we head to the annual Thomas B. Deen Distinguished Lecture. We work hard every year to reach out to diverse groups interested in the featured topic, with the goal of generating new problem-solving ideas, and the work pays off.

The Deen Lecture recognizes the career contributions and achievements of an individual in one of the areas covered by the Technical Activities Division. The major award is named for TRB's eighth Executive Director—he's sitting over there, with several other leaders and colleagues. The TAC also presents awards for best papers and for committee achievements at this session—it usually draws a full house.

Look up at the screen—how exciting to see my own name up in lights as the winner of the Blue Ribbon Committee Award for Community Building and Mentoring! The award recognizes my successful efforts with two other committees in reaching out to younger members and involving them in key leadership positions to plan our joint midyear meeting. It's now a model for our peers. Being selected a blue ribbon committee is a gratifying honor!



[The two committees take a dinner break after the session.]

I hope you didn't mind our quick dinner. It did give me opportunity to introduce you to more of our committee peers. Soon you'll find your own favorite meeting places, and you'll quickly get to know the big family of TRB committees.

Our last stop on today's rounds is an evening session I cosponsored with three other committees to present multiple perspectives on an emerging issue.

[The evening session concludes.]

What a great day it has been—but I'm exhausted and ready to head back to my room. But you feel like you're just getting started? Have a great evening—and welcome to the TRB family!

Robert Lim (center), San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency, comments on an agenda item during the meeting of the Public Transportation Group Young Members Subcommittee.



Emily Parkany, Vermont Agency of Transportation, reports to the Transportation Education and Training Committee.