

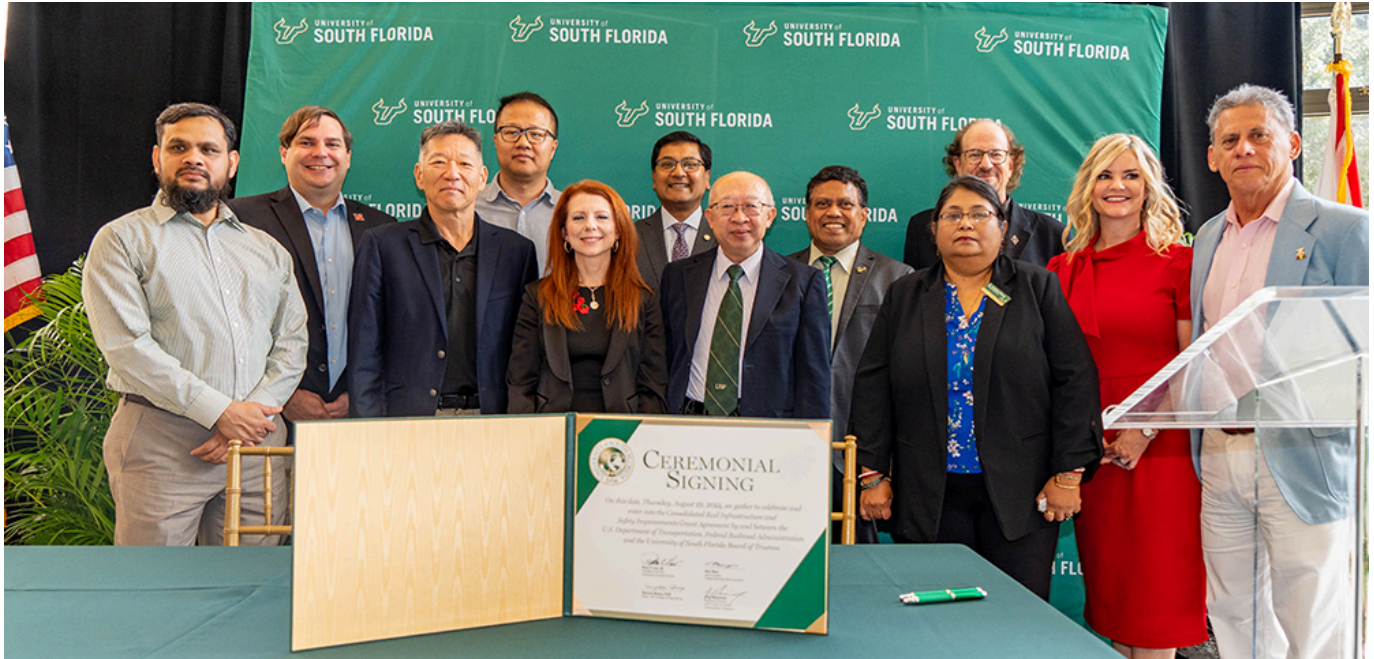
MTI Spotlight: Lisa Staes Receives Outstanding Research Achievement Award

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This month the [Mineta Transportation Institute](#) is proud to spotlight Lisa Staes, her outstanding contributions to the field, and her invaluable insights about staying connected to each other and the communities we serve. Ms. Staes is the Associate Director at the University of South Florida's Center for Urban Transportation Research ([CUTR](#)). She plays a pivotal role at CUTR, one of MTI's key consortia partners in both the Center for Surface Transportation Testing and Academic Research ([C-STTAR](#)) and the Mineta Consortium for Equitable, Efficient, and Sustainable Transportation ([MCEEST](#)), critical collaborations that advance a future of transportation that serves everyone.



Ms. Staes recently received the University of South Florida's [Outstanding Research Achievement Award](#) for her impressive contributions to public transportation safety and security, transit worker and rider safety, transit standards, fatigue and fitness for duty, and transit workforce development and training. In 2023 alone, Ms. [Staes](#) secured significant grant funding, including \$17.0 million from the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) for a [“Comprehensive Approach to Promoting Railroad Careers and Developing the Current Rail Industry Workforce.”](#) In addition to her significant research, she was also appointed by the U.S. Department of Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg to the [Transit Advisory Committee for Safety](#) (TRACS), and she chairs TRB's Standing Committee on Transit Safety and Security (AP080).



C-STTAR consortium partners joined USF and FRA leaders for a ceremonial signing of the \$17.0 million FRA grant.

Although Ms. Staes originally studied geography in college, her passion has always been for connecting people, which led her to work for a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). Her role involved a focus on transportation planning, and she quickly realized how integral transportation was to urban development and connecting communities. Some of her early transportation work was with the Florida Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged, which served individuals with disabilities, elderly people, and low-income communities who relied heavily on paratransit services. “Working as a regional manager for this program allowed me to understand the challenges and opportunities in providing accessible transportation options for people with limited mobility options, including those who could not afford personal transportation, elders, and people with disabilities,” said Staes. She carries these experiences connecting diverse populations into her research projects, including [Exploring the Impact of Public Transportation on Health Outcomes by Investigating Accessibility and Equity among Vulnerable and Disadvantaged Populations](#), which examines the impact of equitable access to public transportation on health outcomes among disadvantaged and rural populations.

Ms. Staes' career journey has deepened her understanding of the intricate connections between funding mechanisms, infrastructure development, and services that sustain public transit systems. Her work has brought her into close collaboration with a diverse community of riders and workers, offering valuable insights into the challenges they face and the ways their voices shape the industry. Dedicated to lifelong learning, she recently earned an M.S. in Management to stay ahead in this ever-evolving field. “A major problem we are addressing is understanding the assaults happening to transit workers and on transit in general; I have been working on this since the early 2000s, and it

remains an issue.” She hopes this research will contribute to everyone feeling safe on transit and beyond.

For aspiring transportation professionals and researchers, Ms. Staes offers this advice: “Stay deeply connected and engaged with what’s happening in the industry. This doesn’t just mean keeping up with industry-wide trends; it’s about building real relationships and understanding the people behind the work. Always reach out and maintain contact with colleagues and mentors you’ve worked with, and don’t lose touch. Treat each person as an individual with value, not just for what they do but for who they are. That approach has served me well, and I believe it’s essential for long-term success in any field. Respecting others and nurturing those connections will open doors, foster a more fulfilling career, and help you make a real difference.”