2025 Mineta Summer Transportation Academy at San José State University

Alverina Weinardy

Project 2613
February 2026

Executive Summary

Since 2006, the Mineta Transportation Institute (MTI) at San José State University (SJSU) has given hundreds of 9th-12th grade students the opportunity to explore the transportation industry and its impact on their own communities while getting the chance to experience an immersive non-resident college life. The 2025 Mineta Summer Transportation Academy (MiSTA), formerly known as the Mineta Summer Transportation Institute, took place from July 7-18, 2025. This year's MiSTA is a part of CRISI: Promoting Railroading Careers and Developing the Current Rail Industry Workforce, a Federal Railroad Administration-funded project led by the Center for Urban Transportation Research at the University of South Florida to revitalize the railroad industry workforce.

The program's primary goal was to inform and inspire students to think critically about their futures and potential for careers in the transportation industry. MiSTA comprised three main components: (1) Transportation Systems 101 lectures, (2) field trips, and (3) guest speaker sessions. Through a combination of classroom learning, hands-on activities, and behind-the-scenes experiences, the program demonstrated that transportation is a dynamic and rewarding field that drives innovation and connection in communities across the nation. Focusing on these components, MiSTA was designed to be both engaging and fun.

A secondary goal of the program was to inspire the students to attend a college or university after high school. This component emerged after many past participants expressed anxiety about applying to colleges and navigating life after high school, a concern that reflects broader national trends. According to a BestColleges survey of 1,000 high school students, 52% reported feeling pressured to make decisions about their future too soon, and nearly one in three reported that college costs or mental health struggles would affect their plans after graduation. This anxiety is significant, as emotional stress often continues to affect students well into higher education. The Healthy Minds Study, which surveyed more than 96,000 students across 133 U.S. campuses, found that more than 60% of college students meet the criteria for at least one mental health problem, and that emotional stress is the leading reason many consider leaving school.

By holding sessions on the SJSU campus and structuring activities in a college seminar format, the program aimed to reduce this anxiety by making the college experience more tangible and familiar. Students had the opportunity to explore the campus, interact with faculty, and experience aspects of university life firsthand, which may help to transform college from an abstract source of stress into a realistic and achievable goal.

SJSU is a large, urban university in the heart of Silicon Valley. MiSTA is structured in the style and format of a pre-college internship, emphasizing civic leadership and public policy, which are MTI's anchoring principles. Thus, a balance is sought between academic and experiential learning

designed to motivate high school students to expand their horizons into the field of transportation and to be connected with the University in a meaningful way.

MTI used a competitive selection process based on a comprehensive application and recommendation letter to identify participants. The 63 applications received were screened based on the timeliness and completeness of the application package, a rubric for scoring the written essay, and their recommendation letter, then thirty candidates were admitted into the program. To ensure full participation, students and parents were required to sign a policy acknowledgement form confirming their commitment to attend all sessions.

To augment classroom lessons, over the 10 days of the program the students participated in 10 field trips, giving them exposure to a wide range of transportation careers and college-readiness experiences. Students learned about mass transit and the critical role transportation plays in the environment and as a cornerstone of the economy, particularly in Silicon Valley and the Bay Area. To access the field trip sites, students used a range of transportation options, including walking, public transit, charter buses, and carpools. The program also included college-readiness workshops featuring transportation leaders and focusing on personal and professional skills such as public speaking and leadership.

Overall, the program's curriculum empowered students to embrace new experiences in some of the major transportation-related topics of today and allowed them to see firsthand "behind the scenes" operations of prominent Bay Area transportation sites and agencies such as the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) bus yard, California High-Speed Rail Authority (CAHSRA) construction sites, San José Diridon Station, and San José Mineta International Airport.

We are happy to note high satisfaction with the program among students, parents, and partnering agencies this year. Combining elements from previous improvements with new activities contributed to this year's overall success. The anonymous program culmination survey that students completed has been instrumental in assessing previous years' programming and in planning for future activities.

Program Objective

MiSTA's primary goal is to inform and inspire students to think critically about their futures and to explore careers in transportation. The two-week curriculum aims to spark curiosity and encourage students to consider the wide range of opportunities available across the transportation industry. In addition, MiSTA is designed to provide an engaging and enjoyable learning experience, motivating participants to share their experiences with peers after the program concludes.

To achieve this goal, the program was structured to meet three objectives:

1. Recruit 30 high school students from different grade levels to participate;

2. Provide participants with a wide range of academic, professional, and experiential learning opportunities in the Bay Area's transportation field; and

3. Provide participants with opportunities to learn science, technology, and career readiness skills.

MTI made a concerted effort to promote the program among schools within the East Side Union High School District (ESUHSD) and San José Unified School District (SJUSD) first, since the program is based in Downtown San José and participants needed to commit to attending all sessions in person. MTI then expanded its recruitment efforts by working closely with the high school liaison and distributing flyers to other school districts in the Bay Area, as well as to private schools near the SJSU campus. At the request of several school counselors, MTI translated the flyer into Spanish and Vietnamese. These additional flyers helped broaden outreach to students and parents whose first language is not English.

MiSTA students demonstrated enthusiasm and curiosity throughout the program's classroom sessions, field trips, and guest speaker presentations. The Transportation Systems 101 lectures introduced essential concepts about how transportation networks operate and their importance to the economy. Students actively engaged with speakers representing various sectors, including public transit and rail, aviation, and emerging technologies, asking thoughtful questions and reflecting on the connections between transportation and their own communities. The field trips provided hands-on exposure to real-world operations, allowing participants to see how classroom concepts translate into practice while exploring a variety of career paths in the transportation industry. Program staff also facilitated reflective discussions to help students connect what they learned to potential college and career goals.

A culminating survey was conducted using Google Forms at the conclusion of the program. The survey assessed various aspects of the MiSTA experience, including (1) guest speakers, (2) field trips, (3) staff, and (4) overall program effectiveness. MTI conducted these evaluations to measure success in achieving Objectives 2 and 3. (A complete discussion of the evaluation results is provided in a separate section below.)

Overall, the evaluations confirmed the program's positive impact. Participants reported a high level of satisfaction with MiSTA activities and stated that the program helped them gain a better understanding of the field of transportation. Following site visits, discussions with students revealed that they were inspired to explore job opportunities similar to those presented and acknowledged the importance of a college education. Throughout the two-week academy, students demonstrated growing confidence in their abilities, stronger teamwork skills, and a greater awareness of how transportation careers contribute to shaping the future of mobility.

Marketing

In late 2024, MTI partnered with SJSU's Graphic Design BFA program to rebrand its flagship high school initiative. Through MTI's $1,000 sponsorship of the BFA Senior Show, a team of design students collaborated on a real-world client project to develop a vibrant new visual identity for MiSTA. The students produced a cohesive suite of materials—including a logo, t-shirt design, flyer, and social media graphics—emphasizing accessibility, user experience, and visual clarity. The refreshed identity reflects MiSTA's core themes of learning and mobility while presenting a modern, engaging look that enhances program recognition and attracts future participants.

Figure 1. MiSTA Rebranding Materials, including Program Logo, T-Shirt, Social Media Shareables, and Flyers

The program application period opened in mid-March of this year and extended through mid-May. During this recruitment period, East Side Union High School District (ESUHSD) and San Jose Unified School District (SJUSD) served as key partners in supporting information sharing. Flyers containing a link to the online application, available in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese—the three predominant languages spoken across both districts—were distributed to principals, vice principals, and counselors. The flyers were also included in several school newsletters and email announcements, increasing awareness among students and families. In addition, program information was posted on the MTI website, social media sites, and in monthly newsletters.

MTI staff also attended sciencepalooza! and the Santa Clara County Environmental Literacy Summit to engage K-12 students, parents, and teachers with transportation-related activities while distributing flyers to promote the program before and during the application period. Compilation videos and student testimonials from previous years were also used to highlight the program's impact and encourage participation.

Applications

- Applications were received from the following SJUSD schools:
- Abraham Lincoln High School
- Del Mar High School
- Independence High School
- Oak Grove High School

- Pioneer High School
- Willow Glen High School
- Yerba Buena High School

Applications were also received from the following ESUHSD schools:

- Piedmont Hills High School
- Silver Creek High School

Students attending public schools outside of both districts also submitted applications to the program. Those schools are listed below:

- Albany High School (Albany, CA)
- Berkeley High School (Berkeley, CA)
- Branham High School (San José, CA)
- Cupertino High School (Cupertino, CA)
- Granada High School (Livermore, CA)
- Henry M. Gunn High School (Palo Alto, CA)
- Irvington High School (Fremont, CA)
- John F. Kennedy High School (Fremont, CA)
- Los Gatos High School (Los Gatos, CA)
- Lynbrook High School (Fremont, CA)
- Monta Vista High School (Fremont, CA)
- Palo Alto High School (Palo Alto, CA)
- San Mateo High School (San Mateo, CA)
- Saratoga High School (Saratoga, CA)
- University High School (Irvine, CA)
- Washington High School (Fremont, CA)

MTI also received applications from students attending charter and private schools:

- Alameda Community Learning Center (Alameda, CA)
- Archbishop Mitty High School (San José, CA)
- Bellarmine College Preparatory (San José, CA)

- Bishop O'Dowd High School (Oakland, CA)
- Castilleja School (Palo Alto, CA)
- De La Salle High School (Concord, CA)
- High Tech High School (San Diego, CA)
- The King's Academy PSP (homeschool)
- Oakwood High School (Morgan Hill, CA)
- Santa Margarita Catholic High School (Rancho Santa Margarita, CA)
- Summit Tahoma (San José, CA)
- University Preparatory Academy (San José, CA)
- Valley Christian High School (San José, CA)
- Wylie High School (Wylie, TX)

Student Selection Process

MTI staff, in collaboration with high school teachers and counselors, distributed and emailed the recruitment flyer to students and parents who expressed interest. All applications were submitted via Google Forms, as indicated in the Application Guide available on the MiSTA website.

Eligible applicants were required to be in good academic standing (GPA of 2.0 or higher) and to have completed Algebra I and a freshman-level science course. Applicants submitted two written components:

- A short essay (approximately 250 words) describing their interest in the program, relevant skills, experiences, and goals for college or career.
- A letter of recommendation from a teacher or similar figure affirming the student's academic standing, character, and suitability for the program.

Applications were evaluated holistically. While academic performance was reviewed, the greatest emphasis was placed on the student's essay, which demonstrated motivation, clarity of communication, and sincere interest in transportation and related fields (e.g., STEM, transit, or urban planning). Evidence of extracurricular involvement and faculty recommendations were also considered. Applicants who failed to submit either the essay or a recommendation letter were not considered for acceptance.

Table 1. Recruitment Details

Number of Students	
Number of applications received	63
Number of students selected for the program	30*
Number of students who completed the program	29

*One student dropped out after the start of the program due to relocation to another region.

Table 2. Enrollment by Grade Level (rounded to the highest tenth)

Grade	Number of Student	% of total
9th	8	28
10th	10	34
11th	11	38
12th	0	0

Program Components

The MiSTA curriculum was composed of three main elements:

1. Transportation Systems 101 Lectures

The Transportation Systems 101 component introduced students to the foundational concepts of transportation systems with emphasis on how interconnected networks of infrastructure, operations, and workforce sustain the mobility of people and goods. Over several days, students examined the modes, functions, and impacts of transportation—from roadways and railways to airports, seaports, and active transportation networks—through lectures and interactive activities.

The opening session, Moving the World: Introduction to Transportation Systems, encouraged students to reflect on their own travel behaviors before exploring the economic, environmental, and societal dimensions of mobility. Through interactive polling and a group exercise, students discovered that transportation is more than traveling between points A and B—it is the cornerstone of community life and the national economy.

Building on this foundation, Designing the Roads We Use Every Day introduced students to the principles of roadway design, traffic flow, and safety engineering. The lecture explored how roadway systems are planned to balance mobility, access, and safety for all users and reviewed how “complete streets” principles integrate pedestrians, cyclists, and public transit alongside vehicular traffic. During a hands-on design activity, students applied these concepts to create their own street layouts, incorporating lessons on lane configuration, intersection design, and safety features.

Later topics, including Moving People, Connecting Communities, expanded the discussion to public transit and multimodal systems, highlighting how buses, trains, and emerging mobility options connect people to education, employment, and essential services. To deepen understanding of design, students also participated in an "Empathy at the Intersection" simulation, in which goggles simulated common vision impairments during a timed "crosswalk" exercise. The activity prompted reflection on the challenges faced by people with mobility challenges and reinforced how human-centered design can advance safe mobility for all.

2. Field Trips

This year's cohort participated in ten field trips over the two-week MiSTA period, as listed in Table 3. These excursions were designed to provide experiential learning opportunities by allowing students to engage directly with transportation professionals, from the frontline to the C-suite. Almost all field trips included career-related discussions to provide students with different perspectives. As a cornerstone of MiSTA, these field trips enriched students' learning experiences by balancing classroom instruction with exposure to industry settings. For many students, these visits offered their first interaction with industry experts or their first experience with certain transportation modes, making them an impactful component of the program.

Table 3. List of Field Trips, Mode of Transportation, and Topics

Site	Mode of Transportation	Topics
1. Behavior, Accessibility, and Technology (BAT) Lab	Walking	Human-intelligent systems interaction; adaptive human-machine interfaces (AI-driven displays); assistive technology and accessibility (mobility, smart home, healthcare robotics)
2. GoMentum Station	Charter bus, autonomous vehicle	Autonomous vehicles, autonomous shuttles
3. Glydways	Charter bus	Autonomous transit connector, Personal Rapid Transit (PRT)
4. Diridon Station	Walking, light rail	Station area planning and design; multimodal transportation hubs; rail operations and management; strategies for enhancing passenger and customer experience
5. Spartan Racing Shop	Walking	Tour of Spartan Racing shop areas, competition race vehicles, electric vehicles, student-led club, campus life

Site	Mode of Transportation	Topics
6. San José Department of Transportation & San José Traffic Management Center	Walking	Innovation in urban mobility; local-level planning in transportation infrastructure; strategies to reduce traffic congestion; future vision and smart city initiatives; traffic management and technology in urban mobility; use of cameras, sensors, and software for traffic monitoring and control; coordination of traffic signals and response to incidents or special events; applications of automation in traffic operations
7. HNTB	Bus, walking	Overview of HNTB transportation projects, aviation and rail projects, highway planning, engineering and consulting services, intelligent transportation systems
8. San José Mineta International Airport	Bus, walking	Aviation, airport planning, behind-the-scenes airport operations (including security, baggage handling, ticketing, and related functions)
9. California High-Speed Rail	Charter bus	High-speed rail, public transit, surface transportation, station design, local economy
10. VTA Headquarters & Bus Maintenance Yard	Students were dropped off at VTA HQ, bus	Welcome remarks from VTA officials, tour of maintenance facilities, bus ADA features, electric bus features, bus simulation training, closing ceremony with parents

Overall, students expressed high satisfaction with the field trips, with an average of 98% rating the individual experiences positively. Support for offering similar opportunities in the future was also high, with an average of 88% of students indicating they would recommend continuing these field trips next year. In addition, many students noted that the field trips made them more likely to consider careers in transportation, as seen in Table 4.

Table 4. Summary of Students' Interest in a Career in Transportation

	Percentage of affirmative student response	Percentage of students who rated "Strongly Agree" and "Agree"
"This program has encouraged me to consider a career in transportation."	100%	91%

In addition to the field trip evaluations, students were also asked about their overall satisfaction with the MiSTA program. Their responses are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5. Summary of Students' Satisfaction with the MiSTA Program

	Percentage of affirmative student response	Percentage of students who rated "Very Satisfied"
Overall Program Satisfaction	100%	82%

3. Guest Speakers

Throughout the program, students engaged with guest speakers representing a wide range of professional backgrounds, both during field trips and in classroom sessions on campus. At field trip sites, speakers not only guided students through behind-the-scenes tours but also shared personal career stories, explained their day-to-day responsibilities, and highlighted how their roles contribute to the broader transportation industry. These conversations helped students understand the various pathways into transportation careers and the real-world impact of industry work.

In the classroom, guest speakers led interactive discussions and facilitated hands-on activities aligned with their areas of expertise. These sessions provided students with an opportunity to connect theoretical concepts with practical applications, reinforcing lessons from the Transportation Systems 101 curriculum. Together, the site visits and classroom engagements offered students a robust introduction to industry practices and innovations while deepening their understanding of the transportation issues they encounter daily.

Table 6. Three of the Most Popular and Recommended Activities

Presentation/Activity and Guest Speaker	Percentage of students who rated trip a 3 or better on a scale of 1-5	Percentage of students who recommend the trip for next year
The "Father" of Modern Transit Service in Silicon Valley (Rod Diridon)	100%	100%
"Reimagining Santa Clara Street" Presentation, Walking Tour, and Streetmix Activity with Fehr & Peers	100%	96%
"Drones & GIS in Transportation" and Drone Flying Activity with Dr. Bo Yang	100%	96%

Partners and Sponsoring Organizations

The success of the 2025 MiSTA was made possible through the contributions of sponsors and partners whose support enhanced the program's instructional components and expanded students' exposure to the transportation industry. While core program funding was provided through the CRISI: Promoting Railroading Careers and Developing the Current Rail Industry Workforce, MiSTA also benefited from substantial sponsorships that supported specific field trips, activities, and learning experiences.

The Lucas College and Graduate School of Business played a significant role by hosting students on campus and enabling college-readiness activities and experiences that helped participants envision pathways to higher education and, ultimately, careers in the transportation sector. This year's presenting sponsors, the Altamont Corridor Express (ACE) and the San Joaquin Regional Rail Commission (SJRRC), supported MiSTA through student engagement at San José Diridon Station, where participants were introduced to regional passenger rail operations. Additional sponsorship was provided by DB E.C.O. North America Inc., which funded the high-speed rail construction field trip; HNTB, which hosted a professional office visit; and Fehr & Peers, which led a downtown San José walking tour and facilitated a Streetmix design exercise.

Figure 2. MiSTA Participants with SJRRC in Front of Diridon Station

Mineta Summer Transportation Academy 2025 Calendar

9am-3pm**	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.
Week 1 Morning 9am-12pm**	**7/7** 1. Welcome & introductions 2. Overview of program & learning objectives 3. Field trip: SJSU Campus Tour	**7/8** Guest Speaker: Dr. William (Billy) Riggs (MTI Research Associate & Professor, USF) – "AI & Transportation" @ BBC 302 Field trip: Behavior, Accessibility, and Technology (BAT) Lab	**7/9 (8:30am-3:45pm)** Field Trip: GoMentum Station (8:45-9:45am) Bus ride to GoMentum Station Snacks will be provided. Students must wear closed-toe shoes.	**7/10** Field trip: Diridon Station **Drop off at Diridon Station.**	**7/11** *1. Empathy at the Intersection @ BBC 302* *(9:00-10:15am)* *2. Field trip: Spartan Racing* *(10:30am-12:00pm)*
Lunch break 12pm-1pm**			***Lunch will be provided		
Afternoon 1pm-3pm**	Transportation lecture @ BBC 302	GIS Presentation & Drone Flying Activity with Dr. Bo Yang (UCSC) @ BBC 302	Field Trip: Glydways (2:00-3:45pm) Bus ride back to SJ	Guest Speaker: Andrea Mosqueda (Ardurra, ASCE San Jose) – "Intro to Civil Engineering" @ BBC 302	Transportation lecture @ BBC 302
Week 2 Morning 9am-12pm**	**7/14** Transportation lecture @ BBC 302 Guest Speaker: Dr. Serena Alexander, Associate Professor, Northeastern University – Transportation & Resiliency Action Plan	**7/15** Field trip: HNTB **Drop off at 1732 N First St #400, San Jose, CA 95112**	**7/16 (7:45am-5:30pm)** *Field Trip: California High-Speed Rail, Fresno* *(8-11am) Bus ride to Fresno* *Snacks will be provided. Students must wear closed-toe shoes, boots/hiking shoes are preferred if accessible. Crocs/ sandals are not appropriate. Pants must cover the ankles. No ripped jeans.*	**7/17** Guest Speakers: ● Richard Shinn, Associate Vice President - NorCal & Nevada PM/CM and ITS Practice Lead, HNTB ● Hon. Rod Diridon, Sr., Retired Founding Executive Director, MTI ● Dr. Karen Philbrick, Executive Director, MTI	**7/18 (9:00am-2:10pm)** Field Trip: California High- Field Trip: VTA Bus Yard Tour **Drop-off at VTA River Oaks, 3331 North First Street, San Jose.** Students must wear closed-toe shoes.
Lunch break 12pm-1pm**		***Lunch will be provided	***Lunch will be provided	***Lunch will be provided	***Lunch will be provided
Afternoon 1pm-3pm**	Field Trip(s): 1. SJ Dept of Transportation @ City Hall 2. Transportation Incident Management Center (TiMC)	Field Trip: San José Mineta International Airport **Pick up at San José Mineta International Airport, in front of Admin Office.**	(2:30-5:30pm) Bus ride back to SJSU	Guest Speaker: Fehr & Peers @ SJSU MLK Library, Room 225	MiSTA Graduation Celebration @ VTA ***Pick up at VTA Chaboya, 2240 S 7th St, San Jose, CA 95112.***

MiSTA also benefited from the involvement of numerous partners who contributed technical expertise, staff time, and access to transportation facilities. These partners included the American Society of Civil Engineers San José Younger Member Forum, the California High-Speed Rail Authority, the Contra Costa Transportation Authority, Glydways, the San José Department of Transportation, the San José Mineta International Airport (SJC), SJSU's Behavior, Accessibility, and Technology (BAT) Lab, and Spartan Racing. Through tours, demonstrations, and presentations, these organizations provided students with exposure to industry operations and innovation, while reinforcing concepts introduced in the Transportation Systems 101 curriculum.

Figure 3. MiSTA Students Participating in Hands-On Activities: (Left) Autonomous Vehicle Testing Planning Exercise; (Right) BAT Lab Simulation

Longstanding partnerships continued to play a significant role in the program. The Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) again provided an in-depth look at transit operations, maintenance practices, and frontline workforce roles. With more than a decade of collaboration, VTA remains a cornerstone of MiSTA's experiential learning model.

Collectively, MiSTA's sponsors and partners expanded the program's impact by offering students direct engagement with transportation professionals, workplaces, and career pathways. Their contributions were essential to MiSTA's mission of preparing the next generation of transportation professionals and fostering early awareness of the opportunities available across the industry.

Closing Ceremony

MTI concluded the program with a closing ceremony held at a VTA facility. Building on the success of previous years, MTI again partnered with VTA to combine the final field trip with the graduation event. VTA continues to be a valuable partner by offering a comprehensive culminating site visit and providing a venue that accommodates students, families, and program staff.

As part of the celebration, students were invited to reflect publicly on their experiences by responding to two questions before receiving their certificate of completion:

1. What was your favorite field trip or activity, and why?

2. What was the most impactful lesson you learned from this program?

These reflections allowed students to articulate how MiSTA influenced their understanding of transportation careers and broadened their aspirations. Family members in attendance expressed particular appreciation for hearing perspectives from both program staff and students, noting that the combination offered meaningful insight into the value of the MiSTA experience.

Figure 4. MiSTA Participants at VTA Chaboya Yard Before the Closing Ceremony

Recommendations

Recommendations for any future programs include:

A. Continue to promote the program early and supplement the traditional methods with the online marketing scheme so that the school districts can again include the information in their parent literature, school websites, parent and student emails, and school announcements.

B. Continue to collaborate with school counselors and teachers in securing speaking opportunities to promote the program and demonstrate the application process.

C. Continue to create a video of the program that integrates students' testimonials and also a special newsletter amplifying alumni successes to recruit students for the next year. This year's video and newsletter can be found online.

D. Keep the class size to a maximum of 30, allowing for more personal interaction with staff, instructors, and guest speakers.

E. Continue to coordinate field trips, workshops, and guest lectures as early as possible to ensure availability and a wide range of experiences.

Additional Comments Made by Students on the Culmination Survey

The 2025 MiSTA program offered students a variety of experiential learning, professional exposure, and academic exploration. In the final survey, participants were able to provide written reflections on each program component, highlighting what resonated most with them as well as areas that could be strengthened. Their comments reveal a few themes about the program's impact and opportunities for improvement.

Interactive and Hands-On Activities

Students consistently described the hands-on activities as some of the most exciting and memorable parts of the program. Drone flying, GIS demonstrations, and the simulator experiences at both the BAT Lab and VTA stood out as particular highlights. Several students remarked that these activities introduced them to completely new ideas or fields they had not previously considered, reinforcing the value of experiential learning in expanding their perspectives. The bridge-building activity also received positive feedback, with one student suggesting that providing additional examples of completed bridges would further support understanding during this engineering-focused component.

Content Delivery and Presenter Engagement

Student comments reflected a range of experiences with presentation-based sessions. Some participants greatly appreciated speakers who offered clear insights, noting that they "introduced new perspectives." At the same time, several students expressed a desire for improvements in delivery. A few found specific sessions difficult to follow due to audibility issues, particularly when the presentation involved a walking tour outdoors or took place in crowded public spaces. Others felt that specific presentations would benefit from more in-depth explanations and concrete examples of real-world applications. These comments suggest opportunities to strengthen presenter support, refine alignment between speakers and their subject matter, and enhance accessibility through improved audio setups.

Field Trips and Real-World Applications

Field trips continued to be defining experiences for many students. Participants described visits to transportation facilities and infrastructure sites as eye-opening, with several noting they gained new perspectives on places they previously took for granted. Comments such as "Cool to see in person" and "It opened my eyes to a different perspective of the station" underscore the value of real-world exposure. Students also expressed enthusiasm about future opportunities to experience elements that were unavailable during the visit, such as riding the demonstration pods at Glydways.

Career Insights and Professional Exposure

Students appreciated opportunities to learn directly from transportation professionals. Many noted that guest speakers helped broaden their understanding of potential career paths, with one student writing that the session hosted by Spartan Racing "genuinely may have changed my life because I didn't know it existed but I want to join now." These insights demonstrate the powerful role that industry exposure plays in shaping students' interests. While students generally responded positively to these interactions, some indicated they would enjoy even more opportunities for deeper conversations, whether in small groups or more personalized settings.

Overall Program Feedback and Suggestions

Overall, students described the MiSTA program as valuable, inspiring, and transformative. Many wrote that they were introduced to entirely new ideas or perspectives, and several comments reflected genuine excitement about the field of transportation. Suggestions for improvement focused on practical enhancements such as ensuring presenters provide more in-depth explanations and examples, and improving sound quality where needed. Students also expressed a continued desire for more interactive and hands-on learning opportunities, which they consistently identified as the most engaging aspects of the program.

Conclusion

Feedback from the 2025 MiSTA cohort demonstrates the program's success in delivering engaging, informative, and meaningful learning experiences. Students left with new knowledge, broadened perspectives, and, in some cases, newly inspired career aspirations. Their thoughtful comments provide a framework for strengthening future programming. By incorporating their feedback, MiSTA can be further elevated to inspire and empower the next generation of transportation leaders.

Acknowledgment

The author thanks Lisa Rose for editorial services, as well as MTI staff Project Assistant Cameron Simons and Graphic Designer Michael Virtudazo.

The 2025 Mineta Summer Transportation Institute was funded by the Federal Railroad Administration-supported CRISI project, Promoting Railroading Careers and Developing the Current Rail Industry Workforce, led by the University of South Florida's Center for Urban Transportation Research, and by California's Senate Bill 1 (SB 1), the Road Repair and Accountability Act, through the California State University Transportation Consortium.

About the Authors

Alverina Weinardy first joined MTI as a graduate student research assistant in 2017. Currently, she serves as MTI's Director of Operations. In this role, Alverina manages the institute's online presence through newsletters, social media campaigns, press releases, blogs, and web content creation. Alverina plays a vital role in the execution of MTI's workforce development programs and other public-facing events. She holds a Master of Urban and Regional Planning, with a focus on Affordable Housing and Community Development Finance, from San José State University.

Disclaimer

This report can be accessed at
transweb.sjsu.edu/research/2613

MINETA TRANSPORTATION INSTITUTE

The Mineta Transportation Institute (MTI) is a university transportation center located within the Lucas Graduate School of Business at San José State University. MTI supports the advancement of safe, efficient, and innovative surface transportation through research, education, workforce development, and technology transfer.