

# Celebrating Excellence and Embracing Growth: 2023 in Review

December 2023

**Dr. Karen Philbrick**

---

This is most definitely a year for celebrating excellence and embracing growth. As we anticipate the upcoming year, I'd like to reflect on the milestones we've reached this past year. Though our successes have been covered in detail in previous [newsletters](#), [press releases](#), and [media coverage](#), I wish to emphasize a few particular instances that underscore the significant impact of our efforts to improve the mobility of people and goods.

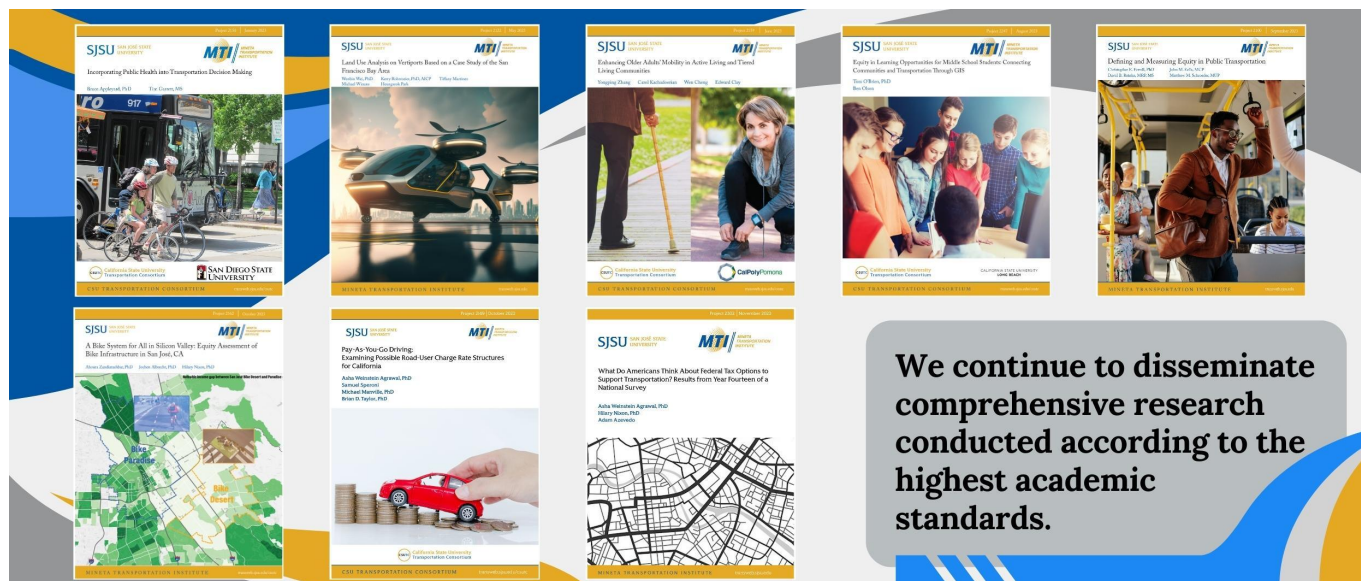
Transportation is a pillar of both economic and social activity in our communities. Commitment and investments in our local and national transportation systems are connected to safety, environmental, social, & economic outcomes. MTI's work as a University Transportation Center is an important part of the scientific foundation that supports informed decision-making at the state and national levels. In addition to the USDOT-funded Mineta Consortium for Transportation Mobility ([MCTM](#)) and the Mineta Consortium for Equitable, Efficient, and Sustainable Transportation ([MCEEST](#)), MTI also leads the California State University Transportation Consortium ([CSUTC](#)) funded by the Road Repair and Accountability Act of 2017 (CA Senate Bill 1) and the Climate Change and Extreme Events Training and Research ([CCEETR](#)) Program funded by the Federal Railroad Administration.

We have long recognized that the success of our institute is centered on collaboration and connection—at the individual level and with other academic institutions and industry partners. This past year, our students and researchers have continued to demonstrate the profound impacts and outstanding quality of their work by earning numerous awards, scholarships, and other recognitions. MTI leaders championed accessible, safe, and sustainable transportation at local, state, national, and international levels this year—including at the 2023 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP28) in Dubai earlier this month. We also developed and implemented transportation [curriculum](#) for elementary school students and engaged [middle school](#), [high school](#), and [post secondary students](#) in innovative programs to inspire communities and build the transportation workforce of the future.

Thirty-two years after its inception, MTI is still growing and expanding our reach and positive impact. We are funding long-standing and brand-new projects, including published projects that have helped our researchers found start-up companies, organize new educational and community-based programs, and expand existing ones. We also launched a [new series](#) called "Inspired to Connect the World" that features students and professionals sharing personal and inspiring stories about their careers.

Efficiency, convenience, inclusivity, safety, sustainability, and community are at the heart of what we do and are instrumental to how we connect the world and increase mobility for all.

## Publishing Evidence-Based, People-Focused Research



**We continue to disseminate comprehensive research conducted according to the highest academic standards.**



This year we published 54 reports from 48 researchers. These research projects engaged more than 70 student research assistants with paid opportunities and real-world experience. Each report includes actionable intelligence to improve our nation’s transportation systems and the industry as a whole. For example, researchers at MTI developed a [Bike Equity Web-Map for San José](#), an interactive tool utilizing a new bikeability index developed by the research team that draws from MTI’s groundbreaking Low Travel Stress (LTS) method developed in 2012. Another success this year comes from Dr. Serena Alexander, a Visiting Scholar of Climate Policy and Infrastructure Resilience at USDOT, who was a main contributor to the [U.S. National Blueprint for Transportation Decarbonization](#) released in January. Findings from Dr. Alexander’s [MTI-funded research](#) were used to inform freight strategies in this report.

Another seminal project, led by Dr. William Riggs, “[Blockchain and Distributed Autonomous Community Ecosystems: Opportunities to Democratize Finance and Delivery of Transport, Housing, Urban Greening and Community Infrastructure](#),” was the stepping stone for Dr. Riggs establishing [Intncity, Inc.](#), which supports technology providing a plug & play blockchain-based platform for local Distributed Autonomous Organizations (DAOs) where neighbors can work together to build and finance infrastructure and provide better services that impact their daily lives. Additionally, Scott Belcher received funding to conduct several research projects focused on cybersecurity for the transit industry, leading him [to previously provide Congressional testimony](#). He recently launched a new company, [Cybrbase](#), to provide cybersecurity assessment and planning services for small and mid-sized transit agencies.

Education Director and [National Transportation Finance Center](#) Director Dr. Asha Weinstein Agrawal’s [transit safety survey](#) examined street harassment on transit in California. This study was conducted in accordance with [California Senate Bill 1161 \(2022\)](#), legislation that directed MTI to develop a reliable, easy-to-use survey instrument for collecting information from public transit passengers about the extent, location, and characteristics of any street harassment they experience. Although the legislation is

focused on large California transit agencies, the study findings are equally relevant to smaller agencies and agencies outside the state.

## Delivering Impactful Events



**We informed and engaged communities through a diverse array of events, both online and in person.**



This year we delivered more than 30 events to over 9,000 participants. We covered diverse topics such as transportation safety, active transportation, sustainability and climate change, transportation planning and finance, and human trafficking.

We opened the year with the important “[Combating Human Trafficking in Transportation](#)” webinar. The success of this webinar led Caltrans to ask MTI to deliver it again, this time [live](#) to more than 400 Caltrans staff during Caltrans safety week. In February, we hosted a four-part MTI Research Snaps' Advancing Transportation Equity [series](#) to reflect on some of the most pressing issues of diversity and accessibility in the industry as a whole, acknowledging a sometimes-painful past to ensure that transportation policies serve all communities equitably.

To celebrate Women’s History Month, we hosted “When Women Lead: Strategies to Advance Equity” in partnership with the Conference of Minority Transportation Officials ([COMTO](#)) to bring together a diverse panel of women transportation leaders as they share personal stories from their careers and lessons learned as they rose to the top.

We also hosted one of our signature events, the [14th Annual Mineta National Transportation Policy Summit: Getting to Zero Deaths on Our Roadways: Is the IJA up to the Challenge?](#), featuring National Transportation Safety Board Chair Jennifer Homendy and Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administrator Robin Hutcheson. This event, presented in partnership with the Commonwealth Club of California since 2010, brings together national experts to discuss cutting-edge transportation challenges and opportunities. This same theme inspired our K-12 offerings to continue to build the future transportation workforce. We decided to adopt #VisionZero2030 theme for the poster and essay [contests](#). These

contests, along with the [Garrett Morgan Sustainable Transportation Competition](#), will announce winners in the coming months.

## Celebrating Our Staff & Researchers



Several MTI researchers, staff, and partners this year were recognized for their significant contributions to the field of transportation and to local and global communities. Dr. Karen Philbrick was awarded the Katherine G. Johnson Trailblazer Award for exceptional leadership in recruiting, retaining, and advancing women in transportation. Additionally, this year, the Silicon Valley Business Journal released its inaugural [Power 100](#) list of the most influential business leaders in the region, naming Dr. Karen Philbrick alongside leaders like SJSU President Cynthia Teniente-Matson, VTA General Manager & CEO Carolyn Gonot, Alphabet CEO Sundar Pichai, and Apple CEO Tim Cook. Dr. Hilary Nixon received the American Road & Transportation Builders Association ([ARTBA](#)) [Excellence in Academia Award](#) for her outstanding leadership, mentorship, and significant educational and/or research contributions in the transportation industry.

MTI partner CSU Fresno's Maria Calahorra-Jimenez was awarded the Regional Teaching Award from the Associated Schools of Construction for her contributions, and Dr. Jorge Pesantez received the 2023 Best Reviewer Award from ASCE's Journal of Water Resources Planning and Management (JWRPM).

Additionally, Dr. Kezban Yagci Sokat, a Research Associate from SJSU, received an Emerging Leader Seed Grant to develop her research agenda in the field of human trafficking focused on the role of transportation. For this US-DOT-funded research, Dr. Yagci Sokat was awarded the Faculty Student Collaboration Award and was appointed to the USDOT's Advisory Committee on Human Trafficking's Research and Data Subcommittee.

## Championing Our Students



MTI supports an interdisciplinary California State University [Master of Science in Transportation Management](#) program, fully accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges and the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business. MTI is proud to have supported our students with close to \$1 million in fellowships since 1996. In 2023, MTI awarded 46 fellowships. Six of our graduate students won other prestigious state and national awards, including scholarships from the California Transportation Foundation ([CTF](#)), Conference of Minority Transportation Officials ([COMTO](#)), and Women’s Transportation Seminar ([WTS](#)).



MTI proudly partnered with other organizations and private companies to develop scholarship opportunities. The American Public Transportation Foundation (APTF) and the American Road & Transportation Builders Association Transportation Development Foundation ([ARTBATDF](#)) graciously matched MTI’s funds—each contributing \$5,000—to award two \$10,000 scholarships to two deserving students! We helped develop the HNTB Spark Scholarship, of which \$6,500 pays for half of the MSTM tuition for a student from an underrepresented background. Finally, we awarded a \$1,000 honorarium for the “Allied Telesis Outstanding Security Capstone Project” in honor of our Trustee Taki Oshima, Founder and CEO of [Allied Telesis](#), who passed away in 2022.

## Building the Future Transportation Workforce



**We inspire the next generation of transportation trailblazers.**



MTI delivered more than 15 workforce development events and programs, engaging audiences ranging from elementary students to mid-level managers this year. In total, we connected with over 2,300 individuals in our efforts to plan for the future of the transportation workforce. We also partnered with educational institutions, non-profit organizations, professional associations

and transit agencies to engage communities at large in advancing the knowledge of various transportation career paths. Our [annual elementary poster contest](#) received more than 60 entries from various schools nationwide and we awarded cash prizes to the winning students. MTI also launched an [essay contest](#) that invites students grades 6-12 to propose a solution to a problem centered around a specific theme each year under one or more of the following principles of transportation: sustainability, equity, safety, community, and innovation.

In the spring, using funds from CA Senate Bill 1, MTI [sponsored](#) Walk and Bike Mendocino to deliver a bike safety education program to 4th and 5th grade students at Nokomis Elementary School in Ukiah, CA. The funding also helped Walk and Bike Mendocino distribute more than 50 helmets to students, who learned about local helmet laws, safe routes to schools, and riding their bikes while following the rules of the road.

In July, MTI delivered its signature workforce development program, the [Mineta Summer Transportation Institute](#), funded by [Caltrans](#), with 32 high-school student participants. Students participated in a series of comprehensive hands-on projects, academic lectures, and field trips to San Francisco Central Subway, Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority's headquarters and bus yard, and future [California High-Speed Rail](#) sites, introducing them to the principles of transportation systems. This tuition-free program was made possible through collaborations with SJSU departments, such as the [Department of Aviation & Technology](#), [Department of Urban & Regional Planning](#), [Peer Connections](#), and [Writing Center](#), as well as industry partners, including [AECOM](#), [EPC Consultants](#), [DB Engineering & Consulting USA](#), [HNTB](#), and [United Airlines](#).

*What a year it has been!*

As we move toward the new year, kindly pass along this message to friends, family, and colleagues who value staying up-to-date on transportation news, professional development opportunities, and industry connections. Join MTI on social media to discover the exciting prospects of a new year in transportation!

