

# Bridging Gaps, Building Futures: 2024 in Review

December 2024

Dr. Karen Philbrick



In this year of significant challenges, we are reminded of the power of community. Around the world and in our own neighborhoods, difficult moments highlight how much we can achieve when we come together, lean on one another, and focus on what unites us. At MTI, we continue to do all that we can to cultivate and advance transportation safety, equity, and sustainability for everyone. To move is to live—and the difference between having and lacking mobility is the difference between having and lacking economic, social, and educational opportunities. As we prepare for the new year, I want to reflect on all the good we have already done this year, the milestones we have reached, and the connections we have built to improve the mobility of people and goods. Although our successes have been covered in [newsletters](#), [press releases](#), and [media coverage](#), I wish to highlight a handful of exciting events and changes.

Continual investment in our local and national transportation systems enables the wellbeing and growth of both economic and social activities in our communities. MTI's work as a University Transportation Center is a critical part of the foundation that enables informed, scientific decision making in California and the United States. In addition to 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.

**Transportation is connection**, and connection necessitates partnerships and collaboration at the individual level as well as with academic and industry partners. In 2024, our students and researchers have continued to work together to advance transportation equity, safety, and sustainability at local, state, national, and international levels. Many have earned awards and scholarships for their outstanding work, demonstrating the profound impact of what we do.

To build the transportation workforce of the future, we continue to develop and implement transportation curriculum for elementary classrooms and engage [middle school](#), [high school](#), and [post secondary students](#), as well as [working professionals](#) in exciting programs. Thirty-three years after its inception, MTI continues to grow. We continue to improve and expand on existing programs and build new projects and collaborations. We continued last year’s [Inspired to Connect](#) series with more features, expanded the reach of the [Garrett Morgan Sustainable Transportation Competition](#), and helped develop a new conference with our consortia partners. We hosted and co-sponsored 54 events in total, including 19 webinars, and we launched a new webinar series for Women’s History Month: [Trailblazer Tuesday](#). This series—featuring exceptional leaders like the Honorable Jennifer Homendy, Chair of the National Transportation Safety Board, and Veronica Vanterpool, Acting Federal Transit Administrator—will expand and continue in 2025.

Former FTA Administrator and MTI Trustee Nuria Fernandez said, “Transit is the great equalizer. Providing rides for those who do not have a car or cannot drive, and particularly in rural and Tribal areas, having access to an affordable, reliable bus ride can mean the difference between isolation and opportunity.” At MTI, we continue to push through and overcome challenges to advance mobility. When everything seems overwhelming, we can come together to create a better, more connected world.

## Research that Moves Us



This year we published 54 reports from more than 70 researchers while engaging 76 student research assistants with paid opportunities and real-world experience.

MTI researchers continued to shape policies and practices across California and beyond. In 2024, MTI Research Associate Dr. Serena Alexander collaborated with SJSU graduate students and VTA staff to develop policy [recommendations](#) for an equity framework for VTA’s proposed Equitable VMT Mitigation Program, addressing the impacts of housing and urban developments in Santa Clara County. Dr. Alexander also provided expertise to the California State Senate Legislative Committee on Climate Change Policies, informing the development of Senate Bill 1505.

This year, MTI also hosted a [webinar](#) to spotlight findings from a groundbreaking [transit safety survey](#) published in 2023 by Dr. Asha Weinstein Agrawal, Education Director and [National Transportation Finance Center](#) Director. This survey, utilized by [AC Transit](#), [BART](#), and [SacRT](#), examined street harassment on California transit systems. Developed in response to [California Senate Bill 1161 \(2022\)](#), the survey provides a reliable, user-friendly tool to collect data from transit passengers about the frequency, locations, and nature of street harassment they encounter. While the legislation focuses on large California transit agencies, the study's findings offer valuable insights for smaller agencies and transit systems nationwide. Additional MTI [security research](#) was used by the [Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency](#) (CISA) to analyze information and patterns of vehicle rammings, contributing to their recent publication: the Vehicle Incident Prevention and Mitigation Security Guide.

MTI's report [Measuring Walking and Cycling Using the Pedestrian and Bicycling Survey Approach: A Low-Cost Survey Method for Local Communities](#) aided California's Departments of Health and Transportation, and was used to improve how they measure active transportation in the state. At the local level, the City of San José continues to rely on a survey instrument developed by MTI researchers to assess the success of the open streets Viva CalleSJ event. This tool helps inform planning and communicate the benefits of these events to funders and community partners.

## Connecting People through Knowledge

**We further the impact of our body of research through engagements across virtual and in-person events.**



This year we delivered more than 50 events to over 11,500 participants, covering diverse topics such as transportation safety, active transportation, sustainability and climate change, transportation planning and finance, and workforce development.

We started the year off with the proud [unveiling](#) of a new statue at San José Mineta International Airport to honor its namesake: [Norman Yoshio Mineta](#). The 6-foot-tall bronze statue was funded by Mineta's supporters and commissioned by nonprofit organizations. MTI's founder served as mayor of San José in the 1970s before working in Congress for 20 years. He was later appointed Secretary of Commerce and then Secretary of Transportation, where he

guided the creation of the Transportation Security Administration. A beloved leader, Mineta passed away in 2022 at the age of 90 after an inspiring lifetime dedicated to public service and building community. This statue will serve as a reminder of his trailblazing efforts and dedication to making transportation safer for all.

In March, we launched a brand new webinar series celebrating Women’s History Month: Trailblazer Tuesdays! This series featured virtual fireside chats with a diverse panel of women transportation leaders at the height of success in academia, public and private industries, and the nonprofit sector. It highlighted the achievements of pioneering women in our industry through compelling personal narratives and valuable insights into how these leaders shape transportation and our communities. Featured Trailblazers included [Veronica Vanterpool](#), Acting Administrator of the [Federal Transit Administration](#) (FTA) (view a recording [here](#)) and the Honorable [Jennifer Homendy](#), Chair of the [National Transportation Safety Board](#) (NTSB) (view a recording [here](#)).

In October, MTI helped launch the first annual [Southern Colorado Transportation Conference](#) (SCTC) in Pueblo, Colorado, hosted by the [CCEETR program](#), which is led by MTI. CCEETR researchers, transportation professionals, and other experts convened to explore how transportation systems—particularly rail—can mitigate climate change impacts and contribute to local, regional, and national solutions. The event was a success with over 100 attendees engaging in a poster session and hearing from guest speakers from the [Federal Railroad Administration](#) and the [Colorado Department of Transportation](#).

This year, MTI also ramped up efforts to support bicycling initiatives, fostering safer and more sustainable transportation options in California using funds from Senate Bill 1. We continued our co-sponsorship of Silicon Valley Bicycle Coalition’s [Bike to Wherever Month](#), which encourages the community to ride for errands, visit friends and family, commute to school and work, and ride recreationally. This year also brought further expansions to our sponsorship of [Bike East Bay](#)’s Biking in Wet Weather & Fix-a-Flat classes. With our support, they were able to distribute bike safety gear and repair tools to participants of their free workshops.

Additionally, we sponsored the Sacramento Area Bicycle Advocates “[Ride Ready Repair Program](#)” to help bring this free pop-up to a new neighborhood in Sacramento. Offering this pop-up in a historically underserved neighborhood eliminates obstacles to bike safety and repair services to help ensure that all people, regardless of race, creed, gender, age, orientation, and economic status, can access safe, sustainable transportation. MTI plans to continue our sponsorship of these programs and further expand our support of bicycle-focused events and education in 2025.

## Celebrating Our Staff & Researchers



We continue to celebrate the collective impact of our team in making transportation more accessible and equitable.

Several MTI researchers, staff, and partners this year were recognized for their significant contributions to the transportation industry. MTI's own Executive Director Dr. Karen Philbrick was elected to the American Public Transportation Foundation board and elevated to a Director of the APTA's High-Speed and Intercity Passenger Rail Committee. Dr. Philbrick was also recognized with Railway Age magazine's [Women in Rail](#) award for her outstanding leadership, community service, and industry accomplishments. MTI's Deputy Executive Director Dr. Hilary Nixon was elected to the position of Treasurer for the Council of University Transportation Centers. In addition, our Director of Education and Director for the National Transportation Finance Center Dr. Asha Weinstein Agrawal was appointed to serve as a member of the California Transportation Plan Policy Advisory Committee and also served as a member of SPUR's San José Ballot Analysis Committee for the November 2024 election.

We also want to celebrate MCEEST consortium partner [Lisa Staes](#) from the University of South Florida, who was one of 27 faculty members recognized by the university with an Outstanding Research Achievement Award for 2024. Another MTI Research Associate, Dr. Kezban Yagci Sokat, was [recognized](#) as a "Thought Leader" by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business. These remarkable achievements demonstrate the dedication and expertise of MTI's researchers, staff, and partners, who continue to shape our industry through their meaningful contributions to our communities and our nation.

Finally, MTI welcomed three new members to the [Board of Trustees](#) for the 2024-2027 term: Kristin Decas, Sachie Oshima, and Lynda Tran. [Kristin Decas](#) comes to MTI as CEO & Port Director of [Port of Hueneme](#) in California. [Dr. Sachie Oshima](#) worked as an emergency medicine physician for more than two decades, including with Stanford University's healthcare organization, before she took on the roles of Chair & CEO of network infrastructure-telecommunications company [Allied Telesis](#). [Lynda Tran](#) is CEO of [Lincoln Room Strategies](#) and a nationally recognized leader in transportation and infrastructure policy. We are incredibly grateful to welcome them as they bring their extraordinary and actionable visions to help us continue to improve mobility for all.

## Fostering Success by Supporting Our Students



Our academic home, San José State University, ranked as the #4 best public university in the nation and #16 overall in the Wall Street Journal (WSJ) and College Pulse's [2025 Best Colleges in the U.S.](#) rankings. The rankings, which rate the top 500 universities in the country, measure how well each college sets graduates up for financial success, how much a school improves students' chances of graduating and their future earnings and balances these outcomes with feedback from students on college life—and SJSU keeps making the list and moving up, vaulting 157 spots from last year's rankings. MTI supports an interdisciplinary [Master of Science in Transportation Management](#) program at the Lucas Graduate School and College of Business, fully accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges and the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business.



Since 1996, MTI is pleased to have supported our students with over \$1 million in fellowships and in 2024 alone, MTI awarded 35 fellowships. In addition, five of our graduate students won other prestigious state and national awards, including scholarships from the Council of University Transportation Centers ([CUTC](#)), Latinos in Transit ([LIT](#)), [Railway & Locomotive Historical Society](#), and Women's Transportation Seminar ([WTS](#)).

MTI proudly partnered with leading organizations and private companies to expand student scholarship opportunities. The American Public Transportation Foundation ([APTF](#)) and the American Road & Transportation Builders Association Transportation Development Foundation ([ARTBATDF](#)) generously matched MTI's funds—each providing \$5,000—to offer two \$10,000 scholarships to two deserving students! Additionally, we supported the development of the HNTB Spark Scholarship, which covers \$6,500—half of the MSTM tuition—for a student from an underrepresented background. Finally, we sponsored the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) San José Branch's 37th Annual Student Scholarship Essay Contest of \$1,000 and the \$2,000 COMTO NorCal Norman Mineta Scholarship to continue to support students in pursuing their educational, professional, and life goals.

We were also delighted to be able to provide stipends for students to attend conferences and networking events, helping make it possible for them to connect with industry professionals. This year we helped students

and alums of our K-12 and college programs attend COMTO Northern California's Summer Intern Reception and Women Who Move the Bay, Silicon Valley Bicycle Summit, and 2024 APA California Conference.

## Fostering Leadership at All Levels



**We cultivate leadership skills and inspire the next generation of transportation trailblazers.**



This year, MTI successfully implemented and supported more than 40 workforce development events and programs, empowering the youngest learners all the way to mid-level managers. Through collaboration and partnerships, more than 5,000 individuals engaged with workforce development programs and connected with the transportation industry. Of these, 1,750 were K-12 students. We also

collaborated with educational institutions, non-profit organizations, professional associations, and transit agencies to connect with communities and help inform them about the many opportunities and career paths in our industry.

In addition to the bike-related initiatives that foster more sustainable transportation options for adults, MTI again [sponsored](#) Walk and Bike Mendocino to bring bike safety education to elementary school students in Ukiah, California. This year, the program visited Grace Hudson Language Academy, a dual language Spanish immersion school, to bring bike helmets to 57 students in Grade 5. The program also brought helmets to 84 fourth graders at Calpella Elementary School. The teachers at Calpella sent a thank-you that highlighted the importance of safety programs like this, “We live in an area which used to have a dirt trail around the east and west sides for horses, walkers, and bike riders. Now the county digs a wider drainage ditch in much of that area, so the children ride their bikes in the car lane with 40-50+mph autos. Your helmets will save lives.”

Our [Garrett Morgan Morgan Sustainable Transportation Competition](#) continued for another successful year with sixteen teams of middle school students from across the country participating in this year’s Vision Zero 2030 theme. The three winning teams from [Kennedy Middle School](#) (Cupertino, CA), [Hopkins Middle School](#) (Fremont, CA), and [Julius Cordes & Peter Hansen Schools](#) (Mountain House, CA) were invited to present their projects to the U.S. DOT Office of the Assistant Secretary for Research and Technology Planning Team principals. A team from Thornton Jr. High School (Fremont, CA) presented their “Sustainable Transportation and Safety Study” to the Fremont Public Works Transportation Engineering Division. One of the participating

educators, Sharon Larson, said that the competition provided her students with “fantastic leadership opportunities.”

This year MTI served as a foundational support for the American Society of Civil Engineers ([ASCE](#)) San José in its launch of the first annual Engineers Week! ASCE engaged future engineers by conducting outreach to K-12 students in a week of fun, hands-on activities. On Girl Day, around 150 girls from local high schools gathered at the San José Women’s Club to hear from MTI’s Executive Director Dr. Karen Philbrick and Northrop Grumman’ Strategic Launches Engineer Kathlyn Terrazas about being a leader and a woman in the industry. Participating students also had the opportunity to tour the SJSU Engineering Building. Altogether, the Engineers Week directly [benefited](#) more than 250 students, inspiring them to hone their critical thinking skills, develop a deeper understanding of STEM, and plan for their futures—maybe as engineers!

In July, MTI delivered its signature workforce development program, the [Mineta Summer Transportation Institute](#), with [32 high-school students](#) participating in a series of comprehensive hands-on projects, academic lectures, and excursions introducing them to the principles of transportation systems. This [program](#)—which enables students to earn 3 transferable college credits and earn valuable skills for *free*—was made possible through collaborations with SJSU departments and long-time industry partners like [California High-Speed Rail Authority](#), [VTA](#), and [HNTB](#). We also collaborated with [Glydways](#) and the [Contra Costa Transportation Authority](#) to bring the students to [GoMentum Station](#) to learn about cutting-edge tech and mobility innovations that can improve transportation safety and accessibility.

“MTI’s interdisciplinary approach was incredibly valuable and informs much of my ambition to leverage policy, science, and engineering to improve the lives of others,” said MSTI alum Absar Ahmed, highlighting the value of the program to participants and the broader community.

In 2024, we also provided 69 transportation professionals in management positions with opportunities to improve leadership skills through our [Leadership Academies](#). MTI delivered a full 6-month academy at Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) and has another in-progress at Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART). Two other two-day intensive leadership academies were completed with Tri Delta Transit in Contra Costa County and Regional Transportation District (RTD) in Denver.

After decades of successful K-12 workforce development and education programs, MTI partnered with experienced educators to pilot a new program for preschool-aged children. These efforts engaged the very youngest learners in understanding more about how transportation shapes their world while laying the groundwork for future opportunities to help them pursue their educational, career, and life goals. Four- and five-year-olds made art with toy vehicles and mud, roleplayed pilots, and rode the bus to a local park. Through this partnership with Bothell Family Cooperative Preschool, we created free resources for Pre-K/TK teachers that align with developmental education standards and get kids excited about mobility. These resources will be freely available on the MTI website in the Spring of 2025.

### *What a transformative and defining year we’ve experienced!*

No matter what the new year brings, we encourage everyone to stay engaged and connected. Share this message with your friends and family and keep pushing forward to address the urgent needs of our communities. Only together can we advance equity, safety, sustainability, and mobility. Through collaboration and dedication, we create a better, more connected future in 2025 and beyond.

