

Firing Line Panel Response to Conference Findings

Tay Yoshitani, *Maryland Port Administration*
Joni Casey, *Intermodal Association of North America*
Lawrence Dahms, *Metropolitan Transportation Commission*
William R. Lucas, *Military Traffic Management Command*
Edward Wytkind, *Transportation Trades Department of AFL-CIO*
Lana Batts, *Truckload Carriers Association*

On the final day of the conference, Steering Committee Chairman Michael D. Meyer summarized the preliminary findings and conclusions of the conferees (see Chairman's Summary in these proceedings). Following this summary, a Firing Line Panel of distinguished transportation professionals represent-

ing a broad spectrum of the transportation industry was given the opportunity to respond. Although a number of those comments are reflected in the Chairman's Summary, the following are highlights of some of the key points made by each panelist and a summary of the panel's dialogue with the audience.

Tay Yoshitani

Market demand very much influences the type and cost of transportation service. Transportation itself has become a commodity whose cost becomes a determining factor in consumer use of the service. In response, the transportation industry has undergone large-scale changes, the most noticeable being mergers. In the last 10 years, the number of major railroads has declined from 42 to 8, major ocean carriers from 25 to about 7.

With regard to education and training, this means that industry will need people who can help companies differentiate their services through marketing, technology innovation, and awareness of the political environment. Transportation is an intrusive industry, so transportation offi-

cial must understand how to be effective in an often volatile environment.

Environmental sensitivity is a key characteristic of the times in which we all work. Transportation officials not only have to manage their way through the environmental process, but also have to understand the politics of getting things done in a world in which political controversy can be linked to the degree of environmental disruption.

The port industry has developed a Port Professional Management Program whose objective is to develop port managers who have a systems perspective on the successful management and operation of their facilities. We must have well-trained and qualified people to take the industry into the next century.

Joni Casey

Trade associations need to ensure the availability of quality education and training programs on behalf of their members as well as a supply of qualified employee recruits for member companies. In some instances, trade associations also provide education and training opportunities for their members.

Transportation education has often taken second place to logistics. We should not lose sight of the respective roles and relationships of transportation and logistics.

As an association that represents the intermodal freight transportation industry, most of our interest will be on training. Curriculum issues in graduate programs and K through 12 initiatives are not within our scope at this time.

Having industry-agency-academic fellowships or sabbaticals is a great idea. One of the early efforts at educating state and local planning officials about the freight community ran into the problem of lack of knowledge or insufficient understanding of the freight industry. This is a great area for partnerships.

We need to be cautious when we combine intermodal passenger and freight education and training initiatives.

The core competencies are perhaps the same for both, but continuing education and training initiatives should be focusing on different things.

An emphasis on technology, and how to best apply innovative technologies, is certainly appropriate. Technology is a driving force in the intermodal industry. However, we also clearly need to focus attention on human resource needs. People are absolutely the most important and valuable asset of any company. Educating and training this asset will basically determine the success or failure of the company.

Although suggested as a means of enhancing training activities, tying mandatory quotas of training activities to funding authorization is not worthwhile. This bond would likely reduce the flexibility that is necessary for training to respond to industry needs.

It is important to have some sense of the return on investment of training activities and of conferences such as this one. Organizational inertia is characteristic of most agencies, and the best ideas for education and training can languish for years without implementation. We need to show the benefits of implementing effective programs.

Lawrence Dahms

The title of this conference was probably wrong because there is no job called an "intermodalist."

The challenge of intermodalism at the highest management level is to leverage all of the modal interests to act intermodally. Therefore, the focus of intermodal education and training should be at that level, not at the K through 12 level or at the level of low- to mid-level employees. And at the highest management level, the need is for basic technical competency in conjunction with interpersonal and managerial skills that are learned on the job.

There has not been much progress in intermodalism in the passenger sector since ISTEA, but this is not because of deficiencies in education and training. There is still a lack of understanding and a lack of commitment at the highest levels of business and government on what the intermodal concept is all about and whether it is worth all of the attention. Unless there is this commitment for and an understanding of the concept of the "intermodal manager," there will be little support for education and training.

William R. Lucas

For the military transportation support function, technical competence is essential. In a combat support situation, the commanding officer will want to have a transportation expert, a supply expert, a petroleum expert, and so on.

Ever since Desert Shield, intermodal transportation has been a key concern to the U.S. military. Forward operations cannot rely on having fixed bases of support, so the military relies on door-to-door service, including the use of commercial services. To be successful, however, there needed to be a logical organizational structure to support this strategy. A joint traffic management office has been created to educate military customers on the benefits of intermodalism and on the capabilities of intermodal transportation to meet their needs, to match requirements with capability, and to provide a full range of solutions.

One of the basic strategies for developing an intermodal focus in transportation is an intern program. Approximately 20 interns per year are placed into a transportation officer basic course that introduces them to the customers they will have to support. The program also exposes the officers to leadership

training and to the practical demands of intermodal transportation.

Continuing education is another vital element of our technical support program, especially oriented toward those who are not part of the transportation intern program but who nonetheless have a role to play in intermodal transportation service provision. A Joint Deployment Transportation Center has been created to offer blocks of instruction to combat officers at different stages of their career so that they understand the transportation requirements of combat modes of operation. This instruction is often done with mock exercises that require rapid deployment of troops and material.

One of the key issues with intermodal education and training is the exchange of information on what everyone is doing. A website for intermodal transportation would allow one to advertise intermodal positions and thus serve as a central focal area for job announcements and for those seeking jobs.

The U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) should be a major actor in transportation education and training. DOT should be an enabler and maybe a partial funder, but not a regulator.

Edward Wytkind

Labor is a key foundation for the success of intermodal transportation. The impact of intermodal transportation on labor is the blurring of modal lines in companies and the challenge of transferring skills to accomplish the seamlessness the industry demands.

Deregulation has had a big impact on industry and on skills in training and education. There are varying perspectives on the benefits of deregulation. To labor, deregulation has cost jobs. Some will argue that jobs have been created, but these jobs are not as good as they were 20 years ago. Studies show that in an industry that is booming, real wages continue to decline. We must be

concerned about the quality of jobs. Therefore, in consideration of training, one cannot ignore the quality-of-job issue and whether you are training people to go to jobs that don't exist.

Labor needs to be part of the education and training strategy. In unionized industries, regional and local union offices offer the best delivery mechanisms for instruction. Partnerships must have labor representation.

A national policy linking workforce development and funding is a great idea, but most likely unrealistic and unenforceable. The Davis-Bacon standard provides a very thorough apprentice program and ensures that a worker can do the job.

Labor has provided some innovative approaches to the training needs of the industry. For example, the AFL-CIO has developed a highly acclaimed training program for hazardous materials transportation. However, employers do not recognize the need of giving employees

time to participate in these programs.

Don't forget that you can't let training and education become disconnected from what is on the receiving end. It is real difficult to attract good people to tough but important jobs when the wages are eroding.

Lana Batts

The longhaul truckload carrier is the fastest-growing segment of the transportation industry. The biggest concern is a tremendous shortage of high-quality entry-level drivers.

A key challenge to the profession is attracting quality people to transportation; intermodalism will then take care of itself. And the critical problem in this challenge is our image. Very few people grow up wanting to be a truck driver. And yet intermodal transportation does not work without truck drivers. Many of the most important CEOs in the industry began as truck drivers.

The image of the trucking industry must change. Few people know that 80 percent of the truckload industry has satellite communications in the trucks. A recent survey showed that 38 percent of the truck drivers with satellite communications are on the Internet. The job is one that is challenging and creative.

Return on investment for training is a critical selling point to industry leaders. One must first ask the question, who has a stake in training? Then one must ask how the industry defines the value added by this training. For trucking companies, the return on investment is improved safety and reduced driver turnover. For insurance companies, it is reduced accidents and a reduction in the severity of accidents. For truck driver training schools, which are also stakeholders, it is the ability to differentiate themselves. Then, you have to quantify the benefit of this investment.

If you are serious about the possibility of national transportation skills standards, they must be developed at the stakeholder level. You also have to ask questions on skill standards: What it is that you want that individual to

know? What do you want that individual to be able to do? How well do you want them to be able to do it? Then you have to start talking about aptitude and ability. But if you don't start at the stakeholder level, it will never work.

Incorporating workforce development into the mission of the DOT agencies is absolutely crucial. We have to get DOT to understand that experienced truck drivers are not developed overnight. We can't hire truck drivers until they are 21 years old, so we lose all of the good people who often make career decisions at 18 years of age. The key is training.

The federal role in education, training, and research is absolutely crucial, especially for DOT. In 1991, when the U.S. Department of Education decided that it was not going to invest in any training courses that were less than 600 hours, DOT was not in on the debate. If transportation officials believe in training and in entry-level jobs, then DOT has to be involved.

As we look at the image issue, we have to take it upon ourselves to make transportation exciting to the K through 12 grades. Image building starts at this level. The trucking industry has a program called Trucker Buddy. It was designed and is maintained by truck drivers. A truck driver adopts a classroom, and when he is driving around the country, he sends postcards back. So, for example, if he is in South Dakota, he sends a postcard of Mt. Rushmore. The teacher then can turn that postcard into a history or geography lesson. The truck driver often brings the truck to the school, and the kids climb all over it. Those are the kinds of things that we have to do to get people excited about trucking, to get them excited about transportation.

DIALOGUE BETWEEN FIRING LINE PANEL AND CONFERENCE PARTICIPANTS

Conference participants were given an opportunity to direct questions to the Firing Line Panel. The following were among the issues raised by participants.

Question/Comment

The number one priority in DOT's Strategic Plan is transportation safety. How do we relate this to education? The only time safety seems to become an issue is when we have a disaster or when the system fails. We need to be more proactive in our education and training programs on the safety issue.

Response (Lana Batts)

I don't think it is enough to say "safety." I know we became very involved in the Professional Truck Driver Institute of America because of safety. Do we know that trained truck drivers are safer? You can't prove it. You have to start looking at the individual actions and operating procedures of companies. We must ask what the value added is. One DOT study on entry-level driver training found that one could not draw a connection to safety, although everybody knows it is there. You have to ask the questions, Do trained drivers have fewer accidents? Is the severity of those accidents less? In fact, we find that entry-level drivers do have more accidents, but the severity is less. They tend to be backing accidents. So I think you deal with safety one accident at a time.

Response (Edward Wytkind)

Much of what I said had to do with the quality of the job. Well, the word "virtual" is being used a lot in the 1990s, and there are also virtual transportation companies. To us, the definition of a transportation company is one that is heavily invested in all aspects of the industry, including safety. Unfortunately, when the business of making money requires you to squeeze and cut every place you can, safety can be sacrificed. Investment in new equipment is critical for safe operations. You don't find many examples of established large companies that have been in this business for decades and have been involved in major accidents.

When you talk about safety, you can't ignore two things—the people who operate the equipment for employers and the level of investment in safety, training, human resources, and wages so that you attract the right people who will operate at the best and safest levels.

Question/Comment

The word "security" has also not been mentioned at this conference. Safety and security obviously are linked, but security is a separate issue. The whole issue of how we ensure that our transportation system is secure from terrorist attacks and other threats seems to me to be a rather important one that deserves a little more attention than it has received at this meeting. How do you educate transportation professionals to be sensitive to security issues? Some of you may be familiar with the President's Commission on Critical Infrastructure. Transportation is one of the critical infrastructures that the Commission has been studying.

But the main point that I wanted to make is the following. What I heard this morning really helped me to crystallize some thoughts that I had. It seems to me that the title of the conference was really not wrong but that, in essence, we focused on one dimension of the educational issue: preparing people for particular jobs and particular occupations. Yet education has many roles to play and this is only one role. Another role that we have to play has to do with educational awareness and public education at all levels. We should perhaps pay a little bit more attention to what George Bush called the "vision thing." We talk about intermodalism because we have a transportation system, not only in this country but internationally, that is failing. Certainly we have many strengths. Historically the transportation system has permitted us to achieve economic development. In many ways, our freight system is the envy of the rest of the world. Nevertheless, we are suffering from pollution. We are suffering from congestion. It is impossible to pick up a newspaper these days without finding stories about transportation problems of one kind or another. The question is, What kind of vision do we have for what kind of transportation system?

I would suggest that there is another word that has been missing in the discussions that we've had until now. That word is "ethics." It seems to me that if we're going to talk about transportation, if we're going to talk even at the level of preparing people for transportation positions, we have to be concerned by the ethical dimension. I would suggest that ethics comes at several levels. On one level, you have the individual. Individuals have to be responsible. I would also suggest that at the policy level, questions of ethics are important. You have to worry about equity, social justice, the disadvantaged, the disabled, and so on. Finally, I would suggest that the kind of transportation system we need ought to be an ethical transportation system. By that I mean one that does not pollute, one that is environmentally benign, one that does not waste energy the way that we are wasting energy today, one that is efficient, and one that is accessible and open to all. When Secretary Slater talks about his vision

of the transportation system for the future, he talks about an intermodal one, an efficient one, an intelligent one.

Question/Comment

I want to add one thing on the security issue. Force protection is a significant concern within the U.S. Department of Defense. The Commander of the U.S. Transportation Command does a force protection assessment before every mission. That information is shared with commercial airline partners to let them know if there are risks inherent in any of the areas in which they will be operating. The Military Sealift Command has a similar partnership with ship operators in which force protection training is offered as well as good intelligence on some of the areas into which they will be sailing.

Question/Comment

I want to thank Tay Yoshitani for mentioning and highlighting the role of the environment and the importance of the environmental movement to what we do in transportation. That has been touched on a little bit all throughout the conference, and I hope the point doesn't get lost. If you look around at the people in the room, they are basically transportation people—some from the private sector and a good many educators. It would have been great if we could have had a few more people from the environmental perspective adding their thoughts. It is interesting that when you go to environmental conferences, the room is filled with environmental advocates. If there was one theme from this conference, it is the importance of cross-fertilization and partnerships.

Question/Comment

In our society, image is everything. We get it on television. We get it through movies. We get it in newspapers. Image is what makes or breaks companies. And transportation has not been one to project an image that has attracted students to the field. One of the things that I did as part of the Summer Transportation Intern program was to make sure that the students who come through that program understand the importance of transportation and the image of transportation—getting them excited about being part of the profession, excited about what they do, and excited about coming into the profession and being part of solving the problems of transportation throughout the country. How do we change? How do we project our image? How do we create an image for the transportation industry that will attract students to the

profession—the best and the brightest—so that they can solve the problems that we've been working on most of our careers and haven't finished yet?

Response (Joni Casey)

My predecessor coined the phrase "Intermodalism is the Rodney Dangerfield of transportation—it gets no respect." This statement can probably be expanded to transportation in general. Transportation is taken for granted and is not noticed until there is a failure. I don't know what the magic answer is to getting transportation elevated to a higher level. Once you go through an educational activity and show people the impact of transportation or what would happen if it wasn't occurring, a light bulb goes on and you see a sudden recognition.

Response (Lawrence Dahms)

I have three points to make. One is that I don't agree that transportation has this horrible image that is being presented here. I think that transportation has its problems, as does almost every other function in society, but I'm not sure that transportation is on the low edge despite some of our problems.

Second, to the extent to which we want to project a positive image, intermodalism is not an identifiable, real product. So if we are concerned about perception and projecting to the public, we have to project reality.

The third point is that despite the fact that intermodalism will never be rolling off the tongues of everybody on the street, it still is a legitimate concern of transportation managers. The fact is that there are some very able advocates and spokespersons for the various modes of transportation. What is missing, I believe, is still the leadership of how you tie it all together. You can call it intermodalism. You can call it anything you want to call it. But in any case, the void, it seems to me, is there. So, again, I would repeat what I said at the podium. If you're going to have a good image, you're going to sell a real product. A truck bringing produce is a real product. I'm sure that registered with all of you. But similarly, if you are trying to achieve an objective, you've got to define that objective. There is an objective for intermodalism that has not been well defined at the highest levels, and so there is a lot of confusion. This conference was a good conference in terms of saying that we ought to educate people to be good citizens, to be good truck drivers, maybe to be good truck managers. I still think the point was missed that if there is intermodalism, what is it and what do you have to do about training someone to deal with it?

Question/Comment

I think it is more of a marketing issue than an image problem. If you go to a cocktail party and tell somebody you're a traffic manager, the normal reaction is that they want to tell you about the light that is out of sequence at the local intersection. They simply don't understand. But I don't think that image is the real issue. It is just a lack of education and marketing.

Question/Comment

I have a slightly different perspective on image. I think we try to define a level of image for transportation that is a bit too broad. I think you have to look at it by mode, and within the mode you have to look at each company. I can tell you that within every mode, there are companies that have excellent images, excellent reputations for what they do. There are those that are not in that class. So I think it is just too broad to think in terms of the image of an industry.

Question/Comment

I'd like to ask a question of the panel as a whole regarding their suggestions on measuring the effectiveness of the education process and its outputs. We had some very good remarks on how to measure the effectiveness of training programs, where the skills are taught, and that perhaps is a more accessible form of measuring the return on investment. But with respect to the education process, the outputs and the process itself, from your various perspectives, how would you provide a better focus to the educational programs to permit goal setting as we try to structure those programs so that their content and their outputs are more in sync with the needs of the broader transportation enterprise?

Response (Lawrence Dahms)

I'm not an educator and I haven't the slightest idea how to answer the question. But I do think that the question of education needs to be divided. One part is, What do we need in continuing education or even training to fill gaps? In cases like that, what sorts of things need to be done that are specifically transportation education issues? This is a challenge for this kind of conference and this kind of community. But in the meantime, I don't think we ought to ask transportation or some other function like transportation to make up for the ills of the Department of Education or the education community as a whole. Therefore, transporta-

tion people aren't the right people to answer that question. It would do us well to do our job well and let the education department do its job well and support that department.

When I graduated from school too long ago, it was easy for someone like me to work my way through school because it didn't cost me much. The state paid for my education in California. California was leading the nation, I believe, at that time in terms of supporting education. We're probably, despite our wealth, close to last in the nation now. That is a sad commentary, and it is not one that is going to be made up for by transportation people pretending they are educators.

Response (Joni Casey)

One aspect of the question that was asked is the value that the employer places on the education and how that is reflected in terms of job advancement, continuing education opportunities through tuition reimbursement, and mechanisms that an employer can put in place to encourage education so that it is showing the value to the employer of the education. That might be one approach in terms of measuring the effectiveness.

Response (Michael Meyer)

In engineering education, you get accredited basically every 6 years. The process includes interviews with faculty, employers, students, the School Chair, and a variety of constituencies. The accreditation process at the undergraduate level now has switched from "Do you teach X, Y, and Z?" to "Do you have in place an assessment process that brings in outside ideas and thoughts so that over time there is some sense that you are responding to the market, you are responding to the needs of the community?" It is a very difficult thing to show evidence on paper, but I happen to agree that this shift in focus is appropriate to bring into the university, at least, in a formalized way. We have done surveys of employers, recruiters, alumni, and other educational institutions. We do benchmarking with other universities. This is another model one can use instead of saying, "Do you teach a course on intermodal transportation?" or "Do you teach a course on logistics?" Rather, "Do you have in place a process by which you are listening to people and you are making changes in response?"

Question/Comment

I would like to get back to basics. Intermodalism developed from multimodalism in response to the needs of the

customer in a changing marketplace, both domestically and, more important, globally. You have to understand what the customer needs. I'm talking on the freight side. But we're really talking about the customer who is interested in cost, transit time, on-time delivery, don't lose it, don't break it, and if you're going to stay in business, you have to make a profit. When we're talking about education and training, we have to really focus on the basis of what we're really trying to do, and that is move the freight for the benefit of the customer.

Response (Lana Batts)

The customer wants four things: on-time pickup, on-time delivery, reliable service, and low cost. How do we pick it up on time? How do we deliver it on time? How do we not damage it? And how do we minimize the cost? This is probably why intermodal freight has progressed faster than intermodal passen-

gers because intermodal freight's customers demanded that we figure out how to do that, and intermodal passengers have not. They still want to stay in their car because it gets them there on time and when they want to go.

Question/Comment

We do need to pay attention to fundamentals and to the basics. As an educator, I was absolutely thrilled to go to the Garrett A. Morgan Roundtable because it brought industry, the education community, the government, and professional associations together. What I am hoping to see come out of this conference is some sort of a sense of a synergistic partnership or the possibility of a synergistic partnership. For that reason, I think it is wonderful that transportation does what it does best and that educators do what they do best. We have to find common ground, and this conference is a good way to start.