

InfraTalk Podcast
Trimble Innovate Panel: Advancing Digital Project Delivery

Greg Nadeau:

Hi, I'm Greg Nadeau, publisher of in for InfraTalk America. In this episode of the Talk podcast, I sit down with my friend and former colleague, Secretary Toks Omishakin of the California State Transportation Agency, better known as CALSTA. During our conversation, we discuss so much of his career and how it has led him to his current role as secretary.

The core for values at California leads with safety, equity, climate action and economic prosperity and tackling modern needs in California's massive transportation sector. This is the Info Talk podcast. Mr. Secretary, welcome to InfraTalk America.

Toks Omishakin:

Thanks, Greg. excited to spend a little bit of time with you. It's been a while since we've had a chance to catch up. So looking forward to this conversation.

Greg Nadeau:

And, we all know that you've been very busy. I guess your life is a it's an open book. certainly to Californians and and the, the entire transportation infrastructure community. I, I want to start, a lot of what I'd like to do with these conversations is give people a bit of a sense of CEOs around the country, and what they're made of and where they come from.

And you have a particularly interesting story. I think. We met back in your Tennessee days. where, you were born in Knoxville, Tennessee. Yeah. You go too far back. but, but PhD in engineering management, a master's degree in urban and regional planning and a bachelor's, a BA in engineering technology. Yeah. did you have a pretty good idea what you wanted to do? with, with your life, when you were going to college?

Toks Omishakin:

Not even a clue. Just like this. Like most people, I guess as a freshman, you come into college and you have these grand ideas of what, what you can do, but it never fully plays out the way you expected, expected to. I, went into school thinking about basketball, mostly wanting to be a, you know, a basketball player.

And my major was actually communications and pre-law. That's the route that I wanted to go. I wanted to be spend time on TV and and possibly be an attorney. But my parents, knew there was something, something else that I, I was pretty skilled in and, you know, decided to go the engineering route. So I got the engineering technology degree.

And after I finished that, I was working for an engineering firm, and my dad said, look, you know, you got to go keep going to school. I was like, oh, no, I'm done. That's the only, and I got talked into getting a master's degree in planning, and it's probably the biggest decision that I've made in my entire career was to go get that planning degree, because it allowed me to be able to understand the very technical responsibilities, like a lot of what we're going to talk about today, infrastructure, but also understand the broader impacts on people and communities.

And that's what planning, very often is about. So I was able to combine those things. And my parents were they work and they worked in academia, and they talked me again into going to get a PhD. So anyway, that's a little bit of how I kept going. And, I ended up where I very fortunate and blessed to sit today

Greg Nadeau:

Must be the planning experience, because, back when you served for eight years with Tennessee D.O.T., following all of that in, in, as deputy commissioner and chief environment, and chief of environment and planning and then prior to that, assistant commissioner for and chief, of Environment and Planning, and, and engineering experience.

So, a pretty good pedigree for someone who's going to, who's ultimately going to run a state dot. But how how did the eight years at at Tennessee dot, a fine organization. how did that prepare you for? Obviously, your first stop in California was, of course, as director of Caltrans, for a couple of years, and then, replaced a, an extraordinary public servant, my old friend and colleague, David Kim, he served as secretary for your time.

So you showed up, at Caltrans, an organization with 22,000 employees and a \$17.5 billion budget, probably slightly different than Tennessee D.O.T., but how how were you? How prepared were you for such a, an expert, for assuming these very heavy responsibilities?

Toks Omishakin:

Well, I think that's a good question, Greg. I don't think you ever fully prepared. I mean, if you think about, people who step into these important, roles at the federal level, whether it be vice president or a president of the, you know, of the country or whatever that responsibility may be, you've never actually done that before.

You you were a congressman or a senator or you were a governor or whatever it may be. And then you get thrust into this responsibility of, no, you're not overseeing a district anymore. The entire country is now your responsibility. And so there's a lot of there's a lot of learning as you go, but there's there's a big difference.

You know, to your point, Tennessee, DOT honored, Commissioner John Shore and gave me the opportunity to serve there and Governor Haslam and Governor Bill Lee. But, for 4,000 people, budget of 2 billion in Tennessee, transition of California, 22,000 people now 17.5 billion. but the

one thing that kind of stuck with me and I knew this going in was that the issues would be the same.

The scale would obviously be tremendously different because, Tennessee population 7 million, California population 40 million, the largest state in America. So five times larger. But one thing was clear to me going in was the, the issues would be the same. And, as long as you lean on people, don't make it ever about you. But the team, the people around you, like, lean on them to help you, ultimately make, a lot of the important decisions that are going to be made because they, they're going to have all the facts and the information.

They're more on the ground, once that happens, you will, you will see success. the part that I'll be honest with you that I, none of us foresaw is the fact that, you know, six months after I took on the responsibility of Caltrans Covid hit, and then we had the worst wildfire season, in the history of the state, we burned more than nearly 4 million acres of land, largest in the size of states of Delaware and Connecticut combined.

So when you going through those things that were completely unexpected, you were thinking policy and project delivery. That was that was one thing. now put on disasters. Now I'd be equity, what I would call the sort of equity crisis that we started to face, post George Floyd incident in May of 2020. All these things added together and now you have five times the responsibility you had before.

A lot, a lot of sleepless nights and a lot of challenges, but ultimately ended up being about, leaning on the people and, of course, keeping the governor of the, of the state, and people like David Kim keeping them abreast of the things that we were doing as well.

Greg Nadeau:

They were challenging times with my son and my daughter or husband, and my two grandchildren were actually born in Santa Monica. So we had a lot of presents in California during that period of time. And it's really extraordinary how, Cala, how how really state governance in California is so challenged so often. And really react so effectively. So, congratulations on, on, on on crises well handled. in your early days with the state of California, and, and of course, when you were elevated to the secretary's job, that's 42,000 people and eight state departments that you're now responsible for and for our audience, ranging from the California Highway Patrol to, to Caltrans, the California State Department of Transportation, the Motor Vehicle Division, among others. but it's a very large organization.

And obviously from a, an administrative point of view, had to introduce yet another whole set of challenges, going into that job. so we don't have to spend a lot of time on the organization of, of course, but but, again, sort of highlights in terms of what you were challenged by and satisfied with respect to two outcomes.

Toks Omishakin:

I think so. Look, again, similar similar thing. Greg, I should call you Mr. Administrator because of all your your service to this country as well, the same thing. Skill, just different, same issues. I'll tell you, I obviously it must be knowing I don't have a law enforcement background. I never worked in motor vehicle, places that dealt with those issues, because I've mostly been on the pure mobility side, if you will, of of our work, so skilled different and then some brand new issues like, the Highway Patrol and, working directly with them.

But to me, again, partnership is what it ends up being about. The highway patrol departments, it's the largest in the country. It's got, more than 10,000 people, more than 8000 uniform women and men's, the largest state police organization, in the country. But they've got a great leadership, already an assistant. So my job is not to come in and say, hey, you need to do this.

You need to do that. Yeah. How do you keep me informed? Work together with the governor, and the governor's office of the state to continue to do, the best, safety and security and service for the state, essentially is what the job is not to dictate to law enforcement entity what to do. And then, same thing with DMV, DMV is making more than 10,000 people who work there.

They're making a transition to from being an organization where you always have to go in to the DMV with your paperwork, you know, to get your driver's license and register and all those things to a more digitally run organization. So sort of it heavily focused in making this transition. Same thing there. My responsible how do I assist and support this effort to transform, an organization that has more than 30 million vehicles registered in the county?

The same thing with licenses. How do you help them transform into this new age of, of registration for the state? So it's more of a matter of leadership and partnership effort than than, you know, being on the ground trying to run these mammoth, organizations.

Greg Nadeau:

Well said. And, good segue, into some of the, topics I'd like to try and just touch on with you before we run out of time, but it's, InfraTalk America, has

We call them our targeted technology sectors, and they include, digital project delivery and, sustainable, composite structures. And, what that means is we do we give particular emphasis to developing programing and content, addressing sort of what we've essentially our mission is to advance the advancement of state of practice of these emerging, opportunities and technologies.

And you mentioned partnerships several times. And when you, and adopted a partnerships became a very significant theme in both your roles as county director and, and across council

secretary. and, and I look at digital project delivery as an example and Caltrans I, I'm a matter of fact we've we've I've had a number of engagements with Caltrans over the years.

and, we're, we one of the, stories that we're developing is states that are really leading in this space, the, federal government just put out, advance, digital construction management system, France, Caltrans, received, one of the, one of several grants, but one of the multi-state grants. So really collaborating and partnering, but not just with, with other states, but with the private sector.

So the partnership is really at and really core to the advancement of digital project delivery. But it really has to begin with the states. and, just last week I was in Chattanooga, Tennessee, as a matter of fact, for the, as to where, Innovation summit, the inaugural summit and, fascinating couple of days of conversations with folks from all over the industry and, and several states and just, in an indicator that the states have really advanced their game and Caltrans is really, I think, one of the national leaders, and I won't get into the variety of things that they're doing in that context.

But, you had mentioned technology in the context of, of, sure. The Highway Patrol, just, your assessment, the role that technology is playing, whether it's advancing digital project delivery at, Caltrans or advancing your policy and operational priorities at, at the Highway Patrol. So the role of technology and how it how it how it potentially affects your yours and your administration, strategic objectives.

Toks Omishakin:

Now, very, very good question. Greg. And, I'll tell you that the expectations in California are probably a little bit different than other states on this issue of the interaction between technology and transportation, because it's California. The governor, Governor Newsom likes to say California is America's coming attraction. So again, that's that's one of the things he likes to remind people of.

So if it's happening here, then at some point in six months or a year, you will see it start to take place somewhere else, in the country. And so the expectations are just a little bit there, a little bit higher. I'll run through just a little bit of some, some particular areas that I'm paying attention to.

And some of the things that you touched on, number one, on the construction front, you know, there's all this money that's coming into our space, federal, state, there's been state funding as well, local funding. California has what we call self-help counties, where, you know, 25 counties within the state have the opportunity to generate revenue themselves. So with this infusion of dollars into construction and building out more infrastructure, people are expecting a return.

Obviously sooner. It's not like before where he was. Oh, yeah, it's going to take 20 years to get that project done. And, you know, people are just waiting by to see now they they have those

investments, those taxes are going up or those fees are going up. They want to see that return. And so the more we can infuse, technology into project delivery.

So on construction sites, working through plans, etc., and working through challenges and issues related to issues on site, instead of having to delay and manually note things and bring them back into the office, those things add time. And so there's, there's excitement for me and support for me. I'll tell you, Greg, I know we got a chance to briefly talk about this in the past.

The more we adopt these tools and infuse them into the process for engineers and construction managers and consultants and contractors, the more we're able to generate efficiencies and deliver the product to the people, sooner. Now, the average person doesn't know, you know, that we're adopting these, these new tools, but we on the inside, the inside baseball people.

An expectation is there. It's not like this, like a rock. It should be rocket science leadership in the state, expenses as well. So very supportive of us continuing to bring on these tools that will help us become ultimately more efficient. But there are some other areas where technology is, I think, making a big difference on the transportation front for us.

one is, there's something called CALITP. California Integrated Travel, project, where our hope is that we can make travel in the state, as seamless as possible. You and I have spent a lot of time traveling to Europe and Asia and all these other places. You see, they have basically have this one tap system where using a phone, they can basically go from mode to mode to mode without having to go to a, a kiosk and buy a ticket.

And you know, I need this credit card for this, but just one one device gets you onto every single thing. And in California, where they're in excess of 300 transit agencies, 30 just in the Bay area alone, you know, being able to have, a, you know, a wallet that's basically your cell phone that can get you from one transit entity to another.

It's a connected system. Same thing with bikeshare, same thing with, the taxis that we use, Lyft, Uber, whatever. People use. Having an integrated system is something that we're hoping we can do. In 2022, only 5% of the population had access. Access to this ability. We're hoping that at the end of 2024, that number will go up to a least half of Californians being able to use some type of like tap one tap system, contactless payment to be able to use, at least the transit side of transportation in our state.

Greg Nadeau:

It's an extraordinary initiative and very achievable. and a great, complement to what we were just talking about in terms of, digital project delivery on the construction side, because the, the, the sort of focus, and, and I've had conversations with your director, Tony 20 diverse and, and your chief engineer, Donna Barry, and clearly the top-level management of Caltrans is very committed, and that's essential, but not enough.

You are in my old, federal highway days and EDC. I just call a top down, bottom up. it is essential to have top leadership committed and demonstrating that commitment. But if you don't have that Buy-In and that engagement of the frontline troops, the program, you know, administrators who make those programs work every day, it's very difficult to achieve.

And I think, I think Caltrans has achieved that. You've got that collaboration going, but it's essential workers. Interoperability is what it's all about. It's all about various tools in the toolbox, talking to each other and advancing construction projects in a more efficient and effective basis. You know, you're talking about the very same thing that is essentially going to benefit and be utilized by consumers of transportation services.

So the technology, you know, I like the way you sort of brought those things together because essentially it's, it's essential to the future of how we're going to, how we're going to move people and goods more efficiently, and, utilizing less energy, obviously utilizing the and of course, fix it first is a is an, not an uncommon policy around the country.

I just started my own commissioner in Maine, Bruce Fano, talking about it on our program yesterday. So rural Maine versus and California, it's very much the same principle. Fix it. First let's let's utilize the existing infrastructure we have to its maximum potential, because building new capacity is not only expensive but very disruptive in many ways. So, so what I hear you saying is technology is the key, to really making that happen. And at a, at the next level.

Toks Omishakin:

Absolutely. You have no doubt about it. And efficient and being efficient with it as well.

Greg Nadeau:

I'd like to I'd like to transition to, climate, policy. Caltrans is obviously, a global leader in this space. And, and, and a leader in the country in many respects. the other, targeted technology sector I mentioned was sustainable, composite structures.

But in the context of, materials used in construction and weather, and in your case, you you probably Caltrans is by far the largest, consumer of construction materials. but I expect you have other agencies that have capital programs as well. So just generally speaking, as we look at the delivery of projects in the context of, climate policy, are you satisfied that California is moving as aggressively as they can to ensure that alternative materials that provide, more a longer life cycle, you know, don't corrode, whatever the particular benefit of, what you're addressing are you satisfied that we're we're we're moving in that direction in California.

Toks Omishakin:

Another one of the areas, Greg, where the the expectations for. So just a little bit different, right. On the on the climate front, we we can't in California because of some of the things that I

mentioned earlier about the challenges we face, from everything from fires to mudslides to drought to, you know, extreme rain and storms, people are expecting us to be making decisions that are more and more, climate friendly.

It's an expectation here that plans and state laws and executive orders. So I think we're doing the right things. I think there's definitely room for improvement, but we're we're going after the federal money that's been set aside, for these particular, program areas to see how we can bring down the drought on the federal money, like the IRA has money that's set up specifically for this to use, for us to be able to use material that is more climate friendly.

There was a state law that actually passed, two years ago in our state, when actually three years ago, when I was still the director of Caltrans, that links towards using more Portland limestone, cement, for example, from limestone cement compared to just, regular, cement. We've identified that it could bring about as much as 10% reduction in GHG annually in our state.

So we started to, see how we could use more and more of that. And there's no state law that says we can and should use more materials like this. So it goes for us. It goes beyond, clearly what gets a lot of the attention is the VMT and travel mobility related tools. But the material, the construction materials are absolutely critical to our efforts as well.

Greg Nadeau:

And it's so cement is another terrific example of where alternative materials are improved and products of research and development. But, I'm happy to hear you, emphasize that because, you know, composites are what I know best. but there are a number of other opportunities, I believe, where we can look at this comprehensively, as is very much a core strategy in, in project delivery and construction, in the context of, achieving climate goals.

And obviously, California famously has some pretty, significant, goals represented by the Climate Action Plan for transportation, infrastructure, capital, something else that, was that evolved and was rolled out on, you know, during your, on your watch. and, can you tell us a little bit about the kind of the broader objectives, that, Catie brings, to your job and your mission?

Toks Omishakin:

Yeah. CAPTI is the the the definition of it is the climate action plan for a transportation infrastructure. So it's an acronym, and it came about from originated from a new governor coming into office wanting to the former mayor of San Francisco. San Francisco wanted to push even further on some of the great achievements that Governor Brown and Governor Schwarzenegger had on the environment and climate front.

And for us in California, 50% of the GHG challenge of the bad air quality challenge in the state comes from the transportation sector. So the governor put forth two executive orders, 1 in 2019, 1 in 2021, 2020, that essentially said transportation needs to be cleaned up. and beyond issues like zero emission vehicles that we by the way, not no surprise we lead the way on again but into our practices as well.

Like how we're building out the transportation system you reference. You fix it first, Greg. approach. So, those executive orders from the governor led to the creation of cap time, and capped on 34 goals, as sort of action items and goals in it and sort of a 5 to 6 year horizon. So within his tenure, believe it or not, we are three years into cap time and by the end of, June, by the end of next month, we will be done with all 34 action items.

That's how aggressive, we have been in taking this on. So we're done with 25. We nine more would be completed by the end of next month. So something that is going to take five years. We've done in three years. And we're working on 2.0 capped at 2.0 already because of how aggressive we've been and the expectations of the people of the state and this administration

Greg Nadeau:

And, disasters, the, the effects of climate change are so readily visible to all Americans now in California, sadly, has become somewhat of a showcase for that, simply because of the scale of what you've been dealing with, whether it's floods, whether it's, fire.

it's the consequences of climate change have become readily apparent. And I think that when you when you look at polling, the American people see it. The American people have embraced that reality. And, sadly, there are still political resistance in certain quarters. But by and large, one of the things that impressed me most in the last decade or so is how the business sector has evolved to be not only accepting of these realities, but champions of climate change and community investments that, you know, that, that enable, broader transportation choices, for community members, which all contributes to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and improves the, you know, improves the lives of people in those communities. And, you know, California certainly has been on the leading edge of all that for, for many years now. so, you know, partnerships, in your case, include communities and the work you're doing with communities to advance these objectives. how important is that the collaboration that you engage with, with communities around the state?

Toks Omishakin:

Critical, critical. and transportation is local, actually. What we're usually, at the end of the day, it's it's people within communities that are looking to use a system. You know, sometimes, I think we spend a lot of energy within our state dots looking to see how we can get, people who are traversing our states, who are traveling through, making sure that they can get through efficiently and safely.

But that's not the preponderance. That's not the large number of the people who are using our system. It's the people within communities and cities. And in some cases of rural areas. So it's always been my position, that we should focus on what communities need, not just what the state wants to do, but what do our cities need?

and, develop and grow a system based on that joint, partnership. And you referenced the climate component of this. Yeah, there's some people, some states that still struggle with this issue. but the common saying around here is, you know, if you don't believe the science, believe your eyes, to your point, like it's happening, like this is not normal.

What we're seeing, we may try to normalize it and just say, oh, yeah, you know, having 30 trillion gallons of water poured down on the state of California in the first two months of 2023 is normal, but it's not there. Sure, like you, to have that much rain come down and flood so many communities. It's not, it's not.

It's not typical potato. And so, we play a big role in that. And seeing that we can do our best to combat that direction that we've been going in and in a state with more than 30 million registered vehicles. we know it's contributing, to the challenge. And so developing and growing a system that is multimodal, that has more infusion of zevs, is a critical part of, of being able to get there

Greg Nadeau:

and really a national movement now, thanks to the national infrastructure in, in IIJA, as we call it. But the National infrastructure bill has launched that those initiatives in, in most every state. so yeah. So it's it's good to see that and, and the partnership side, I just reminded me, Caltrans and we were talking about the composite, technology and we've had, I'm, I'm a member of something called the Transportation Structures Council, the American Composites Manufacturing Association.

And over the last three years, what they've been doing as an industry isn't lobbying to object to some of these provisions that were coming through on the on the, on the national infrastructure bill, but actually preparing themselves to meet those those required. So, for example, they've developed a tool that is soon to be released to help their manufacturers easily comply with environmental product declaration requirements, which is going to force that practice.

That policy is certainly going to compel users, to find materials that obviously score higher on the meter. And, and the first test in making a system like that work is measurement. You have to measure what these products are going to contain and how they're going to contribute to a, a cleaner environment. So industries using that, that's one example.

There are other industries essentially doing the same thing. So EDA really compelled a collaboration between private sector and obviously principally state Dot and a number of larger

local agencies to really make a commitment to make this happen. So, it's, it's an example of how policy can drive practice. And when you collaborate and, with the private sector, particularly in the, in technology where the innovation is coming from, the private sector of collaboration and partnership with them is essential.

And I think in the case of helping, the private sector, whether it be manufacturers, distributors, whatever the case may be, find solutions to essentially make the process of compliance easier and more effective. The other thing it does, Mr. Secretary, is, you know, well, all the data that is generated from all this evolution of technology, the data itself is going to be gold for agencies who effectively own that data.

We don't even know the benefits of that data in the future. Yet we already know a substantial amount of it is benefiting us, in, in, in present day. But, so the partnership element is so important, I think in terms of public agencies and the private sector collaborating on making these things happen.

Toks Omishakin:

Yeah. So I think that's Greg. Another important issue, the fact, yeah, IJA is providing leadership on this issue that sometimes, you know, we can work on in our, in our silos of excellence, as I like to call them. You know, industry is doing one thing, local governments doing one thing, academia, state government, federal government. But when the federal government steps in and says, we're going to provide funding, to support, you know, low carbon material, grants, they set aside \$2 billion to assist with this.

That makes a big difference. And not only are they saying, here's \$2 billion that we're going to manage, for you to apply, they're saying, look, we're also opening up the criteria for who's eligible. And so, you know, and plus cities, you know, private entities can work with them, to apply for, to be eligible to be able to apply for some of this money, it makes a big difference in leaning again, our industry towards, smarter, construction materials that we'll be using.

Somebody likened it to, a nutrition fact sheet, that we have on the, on on food, food items, the fact that, you know, as you consume, these foods here, it's what it's going to mean are due to potentially to your body. Same thing with the materials that we're putting on our transportation system. We should know more and more, what the life cycle of those materials, how long it's going to last and what it's going to do to the environment.

And so, the federal government bill or IJA, whichever one we want to call it, being a part of this and leading, it's going to help us, gel more together in partnership, state and local and private sector as well.

Greg Nadeau:

Well said. And just as an aside, just as a follow up, I talked about the, composites organization and, we've had some terrific conversations with Caltrans leadership on ways that we as an industry can engage with them to really provide, information training, about a, a material that isn't terribly that, that a lot of engineers aren't terribly familiar with.

So, again, partnership means engagement. Let's exchange ideas, let's exchange information. Let's provide training if we can, if that's necessary. So, it's, it's important that those conversations constantly evolve. I, I've always called it my own doctrine of continuous improvement. We never stop, we never rest. But lastly, I had to bring up in our conversation what is the most important issue to you and to any, leader of a transportation organization I've ever known?

And that's, highway safety and, the, the numbers since Covid, have gone in entirely the wrong direction. When I think about this, when I was, when I was privileged to serve at Federal Highway, we had achieved the lowest fatality rates ever. and believe me, I'm not suggesting there's a cause and effect there in terms of the leadership.

the point is, when you look at the time that has elapsed to now, and we're now experiencing the highest fatality rates, in history, just in terms of, other, yeah, sort of observations about safety and California and we've discussed the, the evolution of challenges that that have, you know, recently, with experienced, any other observations on safety you'd like to share?

Toks Omishakin:

Yeah. Just, just just in closing, Greg, look at this. Since I've been in this role as secretary now, we've been going down the road of what we call, the core for, and making sure that, transportation is more is becoming more and more people centric. and if we are going to be successful at becoming more people centric in transportation, those core four things, we have to elevate within the state.

And that's number one, safety to the point that even just making, we were the first state in the country, first D.O.T., when I was Caltrans director, to adopt this safe system approach. because we saw, again, the numbers starting to increase in California. And, mind you, 30% of the fatalities that we were seeing were vulnerable users, people who were walking and biking and trying to get access to transit.

So we put in place that safe system approach policy with that Vision Zero goal, attached to it. So safety number one, number two, climate action, is on that on a core list. And the reason why I think we've discussed it already, we see what's happening in California, really to relate to the environment and climate, within the state.

And to get there, we believe more energy, new energy vehicles and zero emission vehicles and a more multi-modal transportation system are absolutely essential. And technology as well, to be enabled, to get there. So climate action number two, number three, equity on that list. the

fact that we know for 60 to 70 years in this country, we made some decisions that were that didn't have positive outcomes for some communities within the state.

and not just a state thing. That's a countrywide thing where we built freeways especially, and gutted, many minority and underserved communities. We want to reverse that and be intentional about it. The governor should put money, general fund money into reconnecting communities, just like the federal government has. and also contracting opportunities for minority and small business, small business, firms in the state.

So that's a big part of our equity component. And finally, the fourth one on the core for this economic prosperity, giving everybody an opportunity with this state for, economic upward mobility, for everybody from the person who's not in poverty to all the way to businesses like giant ports that we have in Long Beach and L.A., giving them a boost, so that they can achieve that California dream.

Greg Nadeau:

That's such a great, I mean, it's an ambitious agenda, but framed with some very well thought through policy objectives. So that was amazing. Last thing I'm going to say is not only have you achieved this, significant, achievement, in, in your role in California, but it also put you transition to be a national leader in many respects.

And really, just last October, at the AASHTO, AASHTO held the first safety summit in Kansas City, which you played a major role in. And, so from the standpoint, how valuable is this opportunity? to, to be part of that national scene and leading discussions and I think in my notes and leading discussions on safety as a sole focus, can you kind of just wrap up describing what is meant by that and the role you play at the national level?

Toks Omishakin:

Yeah, thanks for that. I do, I look as I mentioned already, safety again is our foremost responsibility. All of us, regardless of where we work, private sector, public state, local, federal. I was excited that, you know, den president Roger Miller, last year, led through a TRB conversation that I was on a panel with him in Washington a couple of years ago, brought up the idea of having a national safety.

some, you know, it sounds like it's something that should have been happening before. but, you know, actually, it's been around for 100 years, and but we finally had one where it was all about safety for three days. State leaders, my peers from, from Missouri, just all over. but it was in Kansas, Kansas City, and I was thrilled and honored to to lead several sessions and several discussions that that we had.

the big takeaway for me, and by the way, the reason why I was, actually two main discussions and I was a big part of it was because at the time I was the chair of the council on Active

Transportation, and now, as we know, active transportation was seeing the the highest increases in percentages of fatalities and serious injuries related to our transportation system.

So, that and honored to be a big part of this national discussion with so many state and local and nonprofit leaders in the room about what we can do. But one of the things that came out of it was a resolution, a joint resolution amongst, the planning committee, the safety committee, and the Council on Active Transportation on some key concrete, action items, that we can take on, to advance, advance our safety goals on.

And for us, very fortunate that at the end of 2023, based on what NASA and GSA, and others are saying, California, for the first time in 4 or 5 years, had a decrease of nearly 10%. I think the number was 9.4% decrease in fatalities. For us, that's 400 plus lives potentially saved compared to the prior year. So, it's our hope that a lot of the policy decisions we're making and actions that we're taking by having these national conversations are having an impact, within our state and our people, when our states are making better decisions and driving and walking and biking as well.

Greg Nadeau:

Thank you, Mr. Secretary, for your service, your commitment and, really some of the extraordinary, achievements and yet to be accomplished objectives that you've described today.

it's, stay DOT do incredibly important work in this country. And, we're really pleased to, to be part of trying to explain that and showcase it, to, to to the American people, as often as we possibly can. So thanks again for your service. And, and good luck in California.

Toks Omishakin:

Thank you. President Biden. By the way. Said there's an infrastructure decade ahead. I look forward to you and many others as we, as we take this on. Thanks, Greg.

Outro:

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