



# Commentary

## Doug Eadie on Leadership

# The Board Chair's Perspective: Talking with CTA's Carole Brown

**H**igh-impact governing is a team sport if there ever was one, and the best-governed public transportation organizations I've come across over the past couple of decades have been led by a really cohesive "Strategic Governing Team" consisting of the governing board, CEO, and senior executives. These governing teams tend to function best, in my experience, when they are co-led by a board chair and CEO working in close partnership.

However, CEOs are typically the focus of lots of attention in their communities, while board chairs tend to do their important work behind the scenes, except when they chair the monthly board meeting or occasionally address a public forum.

On a recent trip to Chicago, I spent a delightful couple of hours chatting with Carole Brown, who has chaired the Board of Directors of the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) for almost six years. Believe me, I felt very fortunate that our schedules meshed since Carole is one very busy person, serving as Senior Managing Director, Public Finance, and member of the Executive Committee of Mesriow Financial, while also serving on the boards of the Chicago Children's Museum, the Mercy Foundation, and the Chicago Network in addition to her CTA leadership role. CTA, by the way, is the nation's second largest public transportation system. A regional system serving 40 suburbs in addition to the City of Chicago, CTA carries almost two million passengers on an average weekday.

**Doug:** How did you get involved in public transportation generally and CTA in particular?

**Carole:** Back in 2001, when I was working with Lehman Brothers as an investment banker, I was asked to participate in a program called Leadership Greater Chicago, whose primary purpose is to get future Chicagoland leaders educated on—and engaged in—community issues. Mayor Daley asked me to chair a special sub-group of my LGC class that was created to brainstorm solutions to community issues, and that activity not only introduced me to the public transportation arena, but also involved me intensely with the Mayor's staff. In September 2003, the Mayor asked me to serve as Chair of the CTA Board. I knew that it would be a lot of work in addition to my very demanding responsibilities at Lehman Brothers, but I never considered turning down the appointment. For one thing, I totally buy into Mayor Daley's philosophy that business people are obligated to contribute substantial time to community affairs. For another, my work

with the Mayor and his staff had taught me that they were strongly committed to building a top-quality public transportation system in Chicago. Mayor Daley, by the way, is great to work with. He does his homework on complex issues, paying close attention to detail. But he isn't even close to being a micromanager. He lets the people around him run with the ball while providing thoughtful guidance and feedback.

**Doug:** What have you found most satisfying in your governing work at CTA, Carole?

**Carole:** Three things have made chairing the CTA Board an incredibly positive experience for me: results; education; and people. First and foremost, making a significant difference in Greater Chicago—contributing to a higher quality of life—is my primary reason for being on the Board, and I'm satisfied that CTA is making Chicago and its suburbs a better place to live.

If I thought otherwise, I wouldn't be on the CTA Board! To me, Doug, learning is a lifelong endeavor, and chairing the CTA Board for almost six years has been a growthful experience, to put it mildly. Technically speaking, I feel privileged to have learned what it takes to keep a huge, complex system—with its 2,200 buses, 1,190 rail cars and almost 2 million riders daily—running, not to speak of all of the other matters that we deal with as a Board of Directors. And serving on this Board this has been a very rewarding experience from a human perspective. For one thing, CTA Board members are highly engaged in their governing work; they do their homework, come well prepared to meetings, and are avid questioners. And the positive culture on the Board makes for a really enjoyable governing experience. We truly like and respect each other, we keep our discourse civil, and

there's not an obstructionist among us. That doesn't mean we always agree on particular issues, but we know how to disagree without impugning motives or personalizing issues.

**Doug:** So let's flip the coin over. Tell me what's less satisfying about your work on the CTA Board.

**Carole:** I'd say what's caused me the most frustration over my six years with CTA is how difficult it is to build widespread public understanding of, and support for, what we do at CTA and for adequate funding of our operations. Getting our message across is a never-ending challenge, especially in the face of apparently deep-seated public skepticism these days about all public institutions. I'm not sure we've mastered how to get ahead of the game, to proactively get our message out there, and I'm occasionally worn out by the effort it takes not to be thrown on the defensive. Let me say, though, that I think one of the preeminent responsibilities of Board members is external communication and public education, so we've got to keep plugging away at this aspect of the job.

**Doug:** What have you learned about keeping the Board-CEO partnership close, positive and productive during your almost six years at the helm of the CTA Board, Carole?

**Carole:** The foundation of a really solid partnership, in my opinion, is a clear understanding of—and agreement on—the fundamental division of labor: The Board Chair leads the Board itself in carrying out its strategic direction setting and performance oversight functions. The CEO runs all day-to-day operations, including supervising senior executives. Now, we do share one function: speaking for CTA and representing it

in external forums; together, we're the "face" of CTA to the wider world. The precise balance changes as the cast changes, of course. A CEO who relishes the diplomatic role and loves being out in the community will seek a larger role, with my blessing. The Board Chair will play a more active external role when partnering with a CEO whose focus is more internal. In addition to understanding our respective roles, regular, full communication is key to a successful partnership. I've always met weekly with the CEOs I've worked with, to go over important issues, and we've stayed in close touch via phone and email.

*Doug Eadie is president & CEO of Doug Eadie & Company. You can reach Doug at Doug@DougEadie.com.*

**Technically speaking, I feel privileged to have learned what it takes to keep a huge, complex system—with its 2,200 buses, 1,190 rail cars and almost 2 million riders daily—running.**

ISSN 0364-345X

The Source for Public Transportation News and Analysis

VOLUME 67, NUMBER 18

ESTABLISHED 1943

Published bi-weekly by the American Public

Transportation Association, 1666 K St.,

N.W., Washington, D.C. 20006; (202) 496-4800;

Fax (202) 496-4321; www.apta.com

It is the mission of *Passenger Transport* to communicate news and information about public transportation and to serve as the voice of the public transportation industry.

**Rosemary Sheridan**, Publisher  
rsheridan@apta.com

**Kathy Golden**, Editor  
kgolden@apta.com

**Susan R. Paisner**, Senior Managing Editor  
spaisner@apta.com

**Susan Berlin**, Senior Editor  
sberlin@apta.com

**John Bell**, Program Manager-Communications  
jbell@apta.com

**Jack Gonzalez**, Director-Marketing and Sales  
jgonzalez@apta.com

**Mitchell Wood**, Graphic Designer  
mwood@apta.com

**News & Commentary:** *Passenger Transport* welcomes articles, announcements, commentary, and letters to the editor. Submitted photographs become the property of APTA and may be used for other association purposes. Send submissions to sberlin@apta.com.

**Subscriptions:** Individual subscriptions within North America & U.S. possessions, \$75 per year; \$125 for two years. First-class subscriptions, \$113 per year; \$201 for two years.

Subscriptions outside North America, \$87 per year; Airmail service outside North America, \$147 per year. Quantity discounts available to APTA members, when billed to one address:

11-20 copies	\$65 each copy
21 and above	\$60 each copy

**Advertising Sales:** The appearance of advertisements and new product or service information in *Passenger Transport* does not constitute an endorsement of such products or services by APTA.

**Fox Associates, Inc.**  
adinfo.psg@foxrep.com

Chicago (312) 644-3888	New York (212) 725-2106
Atlanta (800) 699-5475	Detroit (248) 626-0511
Los Angeles (213) 228-1250	

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to: *Passenger Transport*, 1666 K St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20006. Periodicals Postage paid at Washington, D.C. and additional mailing offices.

### APTA Officers

**Beverly A. Scott, Ph.D.**, Chair  
**Mattie P. Carter**, First Vice Chair  
**Michael J. Scanlon**, Secretary-Treasurer  
**Michael S. Townes**, Immediate Past Chair

### Vice Chairs

**Richard J. Bacigalupo**, Management & Finance  
**J. Barry Barker**, Government Affairs  
**Doran J. Barnes**, Human Resources  
**Linda Bohlinger**, Research & Technology  
**Flora M. Castillo**, Transit Board Members  
**Thomas J. Costello**, Marketing & Communications  
**Joyce Eleanor**, Bus & Paratransit Operations  
**Sharon Greene**, Business Members  
**Delon Hampton**, Business Member-at-Large  
**Angela Iannuzziello**, Canadian Members  
**Hugh Mose**, Small Operations  
**David Solow**, Commuter & Intercity Rail  
**Gary C. Thomas**, Rail Transit  
**Vacant**, State Affairs

### President

**William Millar**

### Department Vice Presidents

**Pamela L. Boswell**, Program Management and Educational Services  
**Arthur Guzzetti**, Policy  
**Robert Healy**, Government Affairs  
**C. Samuel Kerns**, Finance and Administration  
**James LaRusch**, Chief Counsel and Corporate Affairs  
**Petra Mollet**, Strategy  
**Rosemary Sheridan**, Communications and Marketing  
**Kathryn D. Waters**, Member Services

Printed on recycled paper.

