

## Becoming Agents for Change Is the Message at STN Expo's Monday General Session

Written by Art Gissendaner

Tuesday, 23 July 2013 08:49 - Last Updated Wednesday, 24 July 2013 07:37

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Transportation directors can change the industry with their purchasing habits and improve the efficiency of their departments by careful planning, cooperation and doing a little homework. This was the message by a panel of transportation veterans during a general session Monday at the 20th annual STN EXPO.

The session was called "Secrets from the Nation's Largest District Transportation Departments." Panelists included Enrique Boull't, COO of the Los Angeles Unified School District, and Frank Giordano, transportation director of Clark County School District in Las Vegas. Pete Meslin, transportation director of the Newport-Mesa Unified School District in Southern California, was the panel's moderator.

Boull't and Giordano shared strategies they use to overcome challenges associated with operating large transportation departments concerning management, purchasing, personnel and effective change. LAUSD uses 1,150 drivers to transport 45,000 students over 710 square miles each day, and 1,245 drivers transport 120,000 students over 8,000 square miles daily in Clark County.

The panelists told attendees that by determining their needs before purchasing buses and new technologies such as cameras will encourage manufacturers to comply with those needs in order to make a sale. Giordano advised the group to include the people who will use any new equipment or technology when making a purchasing decision. "I involve my IT people when considering a camera system," Giordano said. "You also need to determine if the camera system provides the data we need."

Boull't said the LAUSD has a fleet staff that decides its transportation needs. "We don't buy school buses off the assembly line," Boull't said. "The buses must meet LAUSD specifications."

He added that because LAUSD purchases 100 buses at a time, the district actually helps stimulate the economy by dividing the purchase among multiple manufacturers. "When the economy is slow, you can stimulate it by splitting up your purchase between several vendors," he said. "This benefits the entire industry."

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Giordano agreed, saying any new buses purchased by Clark County must meet the district's code. "School bus manufacturers are not always receptive to change," he said. "They want to produce 'cookie-cutter' buses." He continued by saying Clark County sparked equipment advances such as LED lights, dry cell batteries and solar battery chargers. He also encouraged communicating with each other to learn about new equipment that can be added to their buses.

"Knowing about your options will help you," said Giordano, who also served as this year's STN EXPO chair. "You're able to force changes."

Boull't said an option LAUSD employed was installing solar panels to power the utilities in the parking facilities where the buses are housed. "This reduces your operational costs and the benefit goes back to the district as well," he said.

Both said transportation directors can effect the internal change necessary to introduce new equipment and technology with careful planning and a communications strategy. "You can change anything but you must have a plan," Boull't told the gathering. "You can't fear change, you must embrace it. Either change will happen to you or you can effect change. Allow people involved to have input and stay the course."

Giordano cautioned there is the risk of being the goat instead of a hero but said change is inevitable. "The days we're in dictate change," he said. "Technology is moving so fast but we must keep up with it. What cost a dollar today will cost ten dollars tomorrow."