



ASCE
PHILADELPHIA SECTION

THE

NEWS

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Our 112th Year

Summer 2024

The Sidney Robin Memorial Newsletter of the Philadelphia Section ASCE



ASCE Vision

Civil Engineers are global leaders building a better quality of life.



ASCE Mission

Provide essential value to our members and partners, advance Civil Engineering, and serve the public good.



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NON OMNIA POSSUMUS OMNES (WE CANNOT ALL DO EVERYTHING)

SECTION MEETING SCHEDULE 2024–25

The Section Meeting program for the upcoming season is currently in the very preliminary stages and our meeting program committee is busy lining up speakers and topics for what we hope will be an interesting and informative series of meetings. The information we have at this point is provided below for your planning purposes. We would suggest that you use this to mark your calendar at this time and hold the dates.

In coming issues of *THE NEWS*, this information will be “fine-tuned” to provide updates as they are available. We also suggest you visit the Section website for the latest changes in our meeting program. As we have done, each month’s edition of *THE NEWS* will feature detailed information on that month’s meeting along with as much information as is available for the following month’s meeting, and the “look-ahead” schedule will show details that are available at that time for your advance awareness. E-mail blasts will be sent out on a regular basis to advise and remind of upcoming events and registration deadlines.

We also note the advantage of joint meetings with other societies and will continue to schedule these as we can.

Also, our Technical Groups and Institutes will have their usual programs of meetings and events which will be noted in e-blasts.

2024

October 10

November 14

December, to be determined

2025

January 15 (Wednesday) – joint meeting with American Society of Highway Engineers

February, to be determined

March 13

April 10

May – Spring Social, to be determined

SPRING SOCIAL A SUCCESS

Our Spring Social was held on Thursday, May 16 at the Down Town Club by Cescaphe in Center City. Roughly 140 attendees (the largest turnout we have seen in several years) enjoyed the venue, the great food (and large quantities of it!), and a nice spring evening. We additionally were able to cite one of our Delaware Valley Science Fairs awardees, our two Section Scholarship winners, and nine recipients of Section Awards.

We will provide a more detailed report on the Social in the October edition of *THE NEWS*.



PA COUNCIL IN THE NEWS

On June 3, 10 representatives from the four Pennsylvania Sections of ASCE participated in the annual Legislative Day at the State Capitol in Harrisburg, coordinated by the PA Council. The day-long event included meetings with 12 elected representatives and staffs to talk on current issues for our profession in our state, including transportation funding. In addition, background and informational materials were delivered to the offices of 15 other representatives who were not in attendance, but were interested in our message and supporting our issues. Thanks to those who were able to take part in this, shown in the photo – from left, **Andrew Kline** (Lehigh Valley/Reading), **Bob Wright** (Philadelphia), **Michelle Madzellan** (Central Pennsylvania), **Ruben David** (Philadelphia), **Loujin Daher** (Central Pennsylvania), **John Caperilla** (Lehigh Valley), **Mark Garger** (Lehigh Valley), **Nick Giglio** (Lehigh Valley), **Charles Boruchowitz** (Philadelphia), **Cathy Farrell** (Philadelphia).



NEWS FROM NATIONAL



Ignite Innovation. Forge the Future.

Election Results

The results of the recent election of National officers were announced in early June:

PRESIDENT-ELECT ELECT:

Marsha Anderson Bomar, Ph.D., AICP, ENV SP, F.ITE, F.ASCE

REGION 2 GOVERNOR-ELECT:

Elizabeth M. Wheeler, P.E., M.ASCE



SPONSORS IN THE NEWS

TPD is thrilled to announce that the firm formerly publicly known as "Traffic Planning and Design, Inc.", has undergone a complete brand refresh, including a revised logo, new website, new URL and updated company name. For many years it has been unofficially known as TPD. As it celebrates its 35th anniversary this year, it is commemorating the fact that it has been more than just "traffic planners and designers" for close to 30 years by making the official leap to adopt "TPD" in place of "Traffic Planning and Design, Inc." Rest assured, it will continue to operate with the same exceptional service offerings and dedicated staff, just under a more efficient and streamlined name!

TPD invites you to explore its refreshed website and to take note of its updated email extensions, which will now be @TPDinc.com. It is excited to be **Moving Forward Together**® as TPD and looks forward to continuing to collaborate with you!

As always, it values your continued partnership and welcome any questions you may have. Please do not hesitate to reach out at info@TPDinc.com.

ASCE, PHILADELPHIA SECTION OFFICERS AND BOARD OF DIRECTION — 2024–25 SEASON

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Briana Pampuch, Langan Engineering & Environmental Services

Those Board members noted with * will continue to serve for the remaining one year of their terms.

In accordance with our Constitution and Bylaws, only the immediate Past President will serve on the Board, and only for a one-year term. We show the most recent three Past Presidents as has become our tradition.

We thank these folks for their commitment and service.

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SEPTEMBER 20, 2024**

THANKS TO OUR SPONSORS!

We are happy to report that our Section Sponsorship Program enjoyed another successful season in 2023-24. We are as always grateful for the 17 firms (the highest level of participants we have had in the past few years) which made the financial commitment for last season, with many of them having done this consistently for several years:

Aero Aggregates	McCormick Taylor
Bowman	Michael Baker International
CDM Smith	Navarro & Wright
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GRL Engineers	Traffic Planning & Design
HNTB	TranSystems
JBC Associates	Urban Engineers
JMT	Villanova University Stormwater Program
Langan Engineering and Environmental Sciences	

Sponsor logos are displayed in a special Sponsors section of our website. Additionally, we provide direct links to sponsors' own websites so prospective employees can review all available and up-to-date positions. We do not show the sponsors' logos in the Summer edition of *THE NEWS* but will pick it up again in the fall. And speaking of this, we will be contacting current sponsors later this summer with more information on the program for the coming season. We hope the program will be as successful then as well.

If you have an interest in joining our sponsorship program, please contact **Bob Wright** at newseditor@asce-philly.org for more details.

Also, as you may be aware, our Section recognizes government and quasi-government agencies for the assistance they have provided us. The logos of these sponsors will be provided in the Agency Partners section in the October edition of *THE NEWS*. We are proud to cite last season's

Agency Partners:

- Amtrak
- City of Philadelphia Department of Streets
- Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission
- Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, District 6-0
- Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission
- Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT REQUIREMENTS UPDATE

As you may be aware, professional engineers, land surveyors and geologists in many states are required to obtain continued professional development (CPD) credit to renew their licenses. Locally, this includes Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Delaware. New Jersey and Delaware renewals were due in April and June respectively, and Pennsylvania's has one more year (up in September 2025).

During your renewal process, you likely had to check your tally of professional development hours (PDH) that you needed to attest that you had to meet the minimum for renewal. As you may know, our Section's meeting program is generally able to count toward your continuing education requirement (meetings that the Section believes would not count will be prefaced as such in the meeting announcement) for many states. We also offer various Technical Group/Institute and YMF meetings and events that offer PDH. We continue to have a verification program in place to help our members obtain and track PDH's. Over a two-year licensure period, our Section meeting program alone could amount to half of what one needs to meet many states' requirements.

Additionally, ASCE National offers free on-demand webinars and coursework that will get you up to 10 PDH's as a benefit of your membership. Information on this is available in the Membership section of the ASCE National website (www.asce.org).

N-ASCE*

HIGHWAY HUMOR PROVES TO BE OVER THE HEADS OF SOME DRIVERS

States have had their fun with highway safety messages, posting everything from Taylor Swift lyrics to discourage texting in Mississippi, to a "vibe check" — winking at Gen Z — to encourage seat belt use in Arizona. Such messages are shown intermittently on thousands of highway signs, known as variable messaging signs, when the billboards aren't lit up with alerts about accidents, construction or other real-time traffic issues.

As the summer vacation season gets going, millions of America's interstate drivers can expect to find more puns, silly turns of phrase or cultural references on those massive missives. But federal safety officials aren't amused by states' cheek. In recent years, they've begun to discourage what they view as overly creative messages, fearing that in trying to entertain drivers, highway officials are confusing rather than enlightening them. Some states, most recently Arizona and New Jersey, have pushed back. As a result, officials at the Federal Highway Administration clarified this year that they're not banning road-sign humor outright.

Mississippi, the state with the highest motor vehicle fatality rate in the country last year, has been particularly creative. Recent messages have included "FOUR I'S IN MISSISSIPPI TWO EYES ON THE ROAD," and a reference to the Taylor Swift song "Anti-Hero": "TEXTING AND DRIVING? SAY IT: I'M THE PROBLEM IT'S ME." "It's been an effective program for us. We haven't been contacted by [the] federal highway department and told to cease and desist. We want to be in compliance, but we haven't stopped our message program," said Paul Katool, a spokesperson for the Mississippi Department of Transportation.

A new rulebook issued last year "does not prohibit messages from including humor or cultural references," Federal Highway Administration chief Shailen Bhatt wrote in a recent letter to U.S. Reps. Greg Stanton, an Arizona Democrat, and Thomas Kean Jr., a New Jersey Republican. The representatives had complained earlier this year that the agency was stifling state creativity, calling the new rules "a blanket discouragement of humorous signs that leaves no room for state-by-state discretion. Both of these states have signs that use slang or popular language, but the messages are clear," the representatives wrote in their letter to Bhatt. They cited messages such as two Arizona contest winners, "SEATBELTS ALWAYS PASS THE VIBE CHECK" and "I'M JUST A SIGN ASKING DRIVERS TO USE TURN SIGNALS," as well as New Jersey's recent holiday messages: "DON'T BE A GRINCH, LET THEM MERGE" and "SANTA'S WATCHING, PUT DOWN THE PHONE."

Bhatt's response is an apparent softening of the FHWA's opposition to the signs, after the agency asked New Jersey to pull down some messages in 2022. Some became so popular on social media that the state Department of Transportation asked drivers not to take photos of the signs while driving, posting a cat meme on its own social media accounts: "IF YOU KEEP TAKING PHOTOS OF THE VMS BOARDS WHILE DRIVING WE WILL TURN THIS CAR AROUND AND GO BACK TO THE OLD MESSAGES." Messages shown in 2022 included "GET YOUR HEAD OUT OF YOUR APPS" and "SLOW DOWN. THIS AIN'T THUNDER ROAD," a reference to a song by favorite son Bruce Springsteen.

The Federal Highway Administration isn't telling states what to do — states retain control of their message boards — but it doesn't think humor and cultural references are helpful. Vehicles pass under the signs in the blink of an eye, and the missives could puzzle people who don't "get it" right away. "FHWA appreciates the States' efforts to creatively convey important safety messaging to motorists. Those messages need to be balanced with maintaining driver attention," Bhatt wrote in his letter to the lawmakers. An agency spokesperson, Nancy Singer, said in a statement that "states may

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YOUNGER MEMBER FORUM NEWS

Laurel Welch, Forum Editor

Kirsten Kennedy, Forum President 2023-24

Michael Baker International, kirsten.kennedy@mbakerintl.com

Critical Issues Seminar

April 24

YMF held its 2024 Critical Issues Seminar at Yards Brewing in Center City Philadelphia to discuss the new mayoral administration and its impact on transportation and infrastructure issues. Professional Development chair, **Dan Bhaumik**, moderated the panel discussion and Q&A with the audience. Our distinguished panel included **Megan Clarkin, AICP** (Director of Infrastructure Program Coordination for City of Philadelphia), **Brett Fusco** (Associate Director for Comprehensive Planning at DVRPC), and **Ryan Judge** (Deputy Chief Planning Officer, Strategy & Analysis for SEPTA). Each panelist contributed valuable insights into the state of city and regional infrastructure planning and funding. They also discussed recurring and growing issues, as well as opportunities to address these factors. The YMF would like to thank the panelists for sharing their expertise and time with our approximately 50-person audience!



Rail Park Tour

April 30

YMF gathered for a tour of the **Rail Park Phase One** in Philadelphia, with 17 participants. The event began with discussion about the history of the Rail Park, went on to showcase art installations and vision of the project, and concluded with discussion of the future of the Rail Park, including community programming and future phases of development. Following the tour, attendees gathered for a social hour at **Prohibition Taproom** and had the opportunity to network while enjoying appetizers and drinks. We would like to extend a huge THANK YOU to the Rail Park for welcoming our members and to **Vanessa Chandler**, Development & Operations Associate at the Rail Park, for personally reaching out and offering a tour to the YMF! To visit and support the Rail Park and its vision, please visit its website [HERE](#).



Adopt-A-Highway

May 4

YMF, along with **ASHE Delaware Valley's Young Members Committee (YMC)** joined forces to clean up our two mile stretch of Bethlehem Pike in Ambler. The 9 volunteers picked up trash between Butler Pike and Lafayette Avenue Connector. Thank you to our volunteers for sticking it out in the light rain and to **Fireside Bar & Grille** for providing the meeting location. We hope to see everyone again in the fall!



Election Happy Hour

May 20

YMF met at **Brauhaus Schmitz** to round out the voting period and to hear the announcement of the 2024-25 executive board. Attendees were served German-inspired appetizers and spent the night networking with their fellow colleagues. Thank you to our current board members for their service and congratulations to the incoming executive board!

N-ASCE*

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develop their own traffic safety campaign messages" but they should avoid "messages with obscure meaning, references to popular culture, that are intended to be humorous, or otherwise use non-standard syntax."

There's some serious research behind the new guidance: One of the studies cited in Bhatt's letter shows that overly creative language can have the wrong effect when used on a highway message sign. Driving behavior can get more dangerous, not less so, if you're trying to process a confusing message. "Messages involving humor, wit or pop culture references could have adverse consequences on driving behavior for motorists who are unable to correctly interpret those messages," according to the 2022 study published by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine. Lead author Gerald Ullman, who was senior research engineer at the Texas A&M Transportation Institute at the time the study was published, said it simulated highway-sign messages seen while driving. Highway wit can work well but only "for drivers who get the humor used and the traffic safety point of the message," Ullman said in an email exchange. "However, it does appear to have adverse effects on those drivers who don't get it. Pop culture references that younger drivers get might very easily be confusing for older drivers," he said. "Conversely, puns or references to older funny movies that older drivers find witty can fly completely over the heads of younger drivers."

Still in states such as Mississippi, state officials have heard from residents who say creative messages changed their habits, which might not have happened with more direct language, Katool said. "It's all good fun, but the point is to save lives," Katool said. "There's really only so many times you can just tell somebody to stop texting and driving or tell them to slow down. Eventually they just kind of tune you out. So we feel this is a way to leverage holidays, popular culture, music, that kind of thing."

New Jersey is still using humor in its messages: A batch that ran in May included "SLOW DOWN BAD DRIVERS AHEAD" AND "CAMP IN THE WOODS NOT THE LEFT LANE." But the state is "mindful of the kinds of messages we put up, keeping them safety oriented" and does follow federal guidance, said New Jersey Department of Transportation spokesperson Stephen Schapiro. The latest messages in June include "THERE'S NO DEBATE DON'T TAILGATE" and "LET THE WAVES DO THE CRASHING STAY ALERT!"

New Jersey has one of the lowest rates of traffic fatalities as of 2023, about 0.78 deaths per 100 million vehicle miles driven. Minnesota is the only state lower, at 0.71, with the highest being Mississippi (1.76) and Arizona (1.69), according to preliminary National Highway Traffic Safety Administration statistics. In Arizona, messages "sometimes include humor and cultural references, and we work hard to make sure key messages about safety will be easily understood by drivers," said Doug Pacey, a transportation spokesperson. Over the Memorial Day weekend, the department used a relatively straightforward message: "COOKOUT ESSENTIALS BBQ, MUSIC, WATER, DESIGNATED DRIVERS."

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FROM THE NOT-AS-CLUTTERED-AS-IT-ONCE-WAS DESK OF THE EDITOR...

Summer came on us like a ton of bricks with extended heat and we've just managed to get a bit of relief as this is being written, but the prognosis is more heat. We "survived" another season of dinner meetings in person, just like the good old days (...) and had a very successful Spring Social with a very healthy turnout, more than we've seen in a number of years. The Social isn't quite two months ago but it seems like eons for whatever reason. Personally I am getting back into the swing of things after an early summer vacation (in a hot place, guess I couldn't get enough heat, even though I'm not one for hot weather...), which came at a good time as far as need for a break after some very hectic weeks (and months...), but being busy is good, and we're doing good things, so by rationalization vacation was well-deserved. My story and I'm sticking to it...

And, having not seen my office desk in nearly two weeks (a result of said vacation), I can't say what it currently looks like. My usual habit before going on vacation is to get things in some sort of order assignment-wise to take advantage of the time away (e.g. get submissions in to clients so they can review them while I'm gone) and to clean up the desk a little to make it look as if there is some order amongst the clutter. Thus, at least the desk looks a little less messy than usual, hence the reference in the title.

Also, my recognition as **Delaware Valley Engineer of the Year** (and have I thanked you, our Section members, for this a few times already, but I'll do it again) is coming up on the halfway point, and it seems to be finally sinking in. As I have noted more than a few times, I'm not quite sure I fully deserve this, but I'll take it if you think I should. I like to think it's a "we" thing, that I'm representing the many good things we as professionals do every day for the good of us all, and, using my noted rationalization skills, find this is a good way to convince myself that it is something I've earned. But enough about that...

We didn't have one (yet... hopefully I didn't jinx things) locally, but after the excitement of the I-95 bridge collapse and emergency repairs that got things back to normal in record time (both the temporary fix as well as the permanent condition), it was good to get back to normal. And then of course, 90 miles away, another bridge disaster/collapse... and the Engineers will no

doubt swoop in and respond to make the fixes and get things back to what they were or maybe even better (all of a sudden I'm getting questions from family and friends about how safe bridges are with massive ships lurking around in our rivers).

In early June we had another successful day in Harrisburg with about a dozen members representing three of the four Pennsylvania ASCE Sections (not to point fingers, but Pittsburgh folks were not able to participate, but we did our best to fake their accents so no one was any the wiser...). This continues to be a valuable effort to inform our elected representatives of our concerns and needs and see what we can do to work with the legislature to get more funding, better methods, etc that will benefit all of us. It tends to be a long day but it continues to prove to be worth the effort. We have managed to successfully build relationships with our reps over the years and have shown we can help deliver what is needed, and we remain available to be resources as we may be needed. And the electeds are very willing to listen.

We are also seeing trends that people are returning to their offices and places of employment. From my casual and anecdotal observations, traffic jams are back (is that a good thing...) and trains are surprisingly standing-room most of the time and with labor shortages on SEPTA's part there may be no immediate relief coming in the train schedule to address this. Maybe bad news to those of you who prefer the comforts of home to going to the office. We shall see...

I can't say it's a milestone but this season will be my 22nd as the Editor of *THE NEWS*. It doesn't seem like it was that long ago that I took over the reins from the esteemed **Sid Robin**, but, as we know, time flies when you're having fun... In much the same way our Section is entering **Year 112** of being around, pretty impressive, still going strong.

We hope to see you during our coming season's events, and if you have time and energy to help us do what we do, please let us know. We can always use more help.

N-ASCE*

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Like New Jersey and Mississippi, Arizona sometimes gets the public involved in picking safety messages with contests. A contest last fall led to two winning messages: "I'M JUST A SIGN ASKING DRIVERS TO USE TURN SIGNALS" — a reference to a line in the 1990 film "Notting Hill" with actor Julia Roberts, whose character in the film says, "I'm also just a girl, standing in front of a boy, asking him to love her."

Another contest winner, Elise Riker, won for "SEATBELTS ALWAYS PASS THE VIBE CHECK" which was also displayed last fall. A marketing professor at Arizona State University, Riker told Stateline she crafted it to appeal to Gen Z drivers. "A vibe check is Gen Z slang for good vibrations, from the 70's," Riker said. "Levity definitely helps a safety message get through. 'You can die in a car accident without your seatbelt' is more likely to be ignored. 'Nobody likes to think about dying,' she said. "Friendly and funny safety messages are a reminder that there are humans at the heart of it."

Thanks to **Stateline** for this information.

* N-ASCE – not always something concerning engineering...

