

The Alive! Interview

Keeping L.A. Moving



“I want you to cheat on your car. Of course no one in Los Angeles does it, but in other parts of the country people cheat on their cars. I want you to try another form of transportation, even for just one day. Cheating on your car is a good thing. It’s the one time when cheating is good.”

– Gloria J. Jeff

■ **Traffic, parking, technology, taxis, signal synchronization ... and the great sounds of Motown: they’re all in a day for Gloria J. Jeff, General Manager, Transportation.**

TRANSPORTATION — On March 19, Club CEO John Hawkins and Alive! editor John Burnes sat down with Transportation’s General Manager, Detroit native Gloria J. Jeff, to talk about one of the most significant aspects of life in Los Angeles: getting from Point A to Point B. — Ed.

Alive!: In your own words, can you give us a very general overview of the Department of Transportation?

Gloria Jeff: The LA Department of Transportation is responsible for moving Los Angeles. We do it in a host of ways. We operate three transit systems, which include the DASH system, the Commuter Express and a third subscription service called CityRide, which provides subscription service to school-age children and seniors in each of the Council Districts as directed by members of the City Council. We are responsible for franchising taxicabs. We are responsible for traffic operations, including making sure that all 4,300 signalized intersections in the City of Los Angeles are properly metered and in operating order. We’re responsible for red curbs, and all of the striping that goes on pavements in the City. We’re also responsible for traffic officers at the busiest intersections in the City to direct traffic. We handle all 3,000-plus special events that are held in Los Angeles every year, either

in terms of having traffic officers or engineering staff making sure that the traffic operations are in place. We are responsible for parking management and enforcement.

We have the most sophisticated traffic management system in all of the country – our ATSAC [Automated Traffic Surveillance and Control] center allows us to monitor and control some 3,200 signalized intersections in real time. We have the ability to see these intersections both electronically through detector loops in the pavement, and also by some 300 closed circuit TVs around the City.

We’re also responsible for pipeline operations, to ensure that pipelines that operate in this City are properly regulated.

We are also responsible for the establishment of preferential parking districts, for the removal of abandoned vehicles, as well as stolen vehicles. We run investigative operations to ensure that the taxicabs that are operating in Los Angeles are legal. We work with neighborhoods to make sure that neighborhood traffic management plans are put in place, including stop signs, speed humps, and traffic calming.

We keep LA moving forward. Without us, this City doesn’t move.

Alive!: So if it moves you’re in charge of it?

Gloria Jeff: Yes, unless it’s an airport, or the marine port.

Alive!: You’ve been here for just eleven months. Is it what you expected? Were there any pleasant surprises?

Gloria Jeff: Transportation is what I do; I am a transportation junkie of the highest order.

So, in one context it is everything that I expected, but you also have to remember that Los Angeles is the Super Bowl for transportation professionals. There is no place else, no other City in America, that has the opportunities that we have here in Los Angeles.

We have 3,000 special events, everything from a full-scale, 26-mile marathon, to things as small as neighborhood festivals, where major arterials are closed on the weekends. We have the busiest marine port in North America, and it is continuing to grow. We are the rail head for the West Coast. We have one of the busiest airports in America, not only in terms of business travelers but also in terms of tourists. We are home to the film industry and all that is implied with on-street filming that takes place all over the City. And so, in that context, it is all that I expected. The surprises had to do with the amount of on-street filming that takes place, and the needs to accommodate that, because my experience had been regional, state, federal and private sector.

Dealing with the challenges of parking in Los Angeles is one of the unexpected elements of the job. We operate some hundred-plus off-street parking facilities and some 40,000-plus parking meters for on-street parking in this City. So those were the two surprises.

Alive!: Speaking of those meters, can we expect a new type of meter soon, or will coin-operated meters be here for a while?

Gloria Jeff: With some 40,000-plus meters, we are not going to make a wholesale change; the technology is changing too quickly. We hope in the next two to three months to be providing a recommendation for new technologies for parking in the City of Los Angeles, and some of it will be new meters. Some of it’ll



Gloria J. Jeff

General Manager, Transportation

Hometown: Detroit

Education: University of Michigan

Family: Helped raise two nephews, Harold and Michael.

Favorite candy: Three Musketeers

Favorite movie: Beverly Hills Cop

What does she do on a Friday night: “I’m a movie junkie. One of the pluses to being in Los Angeles is I get to feed my movie junkiness real often.”

Favorite hobby: “Reading, compulsively. Science fiction is my first favorite. African-American literature is my second. After that, almost anything.”

Favorite music: R&B. “Motown! Come on now, I grew up in Detroit! When I was 12, the day after Christmas, my brother and I caught the bus to the Fox Theater. About three o’clock we had [live concert of] Little Stevie Wonder, Martha and the Vandellas, Smokey Robinson and the Miracles, the Temptations, the Supremes, Marvin Gaye and Tammy Tyrrell. It was the Motown Review, and they were home for Christmas.”

The *Alive!* Interview



Traffic officers take to the streets.



From left: Officers Jessie Dyar and Ernest Dunton with a small portion of the bogus handicapped placards confiscated by the DOT's handicapped parking detail.



Officer Mendoza, Hollywood Division.

be multi-space meters; some of it will be electronic single space meters that will allow you to pay by credit card, pay by phone, pay by ... well, pick your favorite form besides just showing coins into it. Although you still will be able to shove coins into it, we still will take cash.

PARKING AND TIGER TEAMS

Alive!: Which is the bigger problem, parking or traffic?

Gloria Jeff: You can't separate the two. Mayor Villaraigosa hired me as well as Gail Goldberg over at the Department of Planning. Transportation and land use can no longer be handled as separate entities; they are interwoven. In order to effectively deal with the issues of traffic, to deal with the issues of parking, we have to look at land use. We have to have a philosophy about how we operate the streets. It's not just what happens between the curb and the curb, but it's what happens along that street. It's the whole idea of, how do we accommodate land use? How do we make it possible for people to have choices, whether it's riding the bus, walking, riding a bicycle, or moving along on a skateboard. Hopefully someday we'll have Segways as a means of transportation. I would love to have a Segway, quite candidly, to get around downtown for my meetings.

Alive!: Do they call that smart planning?

Gloria Jeff: It's one of the definitions of smart growth.

Alive!: I live and work in LA, the City proper, and I have noticed that in the last six months there is a lot more attention being paid to parking during the rush hour. Don't you call it anti-gridlock?

Gloria Jeff: Anti-gridlock zones.

Alive!: Right. Is that new?

Gloria Jeff: That's brand new, and it's part of our initiatives to manage traffic on City streets. We've put in place something called Tiger Teams. The Tiger Teams are a SWAT team approach that is right now only on Wilshire Boulevard. It looks at not only the issue of how do we ticket cars that are illegally parked during the peak period, but an immediate tow, too. We need to be able to get the throughput through those routes. So we've created a series of anti-gridlock zones along major arterials where there is no stopping, no standing, no parking between seven and nine in the morning and four and seven in the evening. Those have been established on all of the primary streets in Los Angeles, Wilshire, Vermont, Van Nuys ... those are the kinds of streets that have been included.

Alive!: It works, by the way.

Gloria Jeff: On Wilshire it works. That's where we are right now. I hope by the first week in April the mayor will roll out a new announcement on the next phase of Tiger Teams.

Alive!: Congratulations, because I love it. I have to drive through it every day.

Gloria Jeff: We've seen an improvement in traffic flow, bus times and passenger ridership on the buses along the Wilshire route.

NOT IN MICHIGAN ANYMORE

Alive!: You came from Michigan.

Gloria Jeff: Yes.

Alive!: How are we different from Michigan?

Gloria Jeff: One of my fondest memories is, during 2005, the Michigan DOT [her previous employer] was celebrating its 100th anniversary as a department, and we kicked off the celebration in January. Well, on the day we picked, there was a blizzard, and we did the parade in the blizzard. We used snowplows at the front [of the parade]. Here we would've had the police and fire department on mounted, but there we used snowplows. That's one of the differences from an operational standpoint. I don't think I'll ever have to worry about having snowplows moving snow at the beginning of a celebration parade here in Los Angeles.

The other difference is that I was running a statewide department, and here I'm running a very large City's department. While the number of people are about the same -- I had 3,000 in Michigan, I've got 2,200 here -- the issues of parking, ownership and operation of off-street parking facilities was not a challenge at the state level.

THE LITTLE DASH THAT COULD

Alive!: What are the successes and limitations of the DASH system?

Gloria Jeff: Well, the successes of the DASH system are that we give choices to people who otherwise don't have a means of getting around their neighborhoods. And it gives people a choice beyond their automobile. You have a choice when you want to go to pick up milk and bread and eggs. If you've got to do the shopping for the week, you probably aren't going to jump on DASH. But if it's just for those quick trips, you have the ability to do that. So those are two of the successes. We give choices to everyone and particularly to those who don't have an automobile.

I think the limitations are as in the controllers' audit [see sidebar] that has just come out. We no longer have sufficient funds to operate the service we have in place, and no ability to financially afford an expansion of the service, though clearly there is a need.

Alive!: Were there future plans to expand DASH to other areas of the City?

Gloria Jeff: Not only were there plans to expand other parts of the city, candidly there is a significant push being put on by the downtown business community to have us extend the hours of DASH operation to make downtown LA more accessible in the evening hours. Right now DASH basically operates on a 12-hour schedule from approximately six in the morning to six in the evening.

SYNCHRONIZING LIGHTS, BUSES

Alive!: Synchronizing the traffic lights is a big priority for Transportation, but some people wonder why it's so hard to do. Can you explain the complexity of it?

Gloria Jeff: Signal synchronization sounds very simple: you set the traffic signal, and if you drive at the speed limit you can go for great distances without stopping. But if you only traveled in one direction at the same time of day every day, it's a piece of cake. However, we have a City that not only goes north-south, but goes east-west, and it goes in different directions at different times of the day. And that's the complexity. While we want to progress traffic north-south, we also want to progress it east-west. We have to look at how

we can set that up so that we get the best traffic flow we can get going in each of the directions, which means it's a balancing act. It means that there is a balancing of folks trying to get to the Valley, folks trying to get to the north, and folks trying to get to the Westside, folks trying to get from their jobs back to the Eastside, where they can more easily afford to live. It is that combination, and that's why it's a complex process.

Alive!: Is it safe to say that changing one signal exponentially increases the complexity throughout the City?

Gloria Jeff: One signal no; but doing a series of signals will have a significant impact. One of the advantages of our ATSAC system is the fact that when there is a problem, where because of a crash or an incident that has occurred, we have the ability to one, see it; and

Department of Transportation

PROFILE

General Manager: Gloria J. Jeff

Board of Transportation Commissioners:

Paul Kim, *President*
Helen Mars, *Vice President*
John Frierson
David Malcolm Carson
George Moss
Andrea Alarcon
Angela Reddock

Board of Taxicab Commissioners

Joseph Czyzyk, *President*
Portia Collins, *Vice President*
Sergio Siderman
Teri Bialosky
Bruce Iwasaki

Employees:
2,200

Headquarters:
Caltrans Building downtown, which contains four Offices and 14 Bureaus

Field locations:
25

Annual budget:
\$144 million (fiscal year 2006-07)

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Sign painters play in invaluable role in helping us get where we're going.



Thermoplastic Operators stripping the street.

two, our loop detectors will tell us when we're not getting as much throughput through a particular lane, so we'll know where the location is. We can look at it and then adjust via the computer in real time what's happening in terms of cycle length, so we can progress traffic through. While it is difficult to change just one signal and see the difference, our ATSAC system gives us the ability to see that whole corridor and adjust that whole corridor to adapt to whatever incident has occurred.

Alive! The loop detectors are actually in the pavement?

Gloria Jeff: Yes they are.

Alive! And the buses are coordinated with that too, right?

Gloria Jeff: In addition, the buses have a detector on board.

Alive! Is this the Rapid?

Gloria Jeff: The Bus Rapid Transit is the correct technical term, and we have those on Wilshire, Vermont, Van Nuys, Crenshaw, every major [thoroughfare] –

Alive! The Valley.

Gloria Jeff: Everywhere, Soto Street we have those ... each of those particular buses is equipped with a detector. As they approach

their separate set of detectors, we will know in real time if that bus is on schedule. If it is behind schedule, the computer will automatically elongate that green cycle to let the bus go through to help it make up some of the time. As it progresses along that corridor, there are opportunities to get it back on schedule. And it's done in real time. The computer does it automatically; however, we do have humans observing the process, and they have the ability to make the adjustments even more rapidly if they need to.

TRAFFIC SOFTWARE

Alive! Do you develop your own software, or is it a combination of purchased software and what your engineers develop?

Gloria Jeff: One of the most wonderful things is the ATSAC system, developed as part of LA's [anticipatory] response to the 1984 Olympics. The basic software was developed by engineering staff here at the LA Department of Traffic in those days, now the LA DOT. That engineering staff continues to modify and evolve the system to where it is today. Every major advancement we have made has been a result of the folks who work here at the LA DOT. You can't buy ATSAC off the store shelves.

"I am a transportation junkie of the highest order. So, in one context it is everything that I expected, but you also have to remember that Los Angeles is the Super Bowl for transportation professionals. There is no place else, no other City in America, that has the opportunities that we have here in Los Angeles."

– Gloria J. Jeff

OTHER GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

Alive! Integration with federal, state and local and county ... how do you do it?

Gloria Jeff: The federal government is where policy gets established. The Fed's traditional relationship is usually with the state Departments of Transportation, or with the regional transit operators. Through that relationship they flow dollars to implement programs to that level, either by formula or by a discretionary program.

There are funds that are collected solely at the state level through the state fuel tax, and those funds in addition to the federal funds are then distributed in the state of California to the county Transportation Commissions. In the case of Los Angeles County, that's Metro. We then have the ability to provide projects that are either 100 percent federal, or 80-20 federally funded, or 100 percent state funded, or through a combination of county and City funds. That's sort of the progression.

Alive! The whole issue in Sacramento with the 405 widening ... were we involved with that at all?

Gloria Jeff: Our involvement is that, guess what happens when the freeways don't work? That traffic goes somewhere, and it goes on City streets. It was important for us in terms of City operations. We provided information to the mayor and the City Council delegation that went to Sacramento, on what the impacts were on the City.

Alive! It must be great that your office is in the Caltrans building. That's by design, isn't it?

Gloria Jeff: It absolutely is. When this Caltrans building was being constructed, someone had an incredible insight: They needed a good working relationship with their largest customer in their service area, and guess who that is, the City of Los Angeles. And so it works for both of us. If there is an issue that I need to get resolved, it's: get on the elevator and go up three floors and do a face to face conversation with the district engineer, as opposed to try and catch him on the phone or try and send him a letter or an email. It's, get on the elevator and say, "Doug [Failing], can we have a conversation?" The same thing is true with the technical staff. You see them going up and down in the elevators, up and down the stairs, talking to one another in the cafeteria. It makes for a very positive working relationship.

TRAFFIC AND PARKING OFFICERS

Alive! Traffic officers: We know their jobs are tough. Are they getting tougher?

Gloria Jeff: Traffic officers are critical to the delivery of transportation services because they not only are out there directing traffic at some of the busiest intersections in Los Angeles, but they do it recognizing that they endanger their own lives. Our parking officers and traffic officers are the same people.

The folks who write tickets are not writing tickets because they've got nothing better to do. It

is part of our effort to make sure that the economic activity takes place, so that there's a turnover that needs to take place for the businesses, so that their customers are able to get in and out. These are the same folks who write tickets on abandoned vehicles and get them removed from neighborhoods where they're eyesores. They are also the folks who, by checking plates on vehicles, are able to identify that the vehicle is stolen and then work with the LAPD get that vehicle back to its rightful owner. We all want clean streets, which means our streets need to be cleaned once a week. For that to happen, guess what, you have to get the cars off the street.

We all want to live in a clean city. For that to happen, there must be an organized effort to do that. Those are the kinds of things that traffic officers do.

Parking is very personal for folks. No one says their vehicle was ticketed for not being in the right place. They say, "I got a ticket. I personally received a ticket." Because it is so personal for folks, as a busy society we tend to react immediately. [Officers] are not out to get you personally. They're doing their job. If you're unhappy, there's an appeals process in place. If you go out to our Website, www.lacity.org, you can find out what the appeal process is. If the ticket was given in error it will be forgiven. If it was given to the wrong vehicle, that also will be corrected. But at the end of the day, these officers are out there trying to encourage economic development for the City, protect the quality of life we as Angelenos all want. So if you're unhappy, come see me [she laughs]. I'm from Detroit!

Alive! And the fact that you even got a parking space was probably due to the fact that ...

Gloria Jeff: The officers were doing their jobs to encourage the turnover.

UNSUNG HEROES

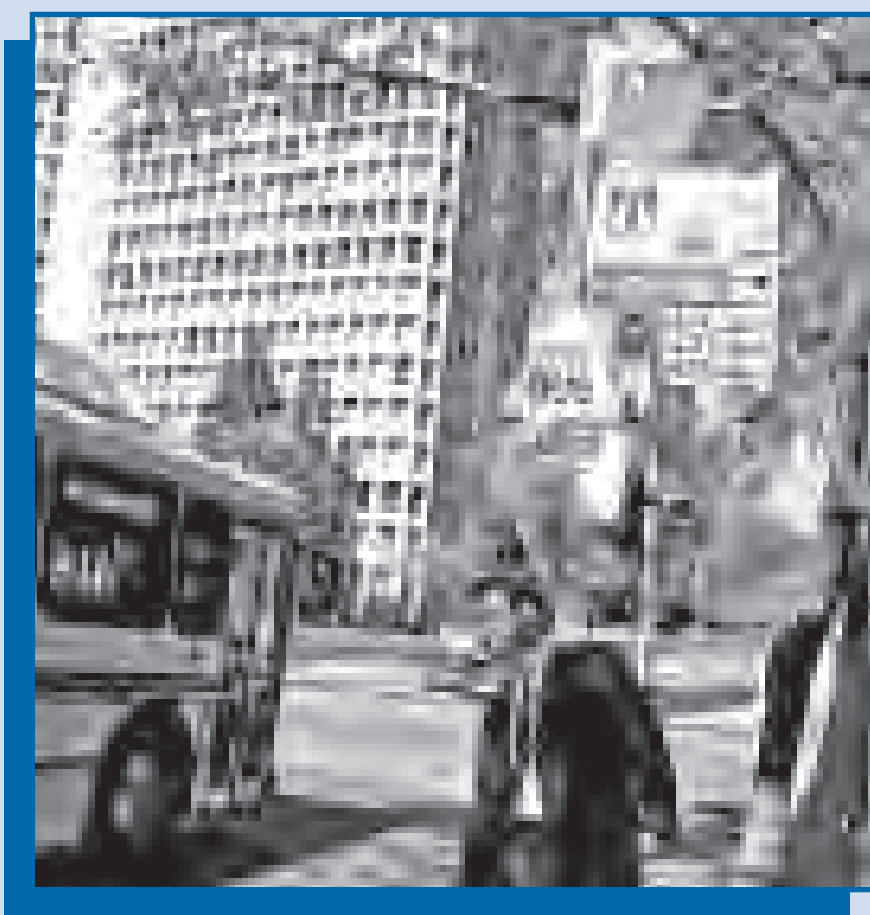
Alive! Are there any unsung heroes in the Department of Transportation?

Gloria Jeff: The entire department is an unsung hero. The quality of life in Los Angeles is a direct reflection of the efforts of this department. Transportation means moving things. We keep LA moving forward. The unsung heroes are LA DOT.

PRIORITIES

Alive! What are your highest priorities?

Gloria Jeff: The mayor has established three essential priorities for the Department of Transportation. The first is that, through operational improvements, we do a better job of managing congestion on City streets. And we do that by an array of things: signal synchronization; an activity we have called "Operation Bottleneck," which allows us to look at all of the intersections in the City and identify those where by making short-term low-cost improvements we can increase the productivity of that intersection. We have Tiger Teams in place, also part of our effort. Reviewing our parking requirements, rate setting, to again support economic activity ... all of those then become part of how we are supporting congestion management. Not congestion elimination, but congestion management.



Dashing to the DASH

It's just natural that John Hawkins, Club CEO, would use Transportation's DASH system when he went from Club Headquarters to interview Gloria J. Jeff for this article; she's the General Manager of Transportation and is in charge of the DASH system. But, the truth is, John – and all the Club staffers – use DASH every day to get around downtown. It's just the smart thing to do. And remember: If you work downtown, you should use DASH when you need to visit Club Headquarters.

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Gloria J. Jeff and John Hawkins talking about Motown at the Transportation offices in the Caltrans building.

Our second priority is to increase transit ridership, and we're doing that by investigating bus lanes along Wilshire Avenue, by creating transit priority systems that allow us to interact with your PDA, whether it's your cell phone or your Blackberry or your Treo, that you will have the ability to know in real time when the next bus will arrive, in real time.

Also, quite candidly, we're going to put together a strategic transportation plan, and that strategic transportation plan is not only going to lay out policies, but guide our investment so that we are appropriately balancing transportation movement, whether it is goods movement, riding public transit, or automobiles. What we want to do is have what I call, for lack of a better term, front door choices. When you walk out your front door you have choices: You can walk to your destination, you can ride a bicycle to your destination, you can ride public transportation to your destination, you can get in your car and drive or you can turn around and walk back in the house and telecommute. But you have those sets of choices, so that people can enjoy the things that are important to them, whether it's in their work life or in their personal lives, but to have choices. We don't want them in the position that they are today, where the only choice they have is to get in their car and drive somewhere.

LONG-TERM TRAFFIC ANSWERS?

Alive!: What do you think in the long run is LA's solution to our traffic?

Gloria Jeff: Our solution is management. We are going to manage and give folks choices. We need to have a living, breathing strategic transportation plan that says, "Here are our broad strategies, and here's how we're going to accomplish them." And a set of triggers should be embedded in that transportation plan that say that, when these set of events take place, it's time to come back and reevaluate. It is not a plan that looks pretty and sits on the shelves. It is one that guides our financial investments, our human resource investments, helps us to evaluate whether or not we're being successful and in defining what that success is. Then once we've achieved it or are off course from achieving it, what will trigger us to look at it and do something different.

At the end of the day I want you to cheat on your car. Of course no one in Los Angeles does it, but in other parts of the country people cheat on their cars. I want you to try another form of transportation, even for just one day. Cheating on your car is a good thing. It's the one time when cheating is good.

THE AUDIT

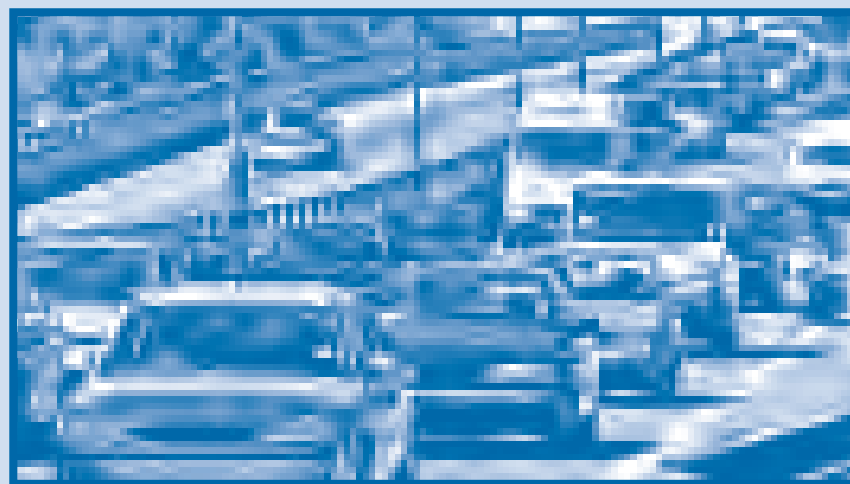
Alive!: I read Controller Laura Chicks' audit on the Department of Transportation that came out last Wednesday, and it mentioned that you requested the audit. Tell me more about this audit.

Gloria Jeff: It is accurate that I requested the audit. With the challenge of being a new individual to the City of Los Angeles, and with an organization that has challenges and expectations, it was necessary for me to be able to rapidly assess my organization. The auditor, the controller has an audit function, a performance management audit, and I asked them to come in and to do an audit of our transit and development area. That was their focus. They came in and helped identify the fact that we needed to do a better job of managing our capital projects, with a reporting process. They commented on the fact that we needed additional resources in the IT area. They strongly stated that we needed a planning and policy function. Those are areas that we can move to immediately. We were already moving toward those things when the audit came out. This provided supporting documentation for what we were already putting together.

We also had requested as part of our '07-'08 budget the opportunity to create a planning and policy function to provide additional personnel in the IT area. It also dovetails nicely with a consultant study that we just completed in the parking area that also talked about our needs. So, two of the four critical branches of the organization have now had an assessment. It gives me a building block, a blueprint, if you will, to build and establish a new foundation for this organization to move forward into becoming a 21st century organization, and one that will meet the 21st-century challenges of transportation that face us.

Alive!: Excellent. Thank you.

Gloria Jeff: Thank you!



Transportation Responds to Audit

TRANSPORTATION — In March, City Controller Laura Chick publicly released an audit of the Department of Transportation, produced at the request of Transportation General Manager Gloria Jeff. Here is the Department's response. —Ed.

The City of Los Angeles Department of Transportation has received the results of the audit it requested last summer from the City Controller, Laura Chick. The audit calls for increased emphasis and resources to address Transportation programs that support Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa and the City Council's goal to improve transportation options here in Los Angeles.

"I'm pleased that the audit has been completed and establishes a foundation our department can stand on to concentrate our people's knowledge and talents toward our goals of reducing congestion, improving traffic flow, increasing transit ridership, and goods movement flow throughout the City of Los Angeles," said Gloria J. Jeff, General Manager, Transportation.

The audit, requested by Jeff, will enable Transportation to evolve into a 21st century organization focusing on effective planning, designing and implementation of a balanced portfolio of investments and programs. Transportation has been developing a performance management tool entitled the Performance Dashboard and Reporting System. This system tracks capital improvement projects from inception through full maturity and activation. Additionally, Transportation has been in discussions with the City Council on a strategic transportation plan since early this year.

"Programs such as Automated Traffic Surveillance and Control System (ATSAC) technology; traffic signal synchronization upgrades; changeable message signs for motorists; and safe biking lanes have been and will continue to be 'priorities' here at Transportation," according to Jeff. "We want to help make Los Angeles more livable and safer for pedestrians, bicyclists and motorists alike. The Mayor said it best last week: 'That's what the people of LA deserve!'"

The Department of Transportation will examine the audit and provide responses to the City Controller by mid-April. Many of the programs examined and recommendations made will be integrated at Transportation and will enable additional concentration in the areas of increased IT support, potential staff to work emerging opportunities and the ability to remain focused on 'moving Los Angeles forward.'