

Article for Transportation Consultant Council Young Professionals Scholarship for the 2008 ITE Annual Meeting and Exhibit

By: K. Scott Walker

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Introduction

When I applied for the Transportation Consultant Council's scholarship to attend the 2008 ITE Annual Meeting in Anaheim, California, I had multiple reasons for submitting a paper on why I should be selected. These reasons included:

1. Represent the Kentucky Section of ITE (KYSITE): I am currently serving as the Vice-President of this Section. While we are much smaller than most Sections in the United States, we have a solid core of transportation professionals. And we are growing.
2. Represent my firm: Working in a large firm like PB, I have access to some of the best and brightest engineers in the world. However, I would be naïve to think that there aren't top-notch professionals elsewhere. Knowing that a meeting such as the ITE Annual Meeting features some of the best projects and topics in the traffic engineering / transportation planning industry, I wanted to be able to use what I gained from the experience to help me day to day on the job.
3. Represent my own professional development aspirations: As a young professional, I want to take advantage of as many opportunities as available. I am very interested in the ever-changing world that is transportation engineering and I want to make sure that I stay aware of what is going on.

Planning the Trip

When I received word that I was selected to receive a scholarship, I immediately jumped online to start planning the trip. I knew that the opportunity presented to me was one that I did not want to pass up. I was excited about the \$1000 that I would be receiving to cover my costs. Then I realized that while the \$1000 was a large sum of money, the money would be spent very quickly. I also felt a responsibility to minimize any costs that my firm would cover.

There were a few expenses that I could not control which included registration costs and airfare. As an attendee under 30 years old, I was eligible for the reduced registration fee of \$425. I also booked flights that were some of the cheapest fares I could find. However, between registration and airfare, I had already spent nearly 75% of the scholarship money.

I knew the next substantial costs would be accommodations. I researched the official hotel (the Marriott), but quickly realized that the cost of the room was more than I should spend. As result, I easily found a room at a hotel within walking distance of the Convention Center -- this hotel saved me at least 40%. Other outstanding costs related to attending the conference include car rental, gas, and meals since most meals were not included in registration.

Putting costs aside, another interesting background fact is that my wife, Lindsay, is also a traffic engineer at PB and the current Secretary of KYSITE. Most folks are clear to point out that they

could never work at the same place as their spouse, but it seems to work well for us after three years of the arrangement. Initially, it was thought that I would attend the Annual Meeting on my own. However, we realized that there was a lot to gain if we both attended. After some thought, we decided that it would be appropriate for her to attend the conference for about a day and a half before returning home to be with our young son – now over 15 months old. We considered taking the 15-month along with us, then realized that jetlag for a toddler wouldn't be ideal. We consider that a smart move.

To California!

Once the airfare was purchased, hotel and rental car reserved, and babysitting arrangements confirmed, we were on our way to Southern California for a couple of days of fun before the big meeting. This included a trip to see two baseball games (Padres and Dodgers) in addition to a day at Universal Studios. We also had the opportunity to visit an old friend from school that moved to Los Angeles over a year ago. But the best part of the trip (besides the conference, of course) was a stop by an In-N-Out Burger, since a trip to the West Coast isn't complete without a visit (at least in our opinion).

After a couple of days of roaming around sunny Southern California, we made our way to the meeting. The selection of Anaheim as the location for an ITE Annual Meeting seemed logical at first thought, but was confirmed once I arrived. The Anaheim Convention Center (ACC) is located just off of I-5, the major north-south freeway in Southern California. The ACC is surrounded by a plethora of dining, lodging, and other offerings. Perhaps it is more important to note that the ACC is directly across from Disneyland, which can easily bring out the child in all of us (and requires you to purchase gifts for a young child at home).

Activities / Events / Session

The first event that we attended was the "Network Reception." The cost was included in my registration but was an additional charge of \$40 for Lindsay. We were both excited about the opportunity to meet folks "from around the world." The reception was a great place to meet vendors and check out the latest innovations in the transportation field. We even had a chance to meet up with a friend that works with one of the software companies in attendance. However, it was not the networking opportunity we expected with respect to meeting and talking with fellow attendees. In fact, we thought the turnout was pretty light. In subsequent discussions with other attendees, we learned that many folks typically skip this event due to past disappointment, mainly due to the high costs and small return on investment.

The opening session included the presentation of awards to very deserving individuals. It was amazing to hear the remarkable achievement and years of dedicated service to their profession and ITE. The opening session also featured Lynne Lancaster, a motivational speaker whose speech focused on the issues with the various generations in our society. This speech included techniques of how to deal with these issues in the workplace. Ms. Lancaster had great speaking abilities and was entertaining at times. However, I had recently seen a similar presentation at a local conference which was just as good, and the speaker was not paid for his appearance.

The technical sessions that I attended were excellent and were probably the highlight of the meeting for me. The sessions truly presented some of the most relevant topics and interests in today's transportation field. The sessions I attended included:

- Perspectives on Trip Generation
- HCM 2010 Release
- Safer Routes to School
- Advances in Parking Management
- Freeway Interchange
- Roundtable discussion on future of transportation models
- I-35W Bridge Collapse Traffic Response

While not related to the sessions directly, a major frustration that I experienced was the high number of cell phones ringing during the sessions. I am not referring to vibrating cell phones or Blackberries, but the actual number of ringing phones. Before I am labeled as hypocritical, I'll admit that I checked my Blackberry (on vibrate) during sessions but made sure I wasn't going to distract another attendee. But the ringing phones were unacceptable. And to further add to my frustration, I can recall two specific times when an attendee actually answered the phone during a presentation and did not have the courtesy to either leave the room, or better yet, NOT ANSWER IT AT ALL! I realize that, as professionals, it is very tough to leave work behind or else we are faced with a long week at work when we return. But as a courtesy to the presenter, please, please turn off your phone, and PLEASE, do not talk on it!!

I also attended the "Attendee Reception" on Tuesday night before the Honorees Dinner. This reception was very well-attended and was conducive for interacting with other attendees. During the hour-long reception, I talked to students in the Southern California area and brought them up to speed on the happenings in the Bluegrass State. In addition, I had the opportunity to meet several other new faces including some that worked pretty close to home.

While I knew it would be an opportunity to celebrate the accomplishments of several distinguished colleagues, I opted out of the Honorees Dinner. A key reason for this was the relatively high costs to attend. Having attended multiple professional dinners ranging from business casual to black tie affairs, I could not justify an \$80 ticket. I would like to take this opportunity, however, to congratulate each winner and thank each one for their service to ITE.

Looking Back

Now, as I write, I am on my way home from the conference. Looking back at the goals I set, I was curious to see how well I accomplished them:

1. Represent the Kentucky Section of ITE: Unless I somehow missed seeing them, my wife and I were the only representatives from the Bluegrass state. Originally, one other member was to attend, but unfortunately, he was unable to attend due to a personal matter. I intend to summarize my experience in our Section newsletter in addition to providing them with a copy of this paper. (On a side note: for those that have not had the pleasure of visiting Kentucky, I strongly recommend that you come visit us sometime. The beautiful horse farms and the rolling bluegrass fields should be seen by all. Feel free to give me a call or send me – I'll be glad to recommend some places to see!!).
2. Represent my firm: While at the meeting, I had the opportunity to meet several other individuals from my firm. I knew only knew one of them from previous project experience, which meant that I met others for the first time. Face to face meetings with co-workers (or anyone for that matter) makes working relationships much easier in the future.

3. Represent my own professional development aspirations: As I noted, the technical sessions were probably the highlight of the meeting for me. I was able to gauge where I stand from a knowledge standpoint and they gave me some ideas of where I need to further develop my knowledge and skills. I also have set a goal to present at a future ITE Annual Meeting.

Having the ability to reflect on the ITE Annual Meeting and the multiple Southern District ITE (SDITE) meetings that I have attended, I must admit that the SDITE Meetings typically provide more opportunities for networking at a lower cost. As the Local Arrangements Chair of the 2013 SDITE Meeting in Kentucky, I will be able to take what I have learned at each meeting and take the best of each. I'm sure I will have an entirely different perspective at the conclusion of that meeting. In the mean time, I am willing to work with ITE in future Annual Meetings to offer any suggestions to save costs or continually improve the meeting.

Wrap Up

In summary, I am very fortunate to have been given the opportunity to attend the ITE Annual Meeting this year in Anaheim. It is highly recommended for professionals wanting to learn about current and future trends in the transportation business. The folks that present are at the forefront of their specialty and are willing to share their experiences when asked. This information can easily be taken back to your own jurisdiction.

Again, I would like to thank the ITE Transportation Consultant Committee for the opportunity to attend this meeting. I feel that the scholarship was an investment in this young engineer that has high aspirations. I would encourage others reading this article to seek this opportunity for future meetings.