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## Whirlwind Tour of Foreign Cities Reveals Public Transit Adaptability

- Metro's Carolyn Flowers visited four European and Asian cities



By BILL HEARD, Editor

(Dec. 2, 2005) It was a whirlwind journey that touched four countries on two continents in only 14 days, but when it was over, Metro's Carolyn Flowers had gained valuable information about financing and operating mass transit systems.

"It was like being on the 'Survivor' reality TV show," says Flowers, executive officer for Operations Administration, recalling the international mission that sent her and 11 other transit agency executives to Spain, Denmark, China and Japan, last month.

The Transportation Cooperative Research Program in cooperation with the Eno Foundation of Washington, D.C., sponsors the annual fact-finding missions to give U.S. transit managers an opportunity to meet foreign transportation officials and observe various aspects of their organizations and operations.

In 2004, Milo Victoria, deputy executive officer for Operations Maintenance, participated in a similar mission to South America, visiting Brazil, Chile and Ecuador.

Flowers, who is responsible for Metro's operations budget, manpower planning and scheduling, was chosen from among 65 candidates for the Oct. 21 through Nov. 4 study mission. Her traveling companions came from transit properties in such cities as Phoenix, Austin, Denver, Tulsa and Tampa.

### First stop: Barcelona



At the Shanghai Urban Transport Bureau, Flowers and her group were given a presentation on the city's bus services.

Starting from Washington, the group first visited Barcelona, Spain, where they learned about a major project to use public/private financing to build and operate the city's transit lines.



Riding the new subway in Copenhagen, Denmark, Metro's Carolyn Flowers flashes a complimentary day pass.

In Copenhagen, Denmark, the group was told that authorities want to encourage a portion of the population to move out of the core city. They hope a new subway line, currently under construction, will foster residential and business development in the suburban areas.

The cost of the rail construction project will be offset through government land grants along the subway line. Similar

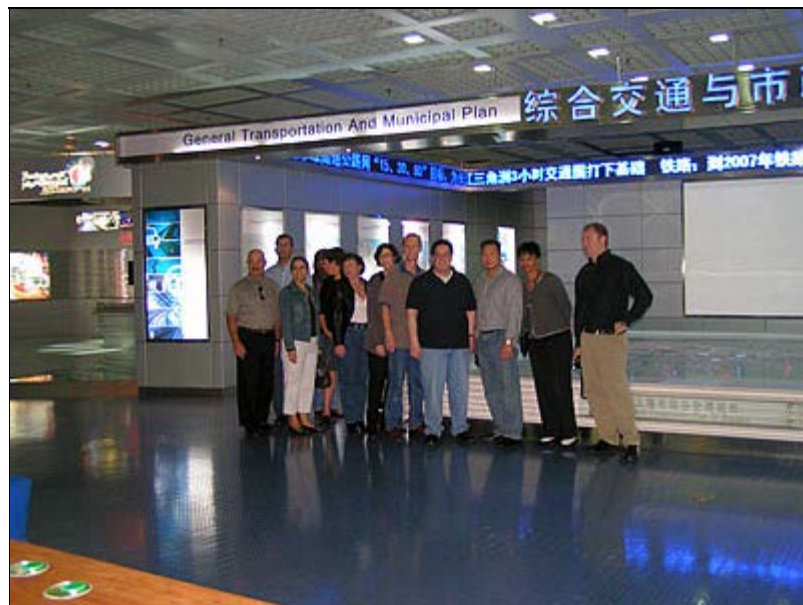
programs are being tried in Osaka and Shanghai.

"We were interested in how these cities are handling high-density and transit-oriented development," says Flowers. "Those are issues we're seeing here in LA."

Next, the group flew to Shanghai. With a population of 18.7 million, it is China's third largest metropolis and one that is experiencing rapid urban planning and explosive growth in preparation for the World Expo in 2010.

"The city has four subway lines now and, in the next four years, will build nine more subway lines," Flowers says, amazed. "They operate 18,000 buses a day and are 100 percent contracted out."

She also rode the maglev train, which reached a speed of more than 250 mph, from the airport to downtown Shanghai. The train is magnetically levitated, has no wheels and "is much smoother than a rail line. There's no sensation of acceleration."



Touring the Shanghai Museum of Urban Planning, the 12-member U.S. study group viewed a model of current and future subway alignments. Carolyn

Flowers is second from right.

**Ridership slump in Osaka**

In Osaka, a city some 285 miles southwest of Tokyo, the study group learned that the local transit agency has experienced a 20 percent decline in ridership over the past five years. A growing population of retirees and a desire for automobile ownership among young people is blamed for the slump in boardings.

Osaka’s transit agency recently began offering a smart card, similar to Metro’s TAP card, that can be used for transit fares, but also can be used as a discount card in purchasing merchandise at local businesses, Flowers says.

Looking back on her trip, Flowers was especially impressed with how flexible the four transit agencies have been in planning, funding, operating and managing the cost of their systems, as well as fostering transit-oriented development.

“We were treated as a quasi-governmental delegation in every country and given access to high-level officials,” she says. “It was a lifetime opportunity.”