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► [Safety](#)

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► [CEO Forum](#)

► [Employee Recognition](#)

► [Employee Activities](#)

► [Metro Projects](#)

► [Facts at a Glance](#)  
(web)

► [Archives](#)

► [Events Calendar](#)

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► [Metro Classifieds](#)

► [Bazaar](#)

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► [30/10 Initiative](#)

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► [Training](#)

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Mineta Transportation Institute director Rod Diridon addresses COMTO meeting Feb. 21 in the lobby of Metro Headquarters.



Photos by Gayle Anderson

## COMTO Meeting Keeps On Track with Noted Transportation Officials

- Mineta Transportation Institute director [Rod Diridon](#) was featured speaker
- U.S. Transportation Secretary Mary Peters, Caltrans Director Will Kempton also spoke

By GAYLE ANDERSON

(March 8, 2007) The general membership meeting of the Conference of Minority Transportation Officials (COMTO) - held recently at Metro Headquarters - left no doubt that the organization, which supports and encourages the involvement of minority professionals in transportation programs, is a vigorous and vital component of the transportation agenda both in the region and nationally.

Attended by professionals in transportation ranging from administrators on all levels to transit officials, members gathered to meet featured speaker Rod Diridon, Sr, who provided top-level insight on transportation programs. Diridon is the executive director of the Mineta Transportation Institute and a ranking member of the California High Speed Rail Authority.

Just before the program was about to start, the National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission completed its



U.S. Transportation Secretary Mary Peters was introduced by LADOT General Manager Gloria

two-day “field hearing” meeting underway in the Metro Board Room. Following the hearing, LADOT General Manager and COMTO member Gloria Jeff invited U.S. Transportation Secretary Mary E. Peters and Caltrans Director Will Kempton to address the COMTO membership.

“Having Secretary Peters and Will Kempton stop at the podium to acknowledge COMTO was a real kudo for members,” said COMTO steering committee member Helen Ortiz-Gilstrap.

Diridon spoke about the history of transportation in California and the role General Motors, Goodyear and automakers played in transforming major transit rail corridors into highways and freeways. Ironically, heavy congestion on those freeways is now the reason the public is returning to the use of public transportation, he said.

A major proponent of high-speed rail, Diridon said mass transit is the commute of choice in most industrialized countries. Here, in the U.S., the average daily commute is by car, usually occupied by only the driver.

If that is just one of the reasons the U.S. is responsible for nearly 30 percent of the world’s greenhouse gas emissions, transportation systems are the most obvious means to reducing the U.S. contribution, said Diridon.

The California high-speed rail system, for example, would create a comprehensive network of mass transit throughout the state, reducing traffic and increasing mobility in a way that is fast, safe, convenient, economical and environmentally friendly, he said.

He ended his remarks by reminding COMTO members of the educational and career opportunities offered by the nation’s premier transportation center, the Mineta Institute.

Jeff.



CEO Roger Snoble joins COMTO President Marion Colston and featured speaker Rod Diridon, director of the Mineta Transportation Institute, at right.



Members include Fred Minagar, president of Minagar & Associates, Inc., a national authority in the areas of Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS); COMTO Southern California Regional Chapter President Marion Colston; Don Ott, executive officer, administration; Communications Manager Helen Ortiz-Gilstrap, and Central City Division Maintenance Manager Hector Rojas.



COMTO officials present commendation to featured speaker, Rod Diridon. From left, Steering Committee Member Milo Victoria, Secretary Kathy Brabson, President Marion Colston, Diridon, and Vice-president Linda Somilleda.

"Education is vital in the growing and continuing need to refine transportation systems throughout the world. It's the first and most necessary step if we are to come up with solutions to global problems," said Diridon, who looks to COMTO to provide the leadership in transportation fields.

"COMTO is stronger now than it has ever been and it will continue to grow as minorities become the majority," he said.

Metro's Marion Jane Colston serves as president of COMTO's Southern California Regional Chapter. "COMTO offers many opportunities for transportation professionals in the Southern California region, who come from diverse backgrounds to blend their individual talents to address transportation issues," she said.

The organization is most widely recognized for its program nationally and locally through networking, training, MBE/WBE/DBE opportunity programs, education, scholarships and research. Through legislative efforts and educational components, COMTO hopes to raise the consciousness of minority communities regarding policies, programs, and opportunities ranging from professionals to general managers of transit properties.

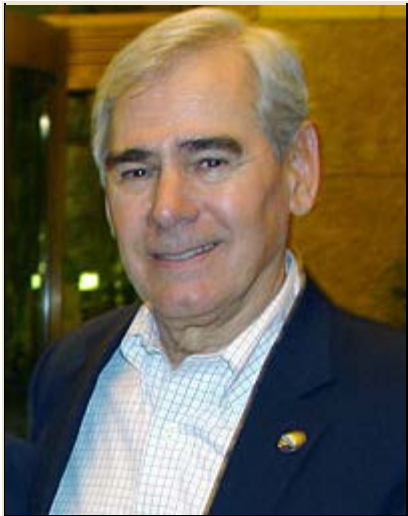
Founded in 1971 on the campus of Howard University in Washington, D.C. COMTO was created to provide a forum for senior minority professionals in the transportation industry. Members have served in every sector of the transportation industry to include aviation, highways, ports, rail and trucking.

Today COMTO has chapters in 35 major cities throughout the United States with a membership of over 2000.

Information: [www.comto.org](http://www.comto.org)

**Who's Who at the COMTO Podium**

The son of an immigrant Italian railroad brakeman, Rod Diridon is called the "father" of modern transit service in



- ROD DIRIDON**
- Executive Director, Mineta Transportation Institute
  - Chairman Emeritus and Member of the California High Speed Rail Authority Board

California's Silicon Valley (Santa Clara County).

His political career began in 1972 as the youngest person ever elected to the Saratoga City Council.

He recently retired because of term limits, after completing 20 years and six terms as chairman of both the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors and Transit Board.

Diridon has chaired more than 100 international, national, state and local community service programs and projects, most related to transit and the environment.

In 1993, he served as the chairman of the American Public Transit Association in Washington, D. C. and more recently as the North American vice president of the International Transit Association in Brussels.

Diridon currently chairs the National Research Council's Transportation Research Board study panel on "Combating Global Warming through Sustainable Transportation Policy." He is frequently asked to provide testimony to Congressional Committees.

Diridon is committed to promoting international understanding in commerce. He founded, and has been the principal liaison for the Santa Clara County Sister County Commissions with the Province of Florence, Italy and the Region of Moscow in Russia.