



*Aileen Cho, ENR's senior transportation editor, is a native of Los Angeles and recovering New Yorker. She studied English and theater at Occidental College, where a reporter teaching the one existing journalism course encouraged her to apply for the LA Times Minority Editing Training Program. Her journalism training led to her first stories about transportation, working as a cub reporter with the Greenwich Time. Her work has appeared in the Los Angeles Times and New York Times. Many of her experiences with engineers and contractors have inspired material for her alternative theater productions way, way off Broadway. For ENR, Aileen has traveled the world, clambering over bridges in China, touring an airport in Abu Dhabi and descending into dark subway tunnels in New York City. She is a regular at transportation conferences, where she finds that airport and mass transit engineers really know how to have fun. Aileen is always eager to hop on another flight because there are so many interesting projects and people, and she gets tired of throwing her cats off her computer in her home office in Long Beach, California. She is a very conflicted Mets/Dodgers fan.*

## Racecars and Rail Discussions

They AACE'd it

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March 1, 2018

Aileen Cho

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One day I'm clutching the wheel of my rental car, daring occasionally to wipe the sweat from my white-knuckled hands. It's Feb. 7 and I'm headed to the Western Winter Workshop in Palm Springs, hosted by AACE Region 6. (There is an alarming number of AACEs out there, from clinical endocrinologists to computer education to code enforcement. And that's just the ones beginning with "American Association of...").

A recovering New Yorker of 22 years, I haven't driven more than half an hour's worth in many years, let alone on LA freeways. I figured that the 2-hour drive (well, more like 3 in traffic and in the slow lane) would help literally get me back up to speed by reminding me of my car-oriented youth.

The next day, ironically, I'm sitting shotgun as a pro racecar driver "drifts" a BMW around and around at the BMW Performance Center, shrieking in delight rather than fear. I'm honored to have been invited to this team-building event with other workshop attendees, including old friend Mike Smith of Hill International—and new one, Sherry Sweitzer of Hill as well. But no, I didn't venture to do any driving myself. Too soon.

(I'd post the video I took, but our current system apparently doesn't allow for that. :( )

Speaking of driving forces, Hill's Mark von Leffern is the human equivalent of a BMW racecar, "drifting" tirelessly through the conference, organizing, overseeing, networking. LA Metro's Julie Owen wasn't far behind.

The workshop was fantastic. With \$15 billion worth of construction currently underway at LA Metro alone, “it’s a good time to be in construction in Southern California,” said Phil Peterson of Ames Construction, who moderated a contractor best practices panel. Northern California isn’t so bad either, especially at SFO, where my [newsmaker Geoff Neumayr](#) explained how the airport has completed billions of dollars in projects with “no claims whatsoever” through progressive design-build.

It was particularly awesome to see my adopted city of Long Beach get a lot of kudos for its innovative programs to encourage entrepreneurs, including a [microlending](#) program and a [BizPort](#) portal with open-source code. The city is also building an Innovation Center, partnering with Huntington Beach in the quest to lure Amazon and in a P3 to turn the Queen Mary into a major live music and entertainment hub. (Note: I got married on the Queen Mary 11 years ago, and the marriage sank. A friend of a friend experienced the same result. It is the Queen Marry-Not.) Long Beach is also building a \$500-million new civic center in another P3.

I learned more in one day of attending this workshop than in 3 days at many other events. More to come, likely in the next issue of ENR California.

Earlier in February, I had the equal honor of attending a [WTS-LA](#) rail discussion that featured Jeanet Owens of LA Metro, Jennifer Bergener of OCTA, Michelle Boehm and Noopur Jain of the California High-Speed Rail Authority and Kimberly Yu of Metrolink. I reunited with Joe Seibold of [Arcadis](#), whom I had not seen for years. Thank you, Sheila Given of LKG-CMC.



February was short and sweet.



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