More and more women are being introduced to a world they may not have seen as a real possibility. We’re providing women with training and support to move beyond traditional careers.

Phillip A. Washington
CEO, Metro
When I started my career at Metro, I was often the only woman at the table, whether that table was a meeting with engineers or at a construction site. It was highly unusual to see women serving in decision-making or technical roles, or working hands-on with tools or equipment. The glass ceiling for women was generally pretty low and it was a challenging environment.

Today, Metro is at the forefront of recognizing the important roles that women can, are and will play in the planning, building and operating of the LA transportation system. Our CEO, Phil Washington, is steering the industry in his commitment to fostering leadership qualities, providing equal opportunities for professional development and cultivating the next generation of workers.

Artists have the extraordinary ability to use their creative process and vision to explore and reveal the human experience in new and compelling ways. In light of this, we commissioned the remarkable artist Michele Asselin to capture the individual identities and collective spirit of a cross-section of women currently working at Metro through her unique lens. These women are all members of the inaugural Women & Girls Governing Council tasked with exploring innovative ways in which Metro can achieve a more gender-balanced workforce, accelerate career advancement for women and improve mobility for female ridership.

The luminous portraits that Asselin created include an urban planner, a mechanic, a bus operator and a rail security officer, amongst other professions. Asselin’s portraits highlight the many opportunities that the transportation industry offers.

I am deeply grateful to my colleagues who sat for portraits and to Michele for capturing this important moment.

Maya Emsden
Deputy Executive Officer
Metro Arts & Design
I have long been interested in how individuals choose to move through the world, starting with the life they are given and moving on to one that they create. Photographic portraiture has the power to capture this journey, between the innate and the elective that we all make. My artwork strives to provide insights into a subject’s choices within the social systems they inhabit. By incorporating relationships, circumstances and environments, I aim to give context and a narrative quality to the portraits and evince an understanding of the subject’s identity.

By spending time with Metro employees, I also witnessed the immense “backstage” of LA public transportation: maintenance hallways, voltage controls, signal log books, emergency exit hatches, cot rooms, service pits and archives that include every bus and subway schedule dating back to the 1960s.

With this project, Forward Motion, I want to highlight women working at Metro, as well as the environments in which they work. These employees volunteered to be photographed in a formal studio setting, and the portraits are adjoined to photographs of Metro infrastructure. The artworks are photo collages, and the images are shaped by silhouette outlines of the districts in which Metro operates. Each individual artwork, and the series as a whole, alludes to the vastness of LA’s public transportation system, the public it serves and the empowerment of women.

My hope is that the Metro patrons who experience these artworks will understand these women to be guides, guardians and builders of Los Angeles.

Michele Asselin
Artist
Anaïs Arrenquin
Laborer | Stops and Zones | On board 2013

I remember being so nervous about working for such a big company.

I feel proud that my job cares for its employees. We have equal opportunities for advancement. With Metro, the sky is the limit.
I clearly remember the feeling that I had walking through Union Station on my first day at Metro. Although I also previously worked in transportation in San Francisco, I had not experienced the energy of people moving through a historical transportation center, such as Union Station, until I arrived at Metro. The energy and dynamic motion of people passing through the portal and halls of Union Station was a moment in which I relished my role contributing to people’s mobility and lives through transportation.

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I am proud to have the opportunity to impact individual lives and communities. My role at Metro has allowed me the opportunity to have a measurable impact on the diverse communities in Los Angeles. The fact that I am a part of the present, future and legacy of Metro’s footprint transforming transportation in the region makes me proud.
Janayre Bertrand
Transportation Operations Supervisor | Operations/Central Instruction | On board 2014

My first day at Metro was amazing. I was overwhelmed by the welcome from everyone. My questions were already answered before I had the chance to ask them. I also loved that everyone was proud to say they were a Metro employee.

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My job allows me the opportunity to lead, inspire and motivate others to enhance the quality of their lives and the community. It allows for the opportunity to be empowered and advancement by learning from others and sharing what I have learned. Most importantly, my job makes me feel valued.
My first day at Metro started off scary, being that I had always worked at smaller companies with many fewer employees. However, that feeling quickly disappeared the moment when I was introduced to everyone in the department. Everyone was so friendly and welcoming! To this day, everyone in the building always smiles at you. It makes my day.

I feel great when an employee thanks me and tells me that they were able to get their direct deposit sorted out and paid on time because of my help. I can only imagine the frustration an employee goes through if their direct deposit went elsewhere.
My first day at Metro was scary but exciting. I walked into the building holding my head high, looking straight and with a smile on my face. Inside, I was shaking. I was nervous about starting a new job, coming from the private sector and not having any familiarity with the public sector. The company I had left was entirely different than a transportation agency, so I was concerned about my adjustment and hoped it would be smooth. The excitement came from knowing I had been selected to work for Metro. I was familiar with Metro being an outstanding agency that was making a difference in the community. I was about to be a part of it.

I'm a people person. My job requires me to interact with lots of people, such as the public and colleagues. I love it! I am so grateful that I have been in a fulfilling career at Metro for almost 12 years. I have grown so much professionally and personally. Metro has taught me to take on new challenges without being intimidated, communicate more effectively and build positive working relationships. Go Metro!
Wow, my first day (October 7, 1997) at Metro almost did not happen. I had just returned from Michigan the night before from burying my grandfather and had forgotten to take my credentials out of my travel bag. When I arrived at the El Monte training center, Demetrius Jones asked for my credentials; I started patting my body and realized that I had forgotten to transfer my credentials to my work bag. Demetrius stated that if I could have someone deliver my credentials, then he would allow me to start that day. If not, then I would have to wait until the next available class. My friend drove from Los Angeles to El Monte to deliver my credentials. The rest is history. Smile.

I enjoy assisting operators and co-workers. I am a giving person and take much pleasure in the service that I provide to both on many different levels. I motivate and encourage them to want to be more and do more. I encourage operators and co-workers to go back to school and go after their dreams and desires. I always tell them “If I can do it, so can you. Just one step or class at a time.” I have received my AA, BS and MS while being employed with Metro. I also plan to obtain my Doctoral Degree in Psychology. I take pride in being a service provider.
Antoinette Estrada  
Transit Security Officer | System Security & Law Enforcement | On board 2015

I remember walking in with a big smile on my face and butterflies in my tummy. It took a little over two years to join the Metro family, so I was happy, excited, nervous and proud.

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I am proud to wear my uniform and make sure patrons and employees are safe 100% of the time.
My first day at Metro was filled with excitement about my new position as a Senior Auditor for the Contracts Team in the Management Audit Services Department. At lunch time, I was pleasantly surprised when all of the managers and the Chief Auditor treated me to lunch. This was such a great gesture as I was able to interact and learn more about the agency in a comfortable setting. During the afternoon, my manager provided a brief overview of the department policies, membership with internal audit association and how to get around using Metro rail and bus. My first day experience was quite pleasant and a great start to my Metro career.

What makes me feel proud of my job is that each day I have the opportunity to make a difference. As auditors, we are tasked with the responsibility of ensuring sound practices in projects that are undertaken by the agency. On a daily basis, I also get to experience the innovative learning environment here at Metro.
Susan Gray
Director | Arts & Design | On board 2009

I am always reminded that it’s a privilege to work alongside a wonderful community that embraces innovation and creativity. It’s an intense work environment requiring sophisticated design skills and artistic vision to step up and play an important role in shaping the face and fabric of our dynamic city-region.

We apply creativity and spirit to the most difficult urban problems and sensitively arrive at solutions that engage and enhance our communities. The resulting beauty and sense of comfort in our surroundings create a beacon that shows that positive change is possible.
Pamela Gutierrez-Blackwood  
Chief Administrative Analyst | Information Technology System Administration | On board 2011

I remembered how welcoming and helpful the project staff was on bringing me up to speed on the Crenshaw/LAX Transit Project. The project was about to start construction when I joined Metro. They gave me the project history up to that point.

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It makes me feel proud that I am making a contribution, no matter how small, in improving the transit system in Los Angeles, as well as in changing the lives of Angelenos.
Imelda Hernandez  
Senior Administrative Analyst | Workforce Services | On board 2014

I remember standing outside of the Gateway Headquarters Building on a bright and somewhat breezy summer morning. Although I felt tiny standing next to the tall building and palm trees, everything felt right and I was filled with excitement to start a new journey of personal and professional growth.

At a micro level, problem-solving to support my peers’ line of work is incredibly satisfying. At a macro level, I value Metro’s leadership in helping disadvantaged communities gain access to critical resources and vital opportunities.
Emertha N. Jones
Bus Operator | Transportation Division 8 | On board 1992

My first day at the time was with RTD/Metro. It was exciting. I felt I had arrived.

I am proud to be a part of the family of transportation that has expanded and is meeting the needs of so many people through rail and buses. I never thought I would see the day that we would be transporting people underground in Los Angeles.
As soon as I walked into Metro on my first day, I was very happy and proud of myself for becoming part of Metro family. I remembered coworkers were very friendly and welcomed me to Metro. I felt on my first day that I was in a great and safe place to begin my career as an engineer at Metro.

Most of the projects that I am working on are very demanding with deadlines to meet. I have to go out in the field and work with other departments, as well as coordinate with contractors to complete my projects. I am very happy and proud of myself for working with different people with different backgrounds, giving 100% attention, organizing, planning and completing my projects on time. Since we don’t have that many women engineers in Metro, it gives hope and belief to other girls that they can choose a career path as a woman engineer, too. There are not many women who study Electrical Engineering. I am proud to be one of them, with two bachelor’s degrees and a master’s degree, too.
Meghna Khanna  
Senior Director | Countywide Planning & Development | On board 2014

I remember telling myself that the task at hand is going to be enormous. I wanted to not just be ready for the challenge, but also be prepared to exceed at all levels.

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It is very exciting to be part of an agency that is working towards transforming the Los Angeles mobility landscape. Our strategies are cutting-edge, admired by professional peers from other cities, and that kind of progressive mindset provides a huge opportunity for working with both private and public sectors to bring good transit services to communities.
On my first day at Metro, I was welcomed into a group of women in the Accounting Department (where I spent my first six months). The first thing they said to me was to get out of accounting as fast as possible because they could tell that I didn’t belong and they didn’t want me to feel stuck in the department. I finished my six-month probationary period on a Monday and applied for a position with Board Administration the same day. Those words of advice have stayed with me since day one.

I am proud that I have created and fostered so many relationships within the Metro family. These relationships help grease the wheel that is the Board Report Process of which I manage throughout the entire agency. Without these relationships, it would feel like pulling teeth for information and status updates. There are only so many times that you can name-drop your department to get a response and these relationships make those drops unnecessary.
Mercedes Meneses  
Senior Transportation Planner | Long Range Transportation Plan | On board 1991

My first day of work was on February 11, 1991. At the time, I was a single mother with a two-year old daughter. I remember taking a leap of faith. I was scared, excited and optimistic in leaving a secure job at the Department of Water and Power to embark into the world of transportation and have never looked back. I am blessed to work at this amazing agency.

I am working at an agency that is changing the transportation industry. In all the years I have worked here, now is the most transformative time. Metro, with our CEO’s guidance, is making a concentrated effort in listening to women and girls and engaging all communities, especially those who have not always received their fair share of resources. Transit is more than just providing bus and train service. It is a necessary component in improving one’s quality of life, as equity is making its way into the agency’s core. It is an exciting time, and I am happy to be part of the process.
Anna I. Noyola
Manager | Third Party Administration | On board 2016

My first day at Metro was busy and extremely dynamic since I met so many friendly and brilliant people.

My biggest source of pride is a sense of accomplishment when items are completed, and I help the agency keep projects moving forward!
On the first day of my employment, I reported to 425 South Main Street (former headquarters of RTD). Needless to say, I was very nervous and didn’t know what to expect. I was greeted on the third floor by Leilia Bailey, Superintendent of Transportation. She made me feel welcomed and introduced me to the team. It was smooth sailing after that because she and my new team made me feel like a part of the team from the first day. First impressions are lasting impressions after 33 years.

I am most proud of the job that I do as a Director, because I ensure that the transit dependent public have an avenue to get to school, doctor appointments, work and play.
Haylie Patterson
Assistant Administrative Analyst | Real Estate Administration | On board 2013

I was really nervous to start working here, but I remember that people were nice and willing to give me a chance.

I am proud to be able to tell people that Metro is building a system to meet the growing public needs.
I remember an overwhelming feeling that I had absolutely no idea what I’d just signed up for. I had researched all the jargon from the job description and had a decent sense of the technical skills required for the position, but I had no clue what my actual day-to-day responsibilities would be.

Part of my job involves troubleshooting signal system malfunctions that can result in delays for our riders. I’m most proud when I can use my skills to minimize the impact of trouble calls on our passengers. I was a Metro patron long before I was an employee, so I know how important on-time service is.
Maria Reynolds
Director, Transportation Operations | Transportation Division 15 | On board 1985

I remember feeling happy and excited to begin my first day of full-time work with such a big agency! I remember feeling anxious as to what lay ahead and looking forward to the many opportunities that I was sure that RTD, Metro’s predecessor agency, would offer an eager, wide-eyed employee like me!

I am proud to have called Metro my “home away from home” for the past 32 years. I am proud that we provide a service to the public and work very hard every day to do so in the best way possible. I am proud that we are an agency of approximately 10,000 employees that are committed to our jobs and do everything possible to provide excellence in service and support to our riding public.
Lucila Robles De Garcia  
Customer Information Agent | Customer Relations/Information | On board 2003

My first day at Metro, I was scared and felt out of place in a workplace predominantly for men. At the end of that day, I realized that Metro would become my new home.

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Being able to help thousands of people get to work, school and medical appointments – it makes me feel proud to be part of their daily lives.
My first day at Metro was very exciting. I started with a week of orientation with other new hires. My entire class received orange bump caps. I wore my bump cap all the way home on the bus.

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Being an avid bus rider for many years, it is very important to me to make sure the bus I inspect, as an Inspection Mechanic, is in the best condition possible for the day’s journey. Nothing is worse than riding Metro and having your bus break down during your travels. Being a former Service Attendant for many years, I make sure the cleanliness of the coach I’m inspecting is up to par as well.
The artist commissioned for the *Forward Motion* series, Michele Asselin, explores the impact of social constructs on human experience through photography. She draws on editorial techniques to examine how people and places come to reflect the systems of which they are a part.

Early in her career, she worked for the Associated Press in the Middle East while living in Jerusalem. Back in the US, she worked as an editorial photographer, creating memorable portraits of the people of our time. Her work has been featured in *The New York Times Magazine, The New Yorker, Time Magazine, Esquire* and *New York Magazine*.

Asselin has been an artist-in-residence for the National Domestic Workers Alliance and has collaborated on projects with social organizations, Street to Home in New York City and The Facial Paralysis Institute in Los Angeles. In 2017, Asselin’s work was included in the Orange County Museum of Art Pacific Triennial: *Building as Ever*. Since, she has completed public art commissions in Los Angeles and Washington DC.

Asselin lives and works in Los Angeles, California.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Metro wishes to thank artist Michele Asselin for contributing her vision and ideas to Forward Motion. We would also like to thank the Metro employees, who participated in this important project, and the Women & Girls Governing Council, for exploring innovative ways to champion the work of women in the transportation industry. Finally, gratitude goes to the board members, executives and staff who support the work of women working in a range of professions at Metro.

Forward Motion is a photographic portrait project of Metro Art featuring the artworks of Michele Asselin. Metro’s art program enhances the customer experience with innovative, award-winning visual and performing arts programming that encourages ridership and connects people, sites and neighborhoods throughout Los Angeles County.

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The 12 artwork collages in the opening and closing spreads are presented in an exhibition at Union Station, 2019.