



Behind the Scenes

Executive Director's Report

As 2026 begins, Access staff is preparing for a busy year highlighted by the following initiatives:

- > In the first half of the year, Access hopes to approve construction decisions for our operations and maintenance facilities in the Southern Region and the Antelope Valley. These decisions will be based on the cost of the bids that we get back and the amount of funding available.
- > Los Angeles will be hosting 8 World Cup games this year in June and July. Access will be providing transportation to the games and also at the games to make sure they are accessible to all. We will continue to be involved in 2028 Olympic and Paralympic planning as well.
- > We have already started the FY 2027 budget process and will be taking a preliminary budget number to our Board at the January meeting.

These and other important projects will be outlined in our five-year Strategic Plan, which is tentatively scheduled to go to the Access Board in February.

Andre Colaiace
Executive Director

Access contractor comes through for flood victims

The Antelope Valley Region features, among other things, miles of sprawling high desert floodplain. Most of the time, the floodplain is dry, to the point that roads pass straight through without bridges. When the weather conditions are right, however, as they were late on Christmas Eve, when a significant storm swept through the valley, the dry chaparral can become a raging torrent, with floodwaters rushing right over the paved roads east of Palmdale and Lancaster proper.



Social media post (Vanevalle from TikTok) showing a large truck that was apparently swept away in the flood.

The Los Angeles County Office of Emergency Management called the Access Emergency Management Coordinator (me) that night, explaining that there were flood victims who needed transportation from a park to shelter and a hotel after being rescued by the Los Angeles County Fire Department. The victims were cold, wet and scared, some with scrapes and bruises from having to take shelter on top of their cars after driving into the floodwaters and getting swept downstream.

"A couple that did not know water was coming up inside the vehicle and the car sank and they tried to get up and had to get in top of their car until someone came. They also had a young child with them. It was very scary. I was happy that they made it. That they were safe. Thanked everyone. They were just worried about their lives not even their vehicle," said road supervisor Trina Roland, who has been driving with Access for nearly seven years. TransDev is the Access contractor for the region, and General Manager Victor Garate shared how he felt about this mission from a company perspective and as a fellow human being.

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"One of the key items in our purpose is to serve the common good. It was very important for our staff to assist for that common good. I was so happy that we were able to help people who were in need," Garate said.

Garate was in the middle of preparing for Christmas when he jumped into action after getting Access' call. Things needed to move quickly, due to the late hour, before staff went home for the day. Access staff wondered if the contractor would be available, since so many people were likely focused on the coming holiday. Garate and his team did not hesitate, sending four vehicles, including supervisors, to the park after making sure that safety was first and foremost. Garate did not want to add to the emergency by having the Access contractor drivers get caught in floodwaters themselves. Fortunately, given his knowledge of the local area as a resident of the region, Garate knew which routes the team should take to try to avoid any flooded roads.

The responding staff encountered people who had been through quite an ordeal.

"One family lost their cars, shoes, gifts... it was so heartbreaking. She never thought her car would flood like that. She was so grateful that her kids were with her. Her daughter almost got swept away. There was a guy that lost his shirt, shoes, money, wallet, everything! They were all very grateful. They were very cold," said Carmen Marquez, a driver for over six years.

The responding team had some advice for anyone thinking of driving through a flooded road.

"Evaluate the hazard, do not take chances assuming you can cross it. Take other means to get to your destination," said driver Joe Jacinto, who added that he was "devastated and felt for the community."

"Please turn around. Call someone to escort you or go a different way. It's so dangerous," Marquez explained. Road supervisor Carlos Perez echoed these sentiments, saying that people should listen to the warnings and turn around.

The team in the Antelope Valley provides a vital service, come rain, snow, flood, dust storm or ice, day in and day out in the form of the next-day Access paratransit service. On Christmas Eve and into Christmas itself, they were able to help nine flood victims in a big way, going beyond their usual mission.

"I am very proud of all the staff in the Antelope Valley. Our drivers and Road Supervisors go through a lot. However, in this case they were willing to stay and assist all victims that were in need. I am so proud and grateful to work with such a professional crew!" exclaimed Garate.

Alex Chrisman
Emergency Management Coordinator

Access' CTSA Program hosts a National Transit Database training in El Monte

The National Transit Database (NTD) is a massive repository of data related to public transit services across the United States. Transit systems provide data to NTD on financial costs, operating statistics, and vehicle and/or public station conditions. This data, across all systems, is designed to help local, state and regional planning efforts through multi-year comparisons of data provided by different systems. The Federal Transit

Administration also uses NTD data to apportion funding to urban and rural area systems across the country.

NTD uses its own unique forms for transit systems to use to submit all the required financial, operational, and asset data. In some cases, these forms can be confusing for staff to fill out.



Last month, Access' CTSA set up a valuable training provided through the National Transit Institute with instructors Mitchell Rose of Philadelphia's SEPTA transit system and Leigh Lumsden of NTD. Attendees came from across southern California, but also from transit systems in Oregon, New Mexico, and Hawaii.

The instructors walked the class of almost three dozen participants through the different forms, explaining their purposes and providing tips on how to avoid common errors when reporting.

This training was the final CTSA training of the 2025 calendar year, and a very valuable training to close out another year of great instruction.

Eric J. Haack
Manager of Strategic Planning

Commendations

Southern Region

"The driver, Israel, was polite and a good driver. I would like to thank him."

Zabel Pinedjian
Rider since September 2014

ALTA

"Driver Maria Martinez was an excellent driver and completely wonderful. I am very happy."

Jamileh Shanhroudi
Rider since June 2023