

Get to Know IBTTA's 2021 President, Mark Compton

In addition to serving as IBTTA's 2021 President, Mark is the Chief Executive Officer for the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission.

Bill Cramer, Communications Director, IBTTA, recently sat down with Mark Compton, virtually, to learn a bit more about his background and interests.

Q: You've had the opportunity to view transportation and tolling through several different lenses in the course of your career. You became CEO of the PA Turnpike in 2013. Please tell us about your various roles and how you have seen the industry grow and change?

A: My career path has provided me various perspectives from different lenses. I often joke that my resume reads like a guy that cannot keep a job. However, I would say the focus of all those lenses has been the safe and reliable operation of our roadways.

I began at the PA Dept of Transportation back in the early 90s and thereafter went to a consulting firm for a period, and then to a mid-Atlantic highway contractor. After several years on the contractor side, I returned to PennDOT where I served as the Deputy Secretary for Administration. It was from that point I was asked to move to the PA Turnpike Commission as CEO. The Commission is a sister agency to PennDOT but operates independently. I've been with the Commission since February 2013 and I must say it has been among the most challenging and exhilarating work I have done.

Throughout my career, I have been blessed to work with many good people who have taught me so much. We have lots of amazing people in this industry – great thinkers, great innovators, and just fine individuals and colleagues. That is one thing that hasn't changed – the fact that our industry is filled with people who love a challenge, are not afraid to work hard, and want to keep innovating.

The biggest takeaway I would like to share is that no matter which role you play, our industry is first and foremost about public service. The pride we all take from driving our families past a great project we've worked on, the "in-it-together" environment we work hard to create, and the understanding that safety and value for our travelers needs to drive everything we do.

Q. As CEO of America's First Superhighway, how long have you been a member or involved with IBTTA?

A: It is my understanding that the PTC was among the first members of IBTTA. IBTTA was established in 1932. The PA Turnpike in 1940. So, the PA Turnpike has a long tradition of valuing collegiality and business networking. Sorry if I sound like a PSA – but those are truly key among the value of IBTTA – connections and communication.

I was elected to the IBTTA Board in 2015. I was asked to Chair the Government Affairs Committee by then-President Emanuela Stocchi. I served on the Awards Committee, Audit Committee, was the liaison

to the Platinum Sponsors and served on the Membership Committee. It has been a true pleasure to be a part of the Executive Committee these past several years.

Q. What is the number-one benefit you and the PA Turnpike receive by being a member of IBTTA?

A: It's easy for me to see that the number-one benefit is relationships and information sharing within these relationships. By that, I mean I can pick up the phone and tap into the expertise and experience of the best minds in our industry. Everyone is eager to help, supply information, and walk and talk me through the issues. Our organization compares more with fellow IBTTA members than we do the DOT or neighboring transit agencies.

Also, in some of our darkest or most challenging days at the PTC, IBTTA members were some of the first calls I received. I will never forget so many fellow members calling me and offering their support. It drove home the point to me that we are all in this together.

Q: Please share with us your vision for 2021 and how your theme, Leading Through Disruption, fits in?

A: The theme has evolved, as everything in 2020 has. I was so proud to be a part of IBTTA in 2020 due to the responsiveness of this association. Samuel Johnson, Pat Jones and all of the staff deserve an extraordinary amount of credit for navigating us through this extraordinary time. No association has done it better.

I hope this theme of Leading Through Disruption speaks to the realization that, while we all want to get back to a sense of normalcy, we cannot — and should not — forget all the good things we've been able to do in 2020.

Again, the extraordinary, unpredictable nature of this time, in many ways, inspired and required us to work more as a team than ever before. Our industry has been agile, flexible and able to pivot and respond quickly to last year's changes and challenges as they emerged.

This year will be about finding the hybrid model to move forward. We all desire in-person meetings. But we cannot keep these new virtual connections we made in 2020 through in-person meetings alone. The new connections are real, these new people are doing great work and we must keep this going. What is important to us now, what has evolved quicker due to the pandemic, must be continued to achieve success.

Q: What new projects, initiatives or committees do you plan to launch during your year as IBTTA President?

A: First and foremost, I want to continue the great work that has been the hallmark of IBTTA these past several years. One great example is the Task Force on Diversity, Social and Racial Justice. As I've said, 2021 will only be successful if this task force is flourishing. I and the entire Executive Committee are excited to see the outcomes of this task force. We are thankful for the great leadership being provided by Joi Dean and Ferzan Ahmed.

We are also excited for several new initiatives as well. I am grateful to John Keller and Kary Witt for starting an effort around Engineering and Construction. I am thankful for Jessica Carson and Mark Muriello for establishing a task force on leakage and lost revenue.

I have also asked for an expanded role for the Past President's Council and that of the Council of Platinum Sponsors. Both are going to work with the Board of Directors on the current strategic plan and will provide recommendations for revisions of the strategic plan. The goal of this effort is for every committee to provide input into the strategic plan. I have also asked for Past Presidents to take the year and provide recommendations, if deemed appropriate, for a regional structure to IBTTA.

It is an exciting time to be an IBTTA member.

Q: What do you see as the two or three biggest opportunities or challenges facing surface transportation today?

A: Funding, Work Force and Environmental Permitting.

Funding: We need federal action, and we need it now.

Work Force: I'm excited for the work of the Young Professionals Council (YPC) to harness this opportunity for the industry and the association. This is a key reason why we not only want to expand their voice, but we also want to expand the role of mentoring within the association. These folks have been taking the association by storm; all I can say is that we want more, more, more!

Environmental Permitting: This often gets lost in the funding discussion, but it also needs to be a key component of the overall funding package. These agencies are underfunded and understaffed. It is tough for these people to get through all the permit applications in an ever-changing regulatory environment. It is time for us to be a bigger advocate for these agencies as well.

Q: What role is IBTTA playing in building practical solutions on these issues?

A: In my mind, we must step up our advocacy with a chorus of other transportation-related associations. We need to be at the table and communicate the value proposition and the fact that inaction also has a significant cost. The cost of continuing to do nothing is quite real.

I also believe that permitting component needs to be addressed here as well. It is tough for an elected official to put up a tax vote and not have their constituents reap the benefits for 12 years. Appropriate

staffing levels in regulatory agencies with a mindset of being a willing partner can shorten that process. IBTTA can play a big role in this as our member agencies can typically advance projects more efficiently. We need to communicate that as part of our value proposition. We have a lot to offer!

On the workforce issue, I cannot have a conversation with many of you where we do not speak of how we love the industry. We need to find a better way of communicating that passion to individuals getting ready to make career decisions. As I stated, we need to continue to empower the YPC and candidly, get out of their way. They've proven to have a successful model, now let's replicate and expand that model outside the walls of IBTTA.

Q: What is your favorite food, book, movie, music or way to spend your free time?

A: The most impactful book for me is the bible (which I must admit I need to spend more time reading).

The last book I finished was written by the Pennsylvania Turnpike's own Chief Compliance Officer Ray Morrow. The book is entitled "Broken Shield" and details an undercover operation that Ray led during his distinguished career at the FBI. A lifelong read for me is Robert Caro's, "The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York."

My wife and I have four children, so a lot of my time outside the office is reserved for them. I have had the opportunity to coach my youngest son in baseball through the past several years. I teasingly tell him I do not love it, but, actually, I do. This past year, my oldest son coached with me, and that was an amazing experience. One of the blessings of COVID 19 was the ability to have all of us together.

I also enjoy watching my two daughters play soccer. It has become a joy of mine to watch the people I love the most do what they love to do. In 2020 we, as a family — and my wife and I as a couple — spent a lot of time hiking, kayaking and bike riding. We strive to make the most of our time outside.

As a hobby, I do love to run (or at my speed more of jog), and I have picked up the guitar over the past several years. However, my guitar playing is a lot like my golf game...very frustrating!

Walt Disney once said, "the way to get started is to quit talking and start doing." I look forward to doing a lot alongside you all in 2021!

###