

Tanisha Hall

CEO and Principal, Fairpointe Planning, LLC

Tanisha Hall's path to transportation planning was one of discovery. She started as a business administration major at Southern University at New Orleans but soon learned that some of her classmates were not finding jobs. That prompted her to consider a second major. "A degree in transportation logistics required only 18 extra hours, so I signed up," she explains. "I was fascinated with it! I never thought about how products get from one place to another."

Business was still Hall's primary focus when she entered graduate school at the University of Iowa—until she discovered urban planning. "Growing up in New Orleans, I had always been a public transit user," she continues. "I caught a bus. I caught a ferry sometimes. I caught a streetcar occasionally. I carpooled to get to class because I didn't own a car until my junior year of undergraduate school. I was a multimodal user and had never thought about all that. From the start, I was ready to take on the world of business. I was all about the power suits and pumps, but something said, 'Nope! You're going to be a planner!' So I earned a master's degree in urban planning with an emphasis in transportation."

Hall's career first took her to Tennessee, where she served two stints as the research and transportation director for the Greater Nashville Regional Council; then to Georgia as senior transportation planner for the Atlanta Regional Commission; and on to the same role for UrbanTrans Consultants, also in Atlanta. In 2012, she returned to Tennessee to become the long-range planning director for the Tennessee Department of Transportation, where she managed the development of the agency's 25-Year Long Range Transportation Policy plan, which outlined the state's long-term vision for transportation. Then, in 2018, she established her own management consulting firm, with a focus on transportation planning.

Hall's firm uses data analysis, research, and public engagement to help a community identify its transportation issues. Then

it recommends ways to improve the community's transportation mobility. "We focus heavily on community engagement," she states. "That part really motivates me. If you do engagement well, the rest of the project can go well. But if you don't do it well, that's when people get quite upset because they don't feel heard."



"Intentionality is extremely important when it comes to having a diverse group of people involved in solving problems."

Hall's current projects devise mobility plans for communities that are on the cusp of significant development flowing in from urban areas. "Some are rural communities, and some are just outside of urban areas," she explains. "They see change coming and want to be proactive in how they prepare for it. We're working with them to determine how people get around. Are there opportunities to include bicycles and walking? Are they looking at electric charging stations for vehicles? Is there a need to connect

parks, libraries, or educational institutions in their mobility? All of these elements factor into the big picture."

Hall keeps her finger on the industry's pulse through participation in several organizations and projects. She is the Nashville Chapter vice president of the Conference of Minority Transportation Officials and the Middle Tennessee Chapter past president of the Women's Transportation Seminar. She also has served on the Special Committee on Research and Innovation for the American Association of State Highway Transportation Officials.

Her work with the Transportation Research Board includes serving as a member of the Standing Committee on Economic Development and Land Use. She has chaired two National Cooperative Highway Research Program (NCHRP) project panels and currently serves as a panel member on NCHRP Project 20-113: Research Roadmap—Transformational Technologies (other than CV/AV).

Hall has observed that minorities are not well represented in the transportation planning field and encourages organizations to embrace diversity: "Be intentional about including different people in your organization. Be intentional about including different people in your projects. Intentionality is extremely important when it comes to having a diverse group of people involved in solving problems."

Diversity also is important to her company's mission. "Minorities need to be involved in the research process and be recognized as thought leaders in the industry; it benefits the industry and the public," she declares. "So many times, we aren't given chances, and our abilities are discounted. I want to provide opportunities and help grow the next generation of transportation planners, but a diverse group who understands the process, has the skill set, and is ready to go. Someone has to commit to that. Why not me?"