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member to member

Herbert S. Levinson, P.E., Dr. ENG, NAE

This issue of ITE Journal explores many of the connections transportation professionals have between the past and the present in looking forward to addressing future challenges. It is fitting, therefore, that ITE Honorary Member Herbert S. Levinson is featured in this issue, both through this member profile and an op/ed column on page 20. With his career spanning half a century, Herb is a key contributor to the profession’s technical body of knowledge and is widely recognized as one of the pioneers of transportation engineering practice and transportation planning. Few transportation professionals have been so extensively published. During his prolific career he has authored several books, research reports, and more than 200 publications. The Transportation Research Board (TRB), American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE), ITE, and a myriad of other organizations cite more than 100 of Herb’s papers. He continues to write today, with his most recent book, Road Traffic Congestion: A Concise Guide, which he co-authored with John C. Falocchio, published in April 2015.

Herb’s career has included employment with the Chicago Park District, Wilbur Smith and Associates, and his own firm. Throughout his career, he has been a consultant to government agencies in the USA and abroad. He has consulted to the World Bank, United Nations, Puerto Rico Planning Board, Singapore Urban Redevelopment Authority, and the U.S. Federal Transit Administration. He has worked on projects throughout the United States and Canada, in the Virgin Islands, Mauritius, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan, and China.

Herb has served on the faculty of Yale University, the University of Connecticut, the Polytechnic Institute of New York University. He is an Icon Mentor (Senior Research Fellow) at the Urban Transportation Research Center at City College, New York. In 1994, he was selected for recognition that only a few transportation professionals have received—election as a member of the National Academy of Engineering. Most recently, Herb received the 2014 Professional Achievement Award from the Illinois Institute of Technology Alumni Association.

Herb recently spoke with ITE Journal about his life-long calling as a transportation professional and his efforts to produce what he humbly refers to as “usable” materials for the profession.

ITEJ: How did you become interested in the transportation engineering and planning profession?

HERB LEVINSON: Many people are born with natural skills or talents, whether they be musical, or mechanical, or so on. At an early age in elementary school, I recognized that I noticed the traffic problems at intersections. I spent time drawing tracks on butcher paper as I observed roadway patterns and the rapid transit lines in Chicago’s northwest side where I grew up. In high school, I read many books on transportation and public transit, such as Street Traffic Control by Miller McClintock and Blake and Jackson’s Electric Railway Transportation. I found the books to be very broad, and as I was intrigued by transportation, I decided to study it—first by becoming a civil engineer in order to get into the Yale University Bureau of Highway Traffic, where I received a scholarship after my initial work for the Traffic Engineering Section of the Chicago Park District in 1949.

Before I started college, however, I was voluntarily inducted into the Army in 1943. I spent three years in service. During my first year, which I spent at Washington...
University in St. Louis, Missouri, I rode and observed the area street car lines, and my second year at Wright Field near Dayton, Ohio gave me the opportunity to ride the Shaker Rapid in Cleveland, Ohio.

After graduating from the Yale Bureau, I went to work for Wilbur Smith, starting to write specifications for traffic signals and doing shopping center designs and layouts. Over the next 28 years as a full-time associate at Wilbur Smith and Associates, where I had become senior vice president, I developed a broad range of experience in almost every aspect of the transportation and traffic. I began publishing extensively, ultimately gaining credibility in the research side of the profession working on many papers for the Transportation Research Board and ITE.

**ITEJ:** What advice do you have for ITE members just starting their careers?

**HL:** In this profession, you can be analytical, but you need to go out and see if your designs and analyses actually make sense. I encourage young members to broaden themselves throughout their careers, and focus on more than number crunching by looking at how your work relates to the bigger picture of the city and the community. A creative thought process is needed, which means looking at and experiencing the street in person and not just from an office window.

I’ve tried to be positive and realistic in my approach to transportation engineering. I learned from Wilbur Smith to have a positive attitude. He encouraged, “Don’t tell me why you can’t do something, show me how you can.” In the more than 300 projects I have worked on as an independent consultant, I’ve looked at the positive aspects of the profession, and above all else, have worked to come up with usable results. *itej*

**Herbert S. Levinson P.E., Dr. ENG, NAE** graduated from Illinois Institute of Technology with a bachelor of science in civil engineering in 1949. He completed his graduate work at Northwestern University and earned a Certificate in Highway Traffic from the Yale University Bureau of Highway Traffic in 1952. He is a registered professional engineer in Connecticut, Massachusetts, and New York. In 2013, Illinois Institute of Technology awarded Herb an honorary doctorate in engineering.


Herb has made major contributions in access management, traffic congestion analysis, and parking. He directed the Metropolitan Boston Parking Study (1974); and helped formulate parking requirements for the Singapore Urban Redevelopment Authority (1990). He wrote *Parking in the City Center* in 1965 and co-authored the ENO foundation book *Parking* in 1990.

Herb is a member of the American Planning Association, the American Society of Civil Engineers (Fellow), the Institute of Transportation Engineers (Honorary), the Transportation Research Board, and the National Academy of Engineering. He received awards from the American Society of Civil Engineers (1993, 1997, 2003), the Connecticut Academy of Science and Engineering (2003), the Institute of Transportation Engineers (1979, 1981, 1997), and the Transportation Research Board (1997). He received the presidential Design Award for Excellence in 1988. Herb has been listed in *Who’s Who in Engineering* and *Who’s Who in America*. He extends special thanks to his wife Sally, who has supported and counseled him throughout his career during their many years of marriage.

Herb’s newest publication, *Road Traffic Congestion: A Concise Guide*, will be available soon in the ITE Bookstore.