I would like to start by thanking ITE for providing the perfect platform for transportation professionals from across the world to network. I would like to express my deep appreciation to the Transportation Consultants Council (TCC) for providing financial support to young professionals, such as me, to attend the meeting. As a budding engineer, I could connect with other ITE members, exchange knowledge, and share experiences from diversified backgrounds. It was a rewarding experience to meet and greet the “Who’s Who” of transportation professionals.

I arrived in San Antonio on Sunday early afternoon. I attended the TCC meeting the same day and learnt more about the TCC committee and its various activities. I got a chance to meet John Kennedy, Jeff Arey, Siva Narla and many others. I am motivated to get actively involved in the council activities. I learnt about ITE’s new webpage on becoming a leader in the transportation profession. During the TCC meeting, scholarship winners were encouraged to provide feedback to ITE in our write-ups. It is important for young professionals to develop leadership, public speaking, management, technical writing and other soft skills along with technical skills. While in ITE District 6, I had actively participated in the mentoring program with Ms. Jenny Grote, Past President of International ITE, as my mentor. She continues to be my “unofficial” mentor till today and I continue to learn a lot about both soft and technical skills. I deeply appreciate the guidance and counseling she provided me and the positive impacts she made on my career. It would be beneficial for all ITE students and younger members to be mentored by a senior, more experienced member. It could be lunch meetings every month, every other month, and even phone conversations if a mentor and mentee pair cannot be found in the same place. I anticipate the mentor-mentee matching program to be upfront intensive and might need coordination at the ITE local or regional level. The mentor and mentee, once matched, would typically discuss career path, career development, technical skills, networking, and other topics of interest. If there are fewer mentors than mentees, it might be possible to pair one mentor with multiple mentees and conduct a common session for all. Such continued interaction and feedback from senior professionals would enhance and accelerate the mentees’ career development. The mentees would also learn from their mentors about how they faced different challenges in their career. This mentorship program can be supplemented by webpages, workshops and webinars directed towards younger members. This would direct them along the path to success and help the transportation community by ensuring excellent contributions from all its members. There could also be ITE Younger Member Committees for younger professionals to interact and build relationships. I personally feel that the ITE leadership webpage is a great start to shape the future of our profession.

The ITE President, Kenneth Voigt delivered the welcome speech and introduced the Burton W. Marsh Distinguished Service Award and the Theodore M. Matson Memorial Award winners. I was encouraged to know about the two professionals totally dedicated to the transportation community. The keynote speaker, Drayton Maclane Jr. delivered an outstanding speech and motivated each one of us. I was inspired by his thoughts on daring to dream, operating out of imagination and creativity, seeking opportunities in adversity, and finding great partners. His speech was extremely thought-provoking and made me realize the importance of working smart and hard and adapting to changes.

I attended various technical sessions and learnt about experiences from different agencies and consultants. The sessions were informative as well as interesting. During the Innovative Design Strategies, I learnt about the various innovative and context-sensitive approaches that different agencies are adopting to improve safety, mobility, and reliability of our transportation system. I learnt about the best practices in the Traffic Signal Operations and Maintenance session. The Integrated Corridors and Managed Lanes session provided insight into the process of planning and developing managed lanes as tools for balancing supply and demand in the transportation system.

I had the opportunity to attend the ITE Meeting as a speaker as well. I presented during the Transit Signal Priority session on modeling transit signal priority and queue jumpers for bus rapid transit. I strengthened my professional growth and gained public speaking skills and confidence after presenting in front of a big
group of professionals. I also learnt a lot from the other speakers and their experiences. The audience seemed interested and asked a lot of questions. Overall, it was a great platform to exchange thoughts, ideas, and experiences.

During the Surface Transportation Authorization Workshop, we discussed about the ITE Policy Recommendation, the current funding issues and the state of the economy. The attendees emphasized on explaining to the general public about how our transportation system is directly related to our day-to-day lives and the safety implications of not investing appropriately in our infrastructure. There were discussions on coordinating with other civil engineering professional organizations to attract the media’s attention to the need to invest in our infrastructure. There were also discussions on the increasing importance of alternative transportation funding sources and public-private partnerships.

The Exhibit Hall looked impressive and provided numerous opportunities for transportation professionals to interact and exchange knowledge. I volunteered in my firm’s (Kimley-Horn and Associates) exhibit booth and answered queries from the attendees. I also checked the latest innovations and the exhibitors did a great job explaining their products and experiences. I was impressed to see the growing importance to safety and sustainability and the use of green technology to reduce transportation's impact on the environment and the society. It made me realize the importance of reducing our growing carbon footprint.

I volunteered at the information desk and had the opportunity to answer different queries. Surprisingly most of them were transportation related, ranging from a transit map of downtown San Antonio, transportation modes available to get to the airport, and the nearest place to get a taxi. I also had the privilege of talking to many senior ITE members who stopped by the desk. Other highlights of the ITE Annual Meeting were the various social functions, which provided an informal and relaxed setting for the attendees to mingle. I attended the Welcome to Texas Reception, the Attendee Reception, the Honorees Dinner, and the Texas Transportation Institute (TTI) Reception. There were numerous warm and unforgettable moments. Unfortunately, I could not attend the technical tours but hear that they were educational too. I also attended the Texas District Annual Business Meeting and caught up with my fellow TexITE members. Additionally, I offered to volunteer during the next TexITE Winter Meeting.

During the Annual Meeting, I had experiences as an attendee, speaker, volunteer, exhibitor, and an ITE TCC young professional scholarship winner. I was really honored in all my roles and am grateful to ITE. I had the opportunity to network with other professionals and interacted with them during lunch and dinner as well. The venue of the Annual Meeting in downtown San Antonio was great for a stroll along the beautiful Riverwalk and offered a great variety of food. The entire Riverwalk was very vibrant and lively and made the attendees feel the same way. At the end of Wednesday, the three days seemed to just fly by. I was impressed to see the effort and the level of detail that the ITE organizing committee put in to make the Annual Meeting a grand success. They were really committed in everything they did, starting from registration to sessions, social functions, and technical tours. It showed how much hard work and devotion went into organizing the meeting and making it run smooth.

I am an Associate Member of ITE. I had started my ITE involvement as a student member, served as a student chapter president, and look forward to serve as an officer in the future. I am enthusiastically involved with the Dallas Section of TexITE and actively participate in our monthly meetings. Attending the ITE Annual Meeting broadened my perspective. I came back refreshed with renewed energy to continue to contribute to the ever-growing field of Transportation Engineering. I would like to thank ITE for giving me such a wonderful chance to interact with experienced professionals and learn more about our industry by attending the ITE Annual Meeting. I am looking forward to attending many such meetings in the future.

Dhruva Lahon, P.E. (TX)
Kimley-Horn and Associates, Inc.
12700 Park Central Drive
Suite 1800
Dallas, TX 75251
Tel: (972) 770-1305
Fax: (972) 239-3820