

Jack Lettiere

A Transportation Planning Innovator



Jack Lettiere, winner of our new Resource Efficiency Achievement Award.

When Jack Lettiere was appointed head of the New Jersey Department of Transportation in December 2002, this Garden State agency wasn't known for its progressive thinking.

"In transportation departments across the nation, the highways, the bridge—the structures—were the thing, but that thinking was upside down," recalls the former DOT Commissioner. "Transportation departments are not in the highway business, we're in the community-building business. That requires having a well thought-out sense of what a transportation system is supposed to do."

In his four years as Commissioner, Jack Lettiere changed the culture of NJ DOT by relentlessly promoting the link between transportation and land use. He is credited with helping to turn NJ DOT into one of the more progressive transportation departments in the nation, and PlanSmart NJ could think of no better person to honor with our new Resource Efficiency Achievement Award.

"Highways have to be built as if you were living there," says Lettiere. "I used to tell my fellow engineers, what if your mom lived there? You wouldn't have the roadway cutting through the town like that. We have to look at how the community is designed and even how long you take to build the road. All of this makes a real difference in people's lives. Our job is to figure out how transportation can fit best into a community. Moving people and goods, livable communities, and the environment are not mutually exclusive. This is the 21st century; it's about time that we put all of these factors in the problem-solving equation."

Starting out as an industrial engineer, Lettiere worked at NJ DOT for more than 31 years. He left his post as Commissioner in January 2006 to spend more time with his family. "I was missing too many of my daughter's basketball games," he says.

Today, Lettiere heads up a private transportation consulting firm in Newtown, Pa., and serves as Chairman of Nation'sPort, a bi-state coalition of business and government representatives seeking to promote the safe, efficient and sound movement of goods through the Port of New York and New Jersey.

Land use planning is still top-of-mind for Lettiere, as he readies himself for new challenges. "Transportation plays a significant role in economic development, particularly in the area around the Port of New York and New Jersey. Right now, the warehouses and depots are not located close to the Port. And that's not good for business, the environment or transportation."

But Lettiere, as always, is optimistic. "Land use issues are extraordinarily complicated, but there are solutions out there. We just have to push people to be more creative." ■

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