

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE — Oct. 30, 2018**

**COMTO Washington State presents academic scholarships, industry awards Oct. 30**

*Conference of Minority Transportation Officials event takes place at the Bell Harbor International Conference Center*

SEATTLE, WA – Washington state’s chapter of the Conference of Minority Transportation Officials (COMTO WS) will recognize industry achievers and award its first round of academic scholarships Tuesday, Oct. 30, 5:30-9 p.m. at the Bell Harbor International Conference Center. Sound Transit Chief Executive Officer Peter Rogoff, a founder of COMTO WS, will serve as emcee for the Second Annual Awards Banquet. The program will feature a keynote speech from Verizon Product Marketing Manager Greta Knappenberger on Smart Cities, Smart Communities: Planes, Trains and Automobiles. Banquet guests will have opportunities to experience what a smart city looks like in terms of vehicles, communications and utilities, thanks to a virtual reality booth from event sponsor HNTB. The program includes Washington State Department of Transportation Secretary Roger Millar; King County Metro General Manager Rob Gannon, who is also a founder of COMTO WS; HNTB CEO Rob Slimp; and COMTO National President Bradley Mims as guest speakers.

“Thanks to our sponsors, this year we are presenting \$15,000 in scholarships to 12 students seeking post-secondary credentials in fields from aviation to urban planning,” said COMTO WS President Linneth Riley-Hall. “And this is after growing our fledgling summer internship program from three interns at one agency to 15 at two agencies. It is all part of efforts to increase diversity and inclusion at all levels of the transportation industry.”

Scholarship recipients include former COMTO WS intern Jeevun (Paul) Vethanayagam, a senior electrical engineering major at Eastern Washington University. Last summer Vethanayagam spent 10 weeks working in systems engineering at Sound Transit. The experience changed his life.

"Even though we raised Jeevun [to] value education, he felt higher education was a waste of time because his friends were making 'decent' money without degrees," said Shanthi Vethanayagam, his mother. "Only after he returned from the COMTO internship did he understand the use of education. What his parents were not able to impress upon him, his short-term internship was able to communicate. Thank you COMTO WS and Sound Transit for your investment."

With internships, scholarships and education initiatives, the 32<sup>nd</sup> chapter of COMTO is working to develop talent and build a strong pipeline of transportation professionals of all ages in all services, including executive management, legal, accounting, planning, communications, engineering, maintenance and operations.

Rogoff, Gannon, Riley-Hall, Systems Consulting CEO Everette Adams (past president), Triunity Engineering & Management CEO Jonnie Thomas, Sound Transit Community Outreach Specialist Rhonda Dixon and a small group of public and private sector professionals founded COMTO WS in March 2017. In addition to agencies and individuals, membership in COMTO WS is open to students; academic institutions; nonprofit organizations; private sector firms; and Historically Underutilized Businesses, including Disadvantaged Business Enterprises (DBEs), Airport Concession DBEs, Minority Business Enterprises, Women Business Enterprises and Veteran Business Enterprises and Disabled Veterans Enterprises. [More information about COMTO WS is available here.](#)

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