

O.A. (Sam) Elrahman

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O.A. (Sam) Elrahman promotes research across national borders. A native of Cairo, Egypt, he grew up seeing the operational, economic, environmental, and health crises caused by uncontrolled urban growth, population explosion, and unfettered car ownership in his hometown. “Internationalization is a critical lens that we need to adopt,” he advises. “We live on a small planet with finite resources. Problems experienced halfway around the world will have an impact here, on our doorsteps.”

Elrahman holds a bachelor of science in city and regional planning from the College of Engineering in Cairo, Egypt; a master’s degree in transportation planning and engineering from Polytechnic Institute of New York University (formerly Polytechnic University) in Brooklyn; a PhD in urban and environmental studies from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York; and a post graduate certificate in management development from Cornell University in Ithaca, New York. His career includes 32 years at the New York State Department of Transportation, observing, analyzing, and advising. His research and management experience during this time spanned environmental analysis, transit, project development, economic development, and policy. This diverse exposure led him to conclude that public policy must play a critical role in balancing the competing priorities of transportation, health, environment, and economic development. “I realized,” he admits, “that an economically efficient, well-functioning, productive society cannot be built at the expense of human health and well-being. Building sustainable communities where the needs of every member of society are taken into consideration must be the goal of each transportation professional.”

Elrahman transitioned from the public sector to academia in 2015, where his own research while a senior research scholar at Rensselaer’s Center for Transportation Infrastructure and Environment centered on the links



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between transportation, health, and collaborative governance. A prolific author on numerous transportation topics, he is on the editorial boards of *Case Studies on Transportation Policy* and the *International Journal of Global Environment Issues*. He also serves as a peer reviewer for TRB’s *Transportation Research Record* and is the coauthor of *Transportation and Public Health: An Integrated Approach to Policy, Planning, and Implementation*, published by Elsevier in 2019. “As a society,” Elrahman explains, “we cannot have parallel and separate fields of transportation, health, and environment. We need to train practitioners to work at the nexus of those three fields and pursue the vision of a sustainable future.”

He admits that this is not an easy pivot. “Science is on our side. There is plenty of evidence that supports sustainability.” Elrahman points out that we have done this before, citing today’s cleaner air and water as evidence of great strides

made in the past 30 to 40 years, thanks to public policy.

An active member of the TRB community since 1983, Elrahman has been a long-term participant in the International Coordinating Council (previously, the Committee on International Cooperation), which he co-chaired from 2013 to 2019. He championed mainstreaming an international perspective in transportation research through maintenance of a web-based information clearinghouse, dissemination of research results, and advanced technology transfer. With this focus on international cooperation and networking, the committee received a TRB Blue Ribbon Award honorable mention in 2018 “for mainstreaming an international perspective in transportation research and promoting international cooperation in transportation.”

Over the years, Elrahman has served on numerous TRB committees and project panels for the National Cooperative Highway Research Program. He is quick to point out that he has witnessed the innovation and creativity that are the hallmarks of the TRB community and benefited from opportunities to partner on scholarly efforts with members of the TRB community. “TRB has been an incubator of cutting-edge research partnerships and an international hub for researchers in the global transportation community,” he observes, emphasizing that, “for more than 30 years, TRB has served as my community—providing me with a rich network that I have relied on to identify gaps in research priorities, forge partnerships for filling those gaps, and stay informed on all the latest developments in the field.”

Noting that innovation and creativity are hallmarks of the transportation community, Elrahman states, “Without research, we would not be able to develop and apply evidence-based interventions to mitigate problems within the transportation system. Without research, we are flying blind and the human, fiscal, and operational costs can be enormous.”