

2026 Felix A. Anderson Image Award

Laura J. Mester
Chief Administrative Officer (Retired)
Michigan Department of Transportation



Laura J. Mester retired in January 2026 the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) of the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT), overseeing the Bureau of Finance and Administration, and the Offices of Aeronautics, Enterprise Information Management, Passenger Transportation, and Rail. In addition, she represented MDOT and provided oversight to the International Bridge Administration, in partnership with the Sault Ste. Marie Bridge Authority Board.

Mester was selected as the CAO in February 2011. Before her appointment, she worked for the State Budget Office, Office of Financial Management, directing the Accounting and Financial Reporting Division, from September 1994 to February 2011. She began her career at the Office of the Auditor General in January 1988.

Mester was engaged in several national initiatives critical to MDOT's mission and strategic plan. She was actively involved in the American Association of State Highway Transportation Officials (AASHTO) efforts related to federal reauthorization and funding our nation's transportation infrastructure. She served as the vice chair of the Subcommittee on Transportation Finance Policy and chaired the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Transportation Asset Expert Task Group. Mester partnered with several transportation related associations and organizations, advocating, supporting and working toward transportation solutions that are crucial to advancing the department's mission and improving how MDOT does business with its industry stakeholders to deliver our programs and shared goals.

Her leadership has shaped MDOT's financial management practices, guided strategic planning and driven the successful implementation of state and federal transportation policies. Her expertise and leadership have been recognized statewide and nationally, earning her numerous awards, including the Government Financial Manager of the Year Award and the William R. Snodgrass Leadership Award. In 2023, she was named Woman of the Year by WTS Michigan for her role as an outstanding mentor and her contributions to advancing women and minorities in transportation. She was also honored for her service as treasurer of the Mid America Association of State Transportation Officials.

She earned a master's degree in business administration from Central Michigan University in 1994, and a Bachelor of Arts degree in accounting from Michigan State University in 1987. She is a registered certified public accountant.