

Transportation Group Of The Year: Mayer Brown

By **Matt Perez**

Law360 (February 21, 2025, 4:00 PM EST) -- Mayer Brown LLP helped close billions of dollars in loans to revitalize rail infrastructure along the Northeast Corridor and helped secure a long-term lease for an airport thousands of miles south in the Virgin Islands, helping the firm land a spot among the 2024 Law360 Transportation Groups of the Year.

Success for the group isn't surprising for its leader, Joseph Seliga, who co-heads the firm's government and transactions practice and projects and infrastructure industry team. Last year, the practice earned its spot as a 2023 Transportation Group of the Year, and a noted strength both years is the long-term commitment made by its roughly 80 attorneys, with its leadership having worked together for around two decades now.

"The bulk have spent either their entire career or certainly a majority of their entire career at Mayer Brown, which we believe has given stability to our practice and consistency to our clients," Seliga told Law360 Pulse.

Attorneys handling transportation deals typically work out of the firm's Chicago and New York offices, though some attorneys also work from California and Washington, D.C. In total, the work done by the transportation practice touches around 15 offices under the Mayer Brown umbrella.

Stephanie D. Wagner joined the firm in its Chicago office in 2008, spending her entire 17-year legal career working with its projects and infrastructure group. According to Wagner, the practice stands apart from its competition due to the variety of experience of its attorneys.

"We work on all sides of different deals, so we have a really broad bench of experience," she said. "For example, we sometimes represent the government owner who is procuring the deal, we at other times are the developer bidding on the deal or the lender financing the deal, and even sometimes we work with contractors."

Wagner said that level of understanding is what makes the difference between a deal that stalls out and one that finds a solution.

A major project that moved forward last year was the Hudson Tunnel Project, a \$16 billion investment led by the Gateway Development Commission, a bistate partnership involving New York, New



Jersey, New Jersey Transit, Amtrak and the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey. Mayer Brown served as project counsel to the GDC, advising on all aspects of the construction procurement and financing of the project.

"That was a huge milestone for the client to move the Hudson Tunnel Project forward," Wagner said.

The team was awarded the work through a request for proposal document in 2019 and has worked on the project since.

In July, the commission announced the signing of a full funding grant agreement with the Federal Transit Administration for \$6.88 billion in federal funding and closed on railroad rehabilitation and improvement financing loans from the Build America Bureau totaling \$4.06 billion to fund the local share of the project. Those actions helped secure the total \$16 billion commitment to the Hudson Tunnel Project, which includes the largest federal funding commitment to a rail transportation project in modern history, with \$12 billion invested.

"Time was important," Wagner said of the deal. "They had to move very quickly to meet the application timing and deadlines for the federal process, so we had to coordinate a lot of stakeholders through a lot of different issues over a quick time period. But they were all able to come together and work collaboratively to get to the point in time."

The vehicle driving the investments — the commission itself — also set the project apart, in Wagner's opinion, as it was designed specifically for the mega-project.

"It's basically kinda like doing a startup at the same time as trying to procure one of the world's largest infrastructure projects," she said.

Another stand-out aspect of the firm, according to its partners, is the fact that many of the team members have worked together for years, even across entire careers, in the case of Wagner and fellow partner Nicholas R. Vallorano, who joined in 2015.

Mayer Brown previously worked on a public-private partnership related to Puerto Rico's international airport in San Juan. That led to the firm representing the Virgin Islands Port Authority for its proposed public-private partnership for the long-term lease and operation of its two major airports, Cyril E. King Airport on St. Thomas and the Henry E. Rohlsen Airport on St. Croix.

"The critical importance of the airports for the everyday life of the people of the Virgin Islands is what makes it most exciting for me," Vallorano said of the project. "Obviously the Virgin Islands is a huge tourist destination, but the tourism is like 80% of the [gross domestic product], so it's a key element of their economy. But it's also critical for getting everyday goods to people who live there and their ability to visit family and get to medical care on the continental side."

The project was launched at the end of 2022, and the firm is advising on all aspects of the transaction, including the development of procurement documents, the evaluation of proposals and the drafting of project agreements. In April, the authority entered into a transition agreement with the consortium SkyCity as its preferred proposer. The practice group is expected to close on long-term agreements later this year.

Vallorano, who also assisted with the GDC loans, highlighted the breadth of experience exhibited by the

practice to help bring these deals to a close.

"It allows us to basically speak the language of the other side of the table, as well as to help clients better understand market position from a holistic perspective," he said.

--Editing by Kelly Duncan.

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