

Interview with Luigi Rosa, PMP¹

Assistant Vice President,
Frederick Douglass Tunnel Program
Amtrak, USA



Interviewed by Ipek Sahra Ozguler

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Introduction to the interviewee

Luigi Rosa, PE, PMP, CCM is the Amtrak Assistant Vice President for the Frederick Douglass Tunnel Program. He is a program executive with over 25 years of experience managing mega railway projects throughout the USA, Europe, and the Middle East. Before joining Amtrak, Luigi worked on several transformational mega projects that changed the lives of millions of people: MTA NY Penn Station Access and East Side Access Projects, the Italian High-Speed Railroad program that revolutionized people's lifestyle and mobility in Italy, and the Omani National Railway Project that is a crucial initiative shaping Oman's future towards becoming an oil-free country by 2050. Luigi can be contacted on [LinkedIn](#).

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Interview

Ipek Sahra Ozguler (Ozguler): First of all, thank you for accepting an interview request. Would you kindly introduce yourself for PMWJ readers?

Luigi Rosa (Rosa): Thank you, Ipek, and PMWJ for this opportunity. My name is Luigi Rosa, and I am the Assistant Vice President for Amtrak's [Frederick Douglass Tunnel \(FDT\) Program](#). Amtrak is the American National Railroad Passenger Corporation that operates inter-city rail service in 46 of the 48 contiguous U.S. states and three Canadian provinces. Thanks to the bi-partisan infrastructure bill, Amtrak is now charged to invest in the future of the American rail. We're modernizing our fleet, bridges and tunnels, stations, and other infrastructure, and the Amtrak FDT is actually the largest project in Amtrak's history with an investment of more than \$6B. Our vision is connecting more people and places and we want to double the number of ridership by 2040. Through the first nine months of FY 2024 (June 2024), Amtrak has welcomed 24.1 million riders – that's an 18% increase year-over-year, and on pace for an all-time record. The FDT Program will help support continued ridership growth.

I hold a master's degree in civil engineering and was born and raised in Italy. While studying engineering in Rome, I learned about Italy's high-speed railroad program, which was part of the modernization of the European rail network. I was fortunate to begin my career on the team that put in operation the first segment of the Italian high-speed railroad in 2005 between Rome and Naples. I grew up under the mentorship of an exceptional leader, Gilberto Cardola, who is now the CEO of the Brenner Base Tunnel project—the world's longest railroad tunnel currently under construction.

Ozguler: What are your key responsibilities as Assistant Vice President for the Frederick Douglass Tunnel Program?

Rosa: I joined Amtrak in July 2023, and I am responsible for the safe and successful delivery of the Frederick Douglass Tunnel (FDT) Program and its associated benefits. The FDT is a vital investment along the Amtrak Northeast Corridor, the busiest railroad in North America. In addition to ensuring the program is completed on time and within budget, I am committed to working with my team to help Amtrak build its internal capacity to manage current and future capital programs.

Ozguler: Could you please provide an overview of the Frederick Douglass Tunnel project, including scope, objectives, and key milestones? What makes a project like this so complex?

Rosa: The existing Amtrak tunnel in Baltimore is called the Baltimore & Potomac (B&P) Tunnel and was opened 151 years ago. The B&P Tunnel is part of the Amtrak Northeast Corridor (NEC) that is the busiest railroad in North America and carries 12 million passengers (Amtrak and MARC – Maryland Area Rail Commuter - passengers) per year; the Amtrak Northeast Corridor is part of the Northeast mega-region also called Northeast megalopolis that includes the Washington DC area, the Baltimore Region, Philadelphia, NYC and Boston. The megalopolis is the home of approximately 20% of the American population and, if it were its own country, it would be the third largest economy in the world with more than 5 trillion dollars in GDP.

In order to continue to grow and thrive, the Northeast megalopolis must rely on modern and sustainable infrastructure. Modernizing our infrastructures will allow the Baltimore Region to remain part of the megalopolis, to retain and attract new talent, to boost new investments, to provide new opportunities, to transform ideas into realities, and to attract new tourists to visit the vibrant and unique city of Baltimore, its history, and its communities.

The \$6B FDT program is a crucial investment to deliver on that vision, to replace the existing BP tunnel with a new state-of-the-art Frederick Douglass Tunnel, and to make sure the Baltimore region remains part of the megalopolis. Thanks to the Biden-Harris bipartisan infrastructure bill, the \$6B project is now fully funded (\$4.7B FRA Grant, almost \$800M from Amtrak, and \$450M Maryland DOT). The FDT program is well underway. We started demolition in January and we are starting the bulk of construction later this summer with tunnel excavation slated to start at the end of 2026. Project completion is 2035.

The new FDT program will modernize a 10-mile segment of the Amtrak NEC within the Baltimore region, replace Baltimore city DOT bridges, new roadway improvements, improve BGE (Baltimore Gas Electric company) infrastructure and will build a new fully accessible West Baltimore MARC station that will provide a safe, reliable, accessible, sustainable and frequent MARC train service between Washington DC and Baltimore in less than 30 minutes. This will bring new access to jobs, opportunities, healthcare and education and will be a catalyst for future projects, such as the crucial East-West redline connection that will increase transportation connectivity and drive future investments for West Baltimore.

Ozguler: Please explain what the most significant challenges have been during the project so far. How did you address them?

Rosa: This is a complex and massive undertaking that requires a high level of coordination between internal and external project stakeholders. I believe that effective

communication is crucial for building the necessary trust among project stakeholders. As a University of Maryland professor (A.B.) aptly said, "Projects move at the speed of trust." To build this trust, my team and I strive to be servant leaders, serving the project and applying the fundamental principles of project management and leadership: consistency, dignity and sharing.

We have been conducting "partnering sessions" with our key partners (external stakeholders) to listen, understand priorities, share schedules, and address issues as they arise. This collaborative environment is essential to increasing our chances of success.

Ozguler: Your experience working on megaprojects is quite extensive. Can you tell our readers a bit more about other projects you've worked on?

Rosa: I often say I've been fortunate to be in the right place at the right time, participating in several mega railroad projects. These transformational projects have profoundly impacted the lives of millions of people by introducing new mass transit systems and railroads, creating new opportunities, and I am deeply grateful for that. With over 25 years of experience as a program executive, I have managed major railway projects across the USA, Europe, and the Middle East. Before joining Amtrak, I worked on several mega projects, including the MTA NY Penn Station Access and East Side Access Projects, Italy's High-Speed Railroad program, which revolutionized mobility and lifestyle in Italy, and the Oman National Railway Project, a crucial initiative aimed at transitioning Oman towards an oil-free future by 2050.

I understood that delivering large infrastructure projects means providing benefits and positive impacts to communities. This realization is a significant motivation, helping to build confidence within the team and align everyone's interests. Aligning the interests of project stakeholders is crucial for mitigating risks and ensuring success.

Ozguler: Let's dive into a megaproject that's made recent headlines – Baltimore's Francis Scott Key Bridge rebuild. Based on your experience and expertise, how does a project manager even begin when faced with such a massive project? What are the most critical skills needed to ensure project success?

Rosa: First and foremost, I was shocked when I heard about the tragic collapse of the Francis Scott Key Bridge on March 26th. Witnessing the bridge fall in just a few seconds was devastating. However, I want to focus on the response since that tragic night. Maryland Governor Wes Moore acted swiftly to lead efforts in supporting everyone affected by the crisis, including families, port workers, first responders, small businesses,

and the surrounding communities. Remarkably, the main port channel was reopened in less than 100 days, and the new project for rebuilding the bridge is now fully underway.

I believe the Maryland Transportation Authority project managers are collaborating with various agencies and stakeholders to build a consensus and form a united front. This will establish a strong, integrated project team crucial for ensuring the new bridge is open by the end of 2028. Key skills include the ability to build a coalition among project participants, focus on near-term milestones like environmental clearance, and issue various RFPs to hire designers, owner representatives, and contractors. Fostering strong relationships between government bodies, contractors, designers, and community groups to ensure seamless cooperation and integrated project management.

Ozguler: Bridge infrastructure around the world is an ongoing conversation. What lessons from the Baltimore bridge collapse and subsequent rebuild could be applied when considering other bridge enhancement projects?

Rosa: I believe that safety and sustainability are crucial when modernizing our aging infrastructure, including bridges worldwide. The collapse and ongoing rebuild of the Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore provide several valuable lessons for bridge enhancement projects globally. Here are my key takeaways:

Immediate and Coordinated Response: Rapid, coordinated efforts can mitigate disaster impacts. Develop comprehensive emergency response plans with clear roles and responsibilities for various agencies and stakeholders.

Inter-Agency Collaboration: Successful projects rely on effective collaboration among different agencies and stakeholders.

Effective Communication: Clear communication with the public and stakeholders is essential during both disaster aftermath and the rebuild process. Establish communication channels to keep the public informed and engaged. Involve local communities and businesses in planning to address their needs and concerns.

Resilient and Sustainable Design: Rebuilding efforts should focus on creating infrastructure that is resilient to future challenges and sustainable in the long term. Use resilient design principles that account for environmental, social, and economic sustainability. Employ durable materials and innovative construction techniques to enhance bridge longevity and safety.

Swift Project Execution: Fast-tracked construction methods can restore critical

infrastructure and economic activities more quickly. Streamline project timelines while ensuring safety and quality are maintained.

Funding and Resource Allocation: Adequate funding and efficient resource allocation are essential for completing large-scale infrastructure projects. Secure funding through public-private partnerships, government grants, and other financing mechanisms to avoid project delays and cost overruns.

Leveraging Technology: Utilize advanced technologies like Building Information Modeling (BIM) to enhance project management, safety, and construction efficiency.

Skilled Workforce Development: A skilled workforce is crucial for executing complex infrastructure projects. Invest in training programs for engineers, construction workers, and project managers to ensure they have the latest knowledge and skills.

By incorporating these lessons into future bridge enhancement projects, communities worldwide can improve the safety, efficiency, and resilience of their critical infrastructure.

Ozguler: You have your PMP certification. How has that equipped you to work on megaprojects?

Rosa: I often emphasize that the [Project Management Professional \(PMP\)](#) framework highlights the critical importance of applying fundamental project management and leadership principles. By adhering to these basic principles, we can significantly increase our chances of success. Although I was already an experienced project manager, discovering the [Project Management Institute's \(PMI\)](#) best practices was a game changer for me. These best practices have greatly enhanced my performance, particularly in communication, risk management, and decision-making. I used to remind my team daily that "the ball is always in our court," meaning that simply answering a question isn't enough to complete the task. It's essential to ensure that our responses fully address the issues and that we are all on the same page.

Ozguler: What advice would you give others hoping to work on megaprojects or break into the construction industry as a project professional?

Rosa: I believe there is a promising opportunity to transition into the construction industry. While there may be a technical gap initially, it can be managed effectively. It's essential to be passionate, understand the big picture, and recognize the critical importance of risk management. Project management is fundamentally about managing risks. Here are a few basic yet fundamental concepts that can help new project

professionals get involved in megaprojects:

- Communication Management Plan: Identify key project stakeholders and understand their needs to ensure effective collaboration.
- PDCA Cycle (Plan, do, check, act): This simple yet effective tool emphasizes the importance of being proactive, which is a key factor for success.
- Triple Constraints (Iron Triangle): This includes cost, time, scope, quality, risk, and benefits. Understanding how these limiting factors impact project objectives is crucial for making the right decisions.

Ozguler: What behaviors among senior project leaders can help guarantee success on megaprojects?

Rosa: I've had the privilege of presenting my experience in managing megaprojects several times for PMI and other organizations. True leaders must possess purpose and courage to lead. As I've emphasized before, they should consistently demonstrate integrity, honesty, and a willingness to share.

Ozguler: Do you have a last message to PMWJ readers, please?

Rosa: Again, I want to thank you and PMWJ for this opportunity. As we navigate the ever-evolving landscape of the construction industry, staying informed and adaptable is crucial. Advancements in technology, sustainability practices, and regulatory changes are shaping the future of our field. Embracing innovation, prioritizing safety, and fostering a culture of continuous learning and collaboration can help us thrive.

In the spirit of continuous learning and collaboration, I would encourage construction professionals to pursue education and community opportunities with PMI. I have been a PMI volunteer for over a decade and can attest that the PMI community is a wonderful network for learning, connection, and opportunity. Additionally, I have had the privilege of providing feedback on the new [PMI Construction Professional \(PMI-CP\)](#) certification. I firmly believe that this industry-specific certification and its supporting learning courses equip today's construction professionals with the knowledge to support project success, decreasing the number of projects that exceed their allocated budgets and timelines or fail to deliver expected benefits.

Together, we can build not just structures, but a resilient and prosperous future for all. Thank you all for your dedication and passion.

Ozguler: Thank you for sharing your time and perspectives.

About the Interviewer



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Ipek Sahra Ozguler graduated from the Istanbul University, Turkey with a Bachelor of Science degree in Computer Engineering and from Middle East Technical University, Turkey with an MSc degree in Software Management. As a project manager, she has more than 13 years of experience in various areas such as portfolio management, program management, project management, software management, business analysis. She became a certified PMP in 2012 and a certified SCRUM Master in 2014.

She has gained broader insights in a variety of projects across manufacturing, defense, FMCG (Cola Cola), insurance (Euler Hermes), audit (Deloitte), telecommunication, aviation and finance sectors. In addition, she has been working as an international correspondent for the PM World Journal since 2014.

Ipek is the creator and editor of the highly acclaimed book, [The Perspective of Women Project Management Professionals](#), interviews with leading female PM experts and professionals around the world. The book was published in March 2020 and is available [here](#).

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