



# WHY I LOVE BEING A RIGHT OF WAY AGENT

BY GEORGE CARDIERI, SR/WA

**A**n appraiser friend of mine once told me, “George, as a right of way agent, you have the most difficult job in all of real estate.”

I thought about that for a few seconds. Sure, I’ve dealt with my fair share of upset property owners. Perhaps I’ve been cursed at on several occasions and I’m certainly responsible for the daunting task of getting unwilling property owners to sign and unwilling occupants to move. But somehow, through it all, I absolutely love my job.

I’ve written this article to share exactly why I find my job as a right of way agent extremely gratifying. This is especially important because public perception doesn’t quite give our industry the credit



it deserves. After all, eminent domain often has a negative public connotation. So as right of way agents, we really do need to understand the importance of what we do. Most importantly, as representatives of the right of way community, we should be able to express deep passion for our work with the objective of educating the public as ambassadors for our profession.

### From a Macro Perspective

I don't know about you, but when I wake up in the morning and jump in the shower, I really enjoy the clean running water that immediately flows from the faucet. In the evenings when I want to watch TV with my family or on a hot day when I want to crank up that air conditioner, I've grown rather fond of that power switch that never lets me down. Simply put, if that power doesn't come on (which rarely ever happens), there's going to be a crisis in my house.

Outside of the home, when my wife has a craving for her favorite European chocolate, we simply get in the car and drive to one of several local import stores. The majority of imported products arrive in

our country by container ship at one of the major seaports before typically traveling great distances by railway and finally by delivery truck to the local retail shops across this county. It's all part of a super-efficient and effective transportation network that ultimately keeps the cost of goods affordable for us consumers—and hardly anyone ever has to think about it. It just happens!

This is just a small sample of the many infrastructure projects that help deliver the utility and transportation amenities that we as the public expect on a daily basis. And there are many more instances. For example, well-organized transportation not only stimulates commerce, but also promotes public safety and well-being. The United States Interstate Highway system was not strictly implemented for the convenience of getting people and products from point A to point B. Instead, it was constructed as a matter of national security. For instance, each year during hurricane season, literally thousands of families on the east and gulf coasts utilize our highways to safely evacuate from the impending disaster.

How about the numerous federally funded low income housing projects that our relocation agents are called upon to implement required entitlements (which are all absolutely important). We have a severe low income housing shortage in the United States and elsewhere. These types of projects are very necessary to help stem the epidemic of homelessness we're currently facing.

The whole point of this macro level discussion is that we enjoy phenomenal public services across the United States, and as a society we often tend to take many of these amenities for granted. The bottom line is the public expects reliable utilities and efficient transportation networks! As right of way agents, we know that the projects that provide these services don't just magically happen, and I am beyond proud of the role I've been able to play with my fellow right of way professionals in the continuous improvement of our public infrastructure.

### From a Local Standpoint

The big picture macro perspective is important, but for me, it's the local and personal standpoint that really makes my job so satisfying.

Let's face it, the transactions we work on are a pain! But somehow, the challenge of each transaction is what makes our jobs so interesting. No two acquisitions or relocations are ever the same. Aside from having to work with your typical unwilling seller, the other potential complications can be endless. We consistently encounter complex title and escrow issues, disagreements on valuation or highest and best use of the property, debates over how the project will look in the after condition (regardless of potential severance), probable construction conflicts and even the need for alternative access to the property during construction. The list goes on





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and on. And yet, somehow, I love the challenge of resolving each issue one by one!

Being involved in public works projects way before they're even constructed is incredibly gratifying. When I have first-hand knowledge of a project and there's information I can share with the public, or with friends and family, it really does make me feel like an important representative of the community. In fact, I would argue that it's a vital component of our job description as right of way agents to be a passionate advocate for the projects we're working on.

I get calls all the time from acquaintances asking me about potential projects they've heard about. I also occasionally—and amusingly—get blamed by friends and family members for inconveniences they might face during the actual construction phase of the project. But ever loyal to my profession, I always tell them it will be well worth it in the end.

## Personal Thoughts

The most gratifying part of my career has been the opportunity to work directly with impacted property owners and displacees. I love the preparation involved with educating myself on each project. In turn, I educating the property owners about the project and the actual process. I go into each negotiation with an open mind and an open ear. I listen critically, answer questions, resolve

concerns and provide timely follow-up. Ultimately, it's all part of the process to earn the owner's trust and I know that I've successfully done my job when the owner signs. This is definitely one of my personal favorite parts of the job.

On the relocation side of it, often the most difficult task is getting the displacee in the mindset that they absolutely have to move. Having the displacee come to this realization is often an enormous challenge and for me, it's an important milestone in the process.

Denial is a strong mentality to have to overcome. To counter this, I try to emphasize the potential positives. For businesses, I emphasize that they may take this opportunity to expand or downsize. Perhaps they may even retire. With households, I try to get them to visualize living on a quiet and safe cul-de-sac if they're currently on a business road. And with residential relocation, it almost always happens in the end—I'm able to turn the initial tears of fear into tears of joy once they get settled into their replacement home.

## In Closing

As right of way agents, we face a huge challenge every day. The public's perception of eminent domain is entirely negative. Although there have certainly been past injustices and government over-reach that have occurred, eminent domain is

an absolute net positive in helping to make sure that necessary infrastructure is built in a timely manner.

Personally, I've had the opportunity to develop and teach a local real estate course in Arizona for real estate licensees, in which I educate them on eminent domain and tell them what I do as a right of way agent. At the end of the class, the comment I frequently receive is, "You know, when an owner or displacee finds themselves in this situation, it doesn't seem as awful as I originally thought it might be." And I respond, "If it were unfair, I truly would not be able to do this job." ★



*George Cardieri is a Senior Right of Way Agent and Project Manager with Acquisition Sciences, Ltd. George began his right of way career as an agent for the Arizona State Land Department in 2007. As a consultant he has completed over 300 acquisitions on behalf of numerous public agencies and utility providers, and he has managed over 50 residential and business relocations throughout Arizona.*