

## Transportation Group Of The Year: Steptoe & Johnson LLP

By **Emilie Ruscoe**

*Law360 (February 13, 2020, 1:11 PM EST)* -- Steptoe & Johnson LLP's transportation group counseled Brookfield Infrastructure Partners LP and Singapore's sovereign wealth fund GIC on the regulatory aspects of a \$8.4 billion acquisition of short-line rail holding company Genesee & Wyoming Inc., helping earn it a spot among Law360's 2019 Transportation Groups of the Year.

The firm's transportation group has five areas of focus, including two in the burgeoning autonomous vehicle and unmanned aircraft system spaces in addition to its robust and longstanding services to rail transportation, motor carrier and aviation clients.

Linda Stein, a D.C.-based partner who heads the group, said those two new and emerging focuses paired with ongoing work in the more traditional areas of regulatory practice have resulted in an exciting period of dynamic group expansion.

"I think that's really exciting, that the transportation area is really growing with the new, emerging technologies — there's a lot more interesting new work for us to be doing," said Stein.

The resulting growth over the past few years has included high-profile, high-level lateral hires as well as early-career associate hires.

Peter Denton, a Steptoe partner whose practice focuses on rail transportation, infrastructure and project finance and who started at the firm in September 2018, is one of those lateral hires — his expertise informed the group's work helping Brookfield Infrastructure and GIC take private a company that provides rail services across North America, Europe and Australia.

At the time, G&W owned or leased 120 freight railroads serving 41 U.S. states and four Canadian provinces, in addition to many other rail-related assets. The deal closed in the final days of 2019.

Denton said the deal represented "a huge trend over the last year or so of infrastructure funds either acquiring entire holding companies of short-line railroads or individual short-line railroads, and we're just seeing that trend increase."

"Infrastructure funds, generally, industry-wide, have raised a lot of money recently and are looking for



places and companies in which to invest” and have come to recognize short-line railroads as a good asset class, he noted.

Steptoe work on such deals means it’s well-positioned to attract more clients for similar projects in the relatively small railroad regulatory space, said Denton.

And indeed, knowing both the law and key players in the industry has served the firm well. Steptoe partner Dane Jacques, another recent high-level arrival with three decades of experience in the aviation space, exemplifies how the firm recruits strategically so it can draw on expertise that goes beyond legal knowledge to get the best results for clients.

“One thing that sets us apart is the experience we have, not just as lawyers,” but “also as participants in the aviation industry,” Jacques, a former pilot, told Law360, characterizing his resulting technical expertise as giving him a competitive edge over other attorneys in aviation practice.

Stein emphasized the firm is working to ensure it’s not just attracting hires at the top of their field, but investing in associates who will hopefully one day reach those same heights, she said.

“We have a long, deep transportation history, and it’s important for the firm to continue that,” she said. “If we’re going to continue that, we need to have young attorneys with a passion for the practice who can continue to do the work.”

In 2020, the partners said, the group will continue work on a number of ongoing matters and is also prepared to respond to potential regulatory developments.

In particular, Denton noted that the arrival of two new commissioners at the Surface Transportation Board had “enlivened the board’s thinking in terms of how they want to approach various policies and rulemaking issues.”

“[The Surface Transportation Board is] very active at the moment in terms of proposing new changes to the rate reasonableness structure that the board uses to review railroad rates” and has been holding a number of hearings and asking for comments on proposed rules, which he and his fellow group members will follow closely, he said.

This is the fourth consecutive year that the group has received recognition from Law360, and Steptoe’s transportation group is one of a trio at the firm to earn the Practice Group of the Year acknowledgment for its work in 2019, alongside its insurance and international trade groups.

--Additional reporting by Benjamin Horney. Editing by Philip Shea.