Mortimer L. Downey III, transportation legend, community activist, and public servant died at Sunrise of Hunter Mill in Fairfax, VA on November 2, 2023. When he learned he had pulmonary fibrosis, Mort moved himself to Sunrise where Mort continued engaging in local politics, advising on transportation, and enjoying Bluegrass music, theater, film, and sports and so so many books.

Public service in transportation defined Downey's 65-year career. Writing a paper on Robert Moses, Downey gained insight into the power of bringing policy and programs together across multiple agencies and projects. He found a kindred spirit in Moses who also read every document, legislation, testimony, contract, or transcript. Critically, Mort also came to understand those processes that needed to be redefined to address equity and accountability.

Mort actually started in transportation as a high school senior. Set to work maintenance as a summer job, he was recommended to take over as sailing instructor in Bermuda for one of the faculty at Andover. Previously mostly a dry-land experience, Mort briefed his students and got them out on the water quickly. He employed this tactic dozens of times with transportation leaders over the years.

Born on August 9, 1936 to Mortimer L. Downey Jr. and Elizabeth Carlin Downey, he grew up in Connecticut and Massachusetts. After finishing high school as a scholarship student at Andover Academy, he attended Yale University receiving a B.A. in Political Science in 1958. Mort earned his master's degree in Public Administration from New York University, completed the Advanced Management Program at the Harvard Business School, and continued online courses at Yale Alumni Program until this October.

After college, Mort moved to New York City where he began service as an officer in the United States Coast Guard Reserve. In 1961, he married Joyce Vander Meyden (1937 to 2012) and they moved with their sons Stepehn and Chris between New York, Connecticut and Virginia over the course of their 51 years of marriage. Mort began with the Port Authority in 1963. He and Joyce moved to
Washington, DC in 1977 where Mort joined the staff of the newly established U.S. House of Representatives Committee on the Budget. From there he joined the U.S. Department of Transportation where he became its first Assistant Secretary for budget. He then returned to New York where he served as Executive Director and CFO of the New York Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) for 12 years. Returning to Washington, Mort held the position of U.S. Deputy Secretary of Transportation for a record term of eight years.

For more than two decades after leaving the DOT, Mort Downey was the go-to advisor in the transportation and infrastructure field for public agencies including New Jersey Transit, Metropolitan Transportation Commission, Chicago Transit Authority, WMATA, the Virginia Rail Express, Transport for London and the Panama Canal Authority. At the same time, he served as the President of PB Consult, an advisory organization associated with the legendary Parsons Brinckerhoff firm. After leading the Obama Presidential Transition team for the Department of Transportation, Mort was appointed in 2010 as the first Federal member of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority Board. He served as the Board Chairman in 2015 and left the Board in 2016.

His legacy includes mentoring and championing dozens of transportation leaders in the public and private sector in the United States and globally. He was a talent spotter who connected people and jobs and informed transportation innovation through the fall of 2023. Mort led by example in his commitment to informed public service. His curiosity and knowledge about all things transportation was legion and he shared his knowledge with us and brought out the best in all who worked with him.

Awards:

This fall the Eno Foundation established the Mortimer L. Downey III Memorial Fellowship Program, adding to his litany of awards and recognition. Among his other honors were election to the National Academy of Public Administration
(NAPA) and recognition with the Transportation Research Board's Frank Turner Lifetime Achievement award, the American Society of Public Administration's Truitt Award for transportation management, the W. Graham Claytor Jr. Award for contributions to intercity passenger rail, lifetime achievement awards from the Eno Transportation Foundation, American Public Transportation Association, the Council of University Transportation Centers, the International Leadership Award from the Intelligent Transportation Society of America and the National Member of the Year Award from the Women's Transportation Seminar.