



Office of Civil Rights

## Building Safe, 'Active Ways' to Travel

*In conjunction with African American Heritage Month in February, Caltrans is spotlighting Disadvantaged Business Enterprise: ActiveWayz Engineering, Inc. to showcase Caltrans' contractors' diversity.*

Admas Zewdie was born and raised in Ethiopia, Africa, and came to the United States (U.S.) in 1998.

He earned his bachelor's degree in civil engineering at Addis Ababa University in Ethiopia in 1996, his Master of Business Administration from Haas School of Business at U.C. Berkeley in 2009, and is a licensed Professional Engineer in the state of California.



© 2024 California Department of Transportation

Before coming to the US, Zewdie worked as a bridge engineer for an Ethiopian government-owned highway design firm. After he came to the U.S., he worked 12-hour night shifts on an IBM assembly line until he transitioned to a transportation-focused civil engineering career.

Zewdie spent 17 years working for a mid-sized engineering consulting company, and in 2016, he founded [ActiveWayz Engineering, Inc.](#) His company specializes in engineering pedestrian, biking, and other active, healthy transportation alternatives. The firm provides plans, specifications, and estimates of different transportation options for cities, counties, Caltrans, and other public agencies.

He said quality, delivery, competence, and networking are all important elements to getting selected for a Caltrans project's engineering team. Attending Caltrans' local Architectural and Engineering (A&E) firm [Mentor-Protégé Program](#) helped Zewdie get connected when he founded ActiveWayz Engineering in Santa Clara.

"We have formed relationships with larger firms committed to helping us grow our firm, professional network, as well as gain valuable experience on Caltrans projects," Zewdie said. "It also helps to have a specialized niche so you can support larger firms and supplement their efforts – rather than compete with them."

He said as a small, [Disadvantaged Business Enterprise](#) (DBE), the required financial documentation has been his biggest obstacle.

“It is a tremendous amount of paperwork for small businesses,” Zewdie said. “The bigger firms have dedicated resources for that,” Zewdie said. “As a DBE, we want to spend our time engineering projects and solving problems – that’s what we love to do and why we pursue this.”

That is why, on April 9, 2024, the U.S. Department of Transportation modernized its DBE program regulations with less prescriptive rules. (See “New Rule” article, or [DBE and ACDBE Final Rule | US Department of Transportation](#) for more information)

“As a small, disadvantaged business owner, I appreciate that Caltrans makes sure that prime consultants come through with their DBE commitments to make sure the DBEs on the teams actually do the work on the team.”

---

*Visit Caltrans’ Civil Rights program webpage to get certified as a [Disadvantaged Business Enterprise](#), or visit the Department of General Services [Cal eProcure](#) website for information on [Small Business Certification](#).*