



The Rail~Volution Podcast
Episode 59, September 2022
A NEW WORLD OF TRANSPORTATION DEMAND MANAGEMENT

We're talking with Tien-Tien Chan, a Principal at Nelson\Nygaard, and Jessica Roberts, a Principal at Alta Planning and Design, about transportation demand management (TDM) – what it is and how it has changed in recent years to embrace far more than the daily commute.

Unedited transcript

Speaker 1 (0s): Welcome to the Rail~Volution podcast. This is Tamar Shapiro, CEO of Rail~Volution. We're a national network focused on transit related mobility options and community development. We host an annual conference as well as additional year round capacity building and learning opportunities. The podcast is a chance to hear from a range of stakeholders, as we dig deep into what it takes to make communities better for people.

Speaker 2 (39s): Hey, there I'm Jeff Wood principal of The Overhead Wire and your host. This month on the Rail~Volution podcast, Tien-Tien Chan of Nelson\Nygaard and Jessica Roberts of Alta Planning and Design, join the show to talk about transportation demand management or TDM. Tien-Tien and Jessica discuss how TDM acts as the soft side of transportation and the flip side of infrastructure and the different types of programs that are employed. Stay with us.

Tien-Tien Chan, and Jessica Roberts, welcome to the podcast.

Speaker 3 (1m 14s): Thank you so much.

Speaker 4 (1m 15s): Thank you.

Speaker 2 (1m 16s): Thanks for being here before we get started. Can you tell us a little bit about yourselves?

Speaker 4 (1m 19s): Sure. So my name is Tien-Tien Chan. I am a principal at Nelson\Nygaard in the Boston office. We are a small transportation planning firm founded by two awesome women in San Francisco. Back in the eighties. My focus at the firm is mainly on parking and transportation demand management prior to Nelson\Nygaard I was at MBTA in the Boston area transit agency. Prior to that, I was in Austin, Texas, where I was at the city's D O T. And in that role, I was charged to build up the city's first transportation demand management program. And working backwards I started my transportation journey in San Francisco at fair and peers.

One of the big projects that really solidified my interest in TDM was co-authoring this foundational report quantifying the effectiveness of TDM strategies. And here I am today.

Speaker 2 (2m 21s): And Jessica, what about you?

Speaker 3 (2m 23s): Yeah, thank you, Jeff. So my name's Jessica Roberts and I'm also a principal Alta Planning and Design, a consulting firm that specializes in active transportation. My role there is to run what we call our programs team and that's really our behavior change engine. So I have a fabulous group of people who design, implement and evaluate behavior change campaigns. We design implement and evaluate behavior change campaigns, and the vast majority of those have the goal of helping people walk, bike, take transit, and share rides more often.

So, firmly in the transportation demand management realm. And I've been there for 18 years. That's what I've done, my whole real adult career. I, I really love the work that I do, and I have the pleasure of working for Tim when she was at the city of Austin. So it's been a pleasure to have intersecting careers with such a fabulous professional.

Speaker 2 (3m 15s): Awesome. And so before your professional careers, what got you into transportation? Like what was the first thing that kind of made you interested in, in the subject overall?

Speaker 4 (3m 23s): So I grew up in the suburbs of Los Angeles and, you know, have a lived experience of a very car-centric life and just always admired and longed for a bustling city, studied abroad in Hong Kong, visited friends in New York city. And so I've always envisioned that life, but it wasn't until I got to grad school that the interest in transportation and TDM really emerged. My master's was more broadly focused on environmental engineering and sustainability.

And there was a really interesting research project researching all the different strategies to combat climate change, everything from fuel to building energy, carbon capture. And that's where I really started to get interested in that intersection of transportation, transportation, demand management, and how that fits into broader climate goals.

Speaker 3 (4m 26s): I grew up in the very, very beautiful, but very, very auto dependent. Oh, kind of rural fantasy excerpts of Northern California in, in the gold rush country where a lot of people like my parents, you know, fled Los Angeles and cities to go live this kind of pastoral hippie lifestyle. That meant you had to drive absolutely everywhere, you know, disconnected rural streets. You know, my elementary school was eight miles away. So I grew up being driven absolutely everywhere. And when I was 16, my parents were like, finally handed me the keys to the pickup truck.

We kept to take the trash to the dump every week. And they're like, great. You're finally not our problem. When I did an overseas study program in tubing, in Germany, in college, that was my

first real opportunity to see a different way that the urban form allowed you to get around. And so for me, that was a wild, new experience of like, oh, I don't have a car, but it's not making my life worse. In fact, I can take the bus everywhere. Walking is lovely and it's compact and well connected.

And eventually I actually borrowed a bike from a friend. This was big for me because I always thought, well, I'm not athletic. And I'm really scared. So biking's not for me. But eventually I was just like, well, everyone else is doing it. And it looks like kind of fast and easy and fun. So I borrowed a bike from, from my neighbor hub out. And my first trip was really scary. I had no idea what I was doing, but then very quickly, you know, I started using the really good bike infrastructure and it changed my life that really, for me, I mean, it's in so many ways, but the most notable being that was the beginning of, for me, a really profound improvement in my mental health, because I was getting exercise every day.

And I think some of the other just like, you know, really being a part of the city and, and feeling like the master of my destiny, I can't overstate how beneficial it was for me. Then I had to move back to the United States where I lived in Portland, Oregon, which you'd think would be like, yay, it's great. But compared to where I live in Germany, it was pretty scary to get on a bike, but eventually I was just like, well, I, I, I can't do without it. I don't wanna own a car. So just those experiences about how it can be on how it is led me to bicycle advocacy, cuz I wasn't very happy with my experiences biking around in Portland.

So I, I did bicycle advocacy for five years and from there transitioned fairly comfortably, you know, I took some college courses on, on bicycle and pedestrian planning and, and transitioned pretty comfortably into consulting. So yeah, that's how I ended up here.

Speaker 2 (6m 52s): I feel like a lot of people have the experience where they go somewhere. I, I went to visit my parents when my parents lived in Rotterdam for a year when I was in college and went for Christmas. And I just was amazed that there was a street that had bike lanes on it and places for people to walk and amazing infrastructure. There was a light rail through the center of the, of the street and maybe one lane for cars. And I was like, wow, you can actually reorient the street around everything else. It's amazing. And I CA I feel like I came back from that experience a changed person. And I think a lot of people have that experience where they go somewhere different and it doesn't even have to be necessarily like out of the country.

Some people just go to a different city in the United States and say, oh, we can do things a little bit different. And the quality of life changes so dramatically. It's amazing.

Speaker 3 (7m 30s): Right. And then you come back and you're like, why should I have to give that up? Yeah. Right. Exactly. And that's how we all become advocates. I did have the experience after college. I sort of was like, well, I'm gonna enter the workforce. So before I do, I'll have a little room Springer. And, and I biked across the country with a group of people and boy biking across the United States makes you feel very keenly. How very much bicycling is not welcome included planned for made safe by culture and norms.

So I, I felt like that'll make an advocate out of anybody

Speaker 2 (8m 3s): For sure. Well, I wanted to talk with you all about along those same lines, kind of a wonky topic called transportation, demand management or TDM as we're gonna refer to it probably for the rest of the show, what is TDM and where does it come from?

Speaker 3 (8m 15s): So transportation demand management, first of all, it's a terrible acronym. It's one of those acronyms that just really communicates nothing to the average listener. It's really too bad, but it's what we have. They call it mobility management in Europe. That's probably better, but, but we're sort of stuck with it. One time somebody asked me what it meant. And I said, oh, it means Tiki death motorcross. But no, it means transportation, demand management. The point being that we can either focus on supply so we can either say, oh, the roads are crowded. And it's hard for people to get where they're going in cars. We should build more roads or we can say, oh, the roads are crowded. And it's hard to get for people to get where they're going in their cars. Maybe we should help them do something other than use cars, right?

It's possible the listeners of your podcast already know that, but that's the focus on demand management is like reduce the demand for spaces to drive alone. What I've always been told is that the origins in the United States come from the 1970s during the oil crisis, where there was a big, both like informal kind of slug line approach, as well as top down, you know, federal funding and policy attempt to get people into carpooling. So a strong focus on reducing oil use and on commute trips because that's where the main congestion was happening.

And perhaps coming out of that legacy then, and through the CMAC, the congestion mitigation air quality funding program, which I believe was introduced in 1991. And the federal reauthorization bill called ICET, the intermodal surface, transportation efficiency act, iced tea, iced tea. So in 1991 with the passage of ICET a lot of really important changes to federal policy happened whereby gas tax could be spent on something other than just freeway building. That was really the beginning as my industry sees it up, the professionalized active transportation industry, but it also the funding and policy that went along with that for PDM was very important too.

And set the tone towards this very clear long term focus on commute trips, large employers, and the absolute dominance of reducing VMT vehicle miles traveled and reducing SB single occupancy vehicle trips. So that being sort of the, the mantra and the one true definition of success. So a lot of where, where I trace what TDM has become in this country, I think comes from that origin. I think one of the reasons I think about this so much is that so much of my work isn't focused on large employers and commute trips.

So much of my work is community based, all trips, all modes. And there's some frustration sometimes about like, why is this kind of seen as like the minority opinion or kind of this like,

Hey guys, me too, don't forget me. You know, it's just this dominance of like, we really only care about commute trips.

Speaker 4 (10m 51s): Yeah. And I feel like it's parallel to, and this kind of overlaps with your question of how did you get into transportation in TDM? When I was in grad school, part of that research project was focused on utilities and how utilities reduced demand. And so the idea of what my professor had called a negot shaving that peak electricity use translated really well to how do you shave peak demand when it comes to transportation as well?

So I wonder if there's like multiple sectors that really have shaped the terminology of transportation demand management over time.

Speaker 3 (11m 33s): Yeah. And I understand this, like, you know, the commute and, and peak our focus, it makes sense from certain lenses. Right? It makes sense in terms of, well, like that's when the most congestion is happening. So from an air quality and economic impact perspective, like focusing there is completely defensible. I think there are other reasons to consider other types of

Speaker 2 (11m 51s): That's an interesting part of it is that, that, you know, it started in this one place and it probably is fanned out and it becomes something else to a certain extent, but there are all those externalities that you're trying to solve for. I'm curious what some of these negative externalities are that TDM is trying to solve for what are the main, what's the main opposition for planners that are trying to, you know, what are we solving for?

Speaker 4 (12m 12s): Well, I mean, Jessica, I think you articulated really well. Historically. I feel like recent history TDM has been so focused on reducing vehicle miles traveled and reducing vehicle trips and seeing that quantitative mode shift from single occupancy vehicles and that discussion and language and source of motivation, I think is evolving a lot over the past few years.

And I think Jessica specifically in your space is how are we reducing mobility barriers? How are we improving mobility access? How are we creating safe community space through transportation demand management is I think more holistically what our niche sector is turning towards or needs to be more focused on rather than just very simply VMT V VT, SOV, all those fun acronyms.

Speaker 3 (13m 18s): Yeah. There's I think there's so many ways to answer this question, Jeff, what I'm kind of thinking of right now is like places where the automobile is kind of the only choice, the only choice that is reasonably gets you, where you're going in a reasonable amount of time offers you the type of flexibility and independence that you need to live your life. Doesn't maybe terrify you or put you in danger. You know, a, a single choice is not a choice, right? And places where you have to drive a car are really impoverished places from so many perspectives.

First of all, I finally fact checked this because I've been saying it for years and every time I'm like, could I back that up? And I'm sure you've all heard this like 30% of Americans can't or do not drive. And that's a lot of people, how could we ethically as a society? Or how could governments say one in three people aren't important to me if they can't get around by car, that's too bad for them. So that that's simply too many people to ignore. But our policy is written as, as if those people do not exist or do not matter. And I think most people would, if you ask them, well, how many people don't drive?

They'd say, oh, I dunno, maybe like 5% people or something. So, you know, places where everyone feels they have to drive or where we have sort of forced their hand through the built environment and through what behavioral scientists would call the choice architecture or the choice environment that really makes driving the dominant choice. You know, there are places where people can't get to know their neighbors as easily. Obviously there are places where the world outside isn't as healthy children are more likely to get asthma. Children are more likely to, you know, suffer cognitive impairments because of poor air quality.

There are places where seniors, people with any kind of mobility impairment, young people, they just can't live as rich a lives. They simply have to stay home more poor. People don't have access to as many job opportunities you or someone you care about is more likely to get hurt or killed by a car. These are quality of life outcomes that I think we should find unacceptable as a society. And the fact that we can't really see them and evaluate them and decide for ourselves, whether that's okay is, is I think a real failure of, you know, imagination and perspective taking man,

Speaker 4 (15m 29s): What a downer Jessica

Speaker 3 (15m 32s): I'm saying, that's why our work matters so that we can have another path forward.

Speaker 4 (15m 36s): Yeah, exactly. I mean, if I think about kind of what our call to action in the TDM space, Jessica, you alluded to this in your definition of TDM, that we are the flip side of, of infrastructure, the soft side of transportation. And I feel like TDM has the opportunity to really fill a lot of near term gaps where it's like we, for example, like we know we need better public transit in a lot of different places, but that takes a lot of time.

We know land development code zoning code needs to be overhauled and that all takes time. So how can transportation demand management fill those gaps from the softer side by providing the education, the outreach, the engagement by thinking about policy solutions that can be impactful in the near term. And as well as in the long term, it is about complimenting really thoughtful infrastructure, complimenting really thoughtful design, safe design of our streets and adding to that and making sure that it is working in tandem.

I also think this is like a much bigger conversation, but thinking about transportation, demand management as not just solving for mode split, but creating the safe community space from a

softer side and not creating a safe community space from just an infrastructure, traffic calming perspective, right? Like TDM plays such an important role to work with the community immediately.

Speaker 3 (17m 17s): Tim, Tim, you're totally my hype woman because this is, you know, this is essentially what I tell people about the work that I do. I always say everything my colleagues do is heading towards the ribbon cutting right, and intends to transform the built environment. And that's really, really important. You cannot do, you know, a behavior change campaign cannot succeed when the built environment, the policy environment, the pricing environment are all working against you, but it takes a long time to do that work. I can have a campaign done in a gear. You know, we have some really good metrics on some of what we do.

So yeah, I think they can work together, right? Like the sort of campaign, the person to person approach that kind of like, you know, lighter, more nimble wraparound approach. It can serve as an advanced scout for the policy pricing and infrastructure work. It can support it once it's being rolled out to amp up the ROI. And after that work is done and the funding is complete, right. It can continue to get that long tail of impact over time.

Speaker 2 (18m 13s): So this is where you're focusing your effort specifically when you design say a, a TDM program or a strategy, how do you focus efforts on people specifically when you're trying to convince them not towards the hard infrastructure, but towards this more policy perspective of TDM strategy?

Speaker 4 (18m 31s): Yeah. I have learned a lot working in the mu the pull side and one of the things that came out recently, which I think I would have loved when I first started at the city of Austin was NRDC and Nelson. IARD authored a recent report called the new transportation, demand management, something like a guide for city officials and that articulates a lot of really innovative strategies that are coming out of cities.

But on top of that, it really provides kind of those initial steps of how do we get started talking about it from a city staff perspective and how do we articulate the value of TDM? How do we talk about TDM in concert with land development code and concert with parking policy in concert with curb management, all of those things. And that is something that I struggled a lot with working in the municipal side and trying to justify the existence of the emergence of this brand new program.

I feel like a few things that have been valuable lessons learned is one is to always lean on your municipal colleagues. It is very difficult to articulate a new concept, but it is much easier to say, look, your sister cities at X, Y, and Z have started to think about TDM programming have started to think about TDM policy.

This is how it might be applicable in this context that we are talking about another way to really articulate the value of TDM is to think about it from a people's perspective. And that is something I think is difficult to do. We talk about policy, we talk about programs. We talk about

projects, but we're not talking about how it impacts the individual. And if you are able to say, how does transportation demand management impact the individual?

Now in a few years, in the long term future, it starts to resonate.

Speaker 2 (20m 57s): Jessica, where do you focus your efforts when it comes to designing a TDM strategy?

Speaker 3 (21m 1s): What IMI team specialize in is, is creating custom campaigns for a specific community. And when I say community, that's often defined in terms of like a residential area, a neighborhood or a city, but it doesn't have to be that. I mean, it could be, we we've designed campaigns on military bases, right? That's a really specific population that has specific, you know, needs and communication pathways, cultural norms. It could be for a hospital employee population, right. Or veterans, or we had one that was trying to increase.

There was a fantastic bike share program that was funded by a public health insurance group. And every one of their members could get a free membership to the bike sharing program, but they weren't taking them up on that. So, you know, that was a really specific one. We wanna reach these people and get them to use it. So it, I could tell you all kinds of stories about the specific populations and how we designed for them. But the whole point is that any kind of behavior change campaign works best when you really seek to understand the people that you want to serve, why aren't they using it today?

What are the barriers or assumptions or, you know, attitudes, norms that are getting in the way, and which of those can we address? In some cases they might be correct that it's going to take longer to take transit. Can we work with that? Or is that really a non-starter? So it's about perspective taking, and it's about not making assumptions, learning from people about how they get around and what we can do to make alternatives, to driving work well for them. And then designing an effective campaign. I'm very, very interested in making sure we don't just make that up best practices.

And peer review is great. We can learn a lot from each other and we should do that, but we should also be learning from actual research. So wherever possible, I say, you know, we're gonna do that kind of ecological research, but we should also look to publish academic research or other high quality research to say, well, how do we think behavior change happens? What is our theoretical framework that we're working with here? And then how do we activate those principles? So I think that combination of like, like the research focus, but also not assuming we're the experts, the people who we actually want to serve other experts.

And then, you know, you take that and decide, are we doing events? What are our communication channels? Is there social media, digital media involved in this? Are we doing tabling? Do we have partner organizations? What is our call to action and ask, what are we offering? People are there incentives. These are just like the mechanics, the tactical pieces that

you use to say, we wanna serve these people. We wanna help them do this. And here's what we believe will motivate them and support them.

Speaker 4 (23m 31s): I think one thing with TDM that is important is to understand how it can complement spaces outside of transportation. So, you know, some tangible examples in Austin was working with special events in Austin union. You know, that there's south by Southwest and Austin city limits, and they wanted to do an ordinance to improve sustainability with composting and cycling. And how can transportation demand management influence that space with visitor TDM, similarly business incentive programs to encourage businesses to come into your city again, how can you incorporate transportation demand management into that require or incentivize businesses coming in to think about employer commute programs?

And I think from the municipal perspective, those small wins are really important to see how TDM can be infused into spaces outside of transportation.

Speaker 2 (24m 34s): So how's this all paid for. Then you're talking about doing stuff with south by Southwest. You're trying to do stuff with local employers. You're doing stuff all over the city. Where's the funding for the program come from.

Speaker 4 (24m 45s): So that is the beauty of collaborating with different departments and different stakeholders. At least how I tried to approach it was I was a small team of one and then a small team of a few. How can I take advantage of a policy that is already emerging or program that is already being developed already funded for, by a different department that wasn't transportation focused and how can I essentially donate my time, help brainstorm, help, write ordinances, just help think about how to be a good partner within the city space.

So kind of that shortcut is I didn't have to think about additional funding because these were things that were already in motion, not exactly a long term sustainable solution, but it is a way to just kind of start getting kind of that thought process out there and start getting other folks outside the transportation space to think about TDM from their lens.

Speaker 2 (25m 48s): Well, it seems like it should be like if it's something that really helps drive the sustainability of cities generally, and it's not hard infrastructure, it seems like there should be some sort of a funding source for TDM programs, policies. That's maybe it's tied up in, in the infrastructure funding, or maybe it's tied up in city funding in some form or fashion, but how does that work for trying to make that case that it's a necessary expenditure or there's money that's needed to pay for these programs?

Speaker 3 (26m 14s): It almost seems like I, I alluded earlier to the congestion medication, air quality CMAC, federal funding source, and that's been a great boon to the U TDM industry. And I I'd like to think, you know, a benefit for our cities. It's a funny kind of program. It's this perverse prize you get when your air quality sucks enough. And if your air quality improves, you lose prize. So that's a little bit weird. So it means that there are plenty of places that have, you know, real needs that don't get CMAC funding. So that's a little bit weird, but you know, when I

talk to our Canadian colleagues, they have nothing comparable and they're so far behind us and it's not because they're not smart and capable it's because they don't have that kind of like dedicated funding source.

So I think you're right. If we care about something, we need to make sure there's a sustainable funding source. Now that federal funding tends to get like, sort of laundered down through the state dots and then often through the regional governments. And so I think there are some inefficiencies in that I also see from my perspective, most of my work is grant funded and that's probably because I'm a consultant. So, you know, maybe if you had standalone or dedicated funding, you'd hire staff, but for grant funded one off work, you may not be able or want to add staff capacity. So I have a bit of a bias there, but you know, I do think in some ways this like grant mentality, it's kind of like the opposite of abundance, right?

You can't plan very far ahead. You build all of this like knowledge once, but if you can't get another grant, you sort of lose it. So, you know, it's a little bit like nonprofits where if you're limping from grant to grant, I, I think there are real downsides in the places that have done a great job with TDM have overcome that in some way or another. So for example, I know Portland best because I live here, but you know, for many years they get the acronym, but you know, they have the state funding pot BA basically they've found like sustainable funding sources and they have a really strong internal, permanent TDM team on staff.

Well staffed lots of people and they keep their institutional memory over time. I don't know exactly how the other places that are doing it really well, like Arlington or go DC go, or Dr. Cog in Denver. I don't know how they're managing to make it work, but these are places I think of as having that kind of like permanent capacity. So I, I think you're right. And I think the places that have in, in particular, the logic that if cars are causing these societal externalities, these negative impacts, maybe they should pay for the solution.

Politically that's really hard, but it sure makes a lot of sense. So again, not to overemphasize Portland, but our bureau of transportation has instituted a few new paid parking districts in the last decade. So you used to be able to park for free and now you have to pay, they take basically all the money and spend it on mobility programs, spend it on buying down the cost of transit, spend it on different kinds of subsidies. Working through employers. I benefit from that. My employer is in one of those districts, my fellow colleagues can't park for free anymore. Some of them grumbled about that when it happened, but we get this transportation wallet offered at no cost to us where I get like a hundred dollars in free bike share, like, I don't know, \$250 or something and free transit every year just for working in this district, all these other like share.

And I don't even take advantage of all of them. So to me, that's just like, that's both sustainable, cuz people will always drive and you can price it. And we're sort of taking the money from the right place and spending it on things that mitigate that.

Speaker 4 (29m 22s): Yeah. I was going to mention that too, that we are starting to see much more creative funding streams from parking revenue, from mitigation funds, from fees on ride hailing. And having, seeing that go towards really important emerging TDM programs like universal basic mobility programs that have a strong equity focus is incredibly exciting and something that I would love to see replicated in cities throughout the us.

Speaker 2 (29m 56s): One of the big discussions that's been moved to the forefront, at least among active transportation professionals is the topic of access. I'm wondering how that kind of evolutions has also led to more discussions about equity and discussions about, you know, other things besides reducing the amount of cars that are on the

Speaker 4 (30m 11s): Road. I mean, I feel like Jessica working with you doing smart trips, Austin is a great example of like we created this framework of a neighborhood based education outreach program, but at least from the city's perspective, the whole purpose was to get people out of cars and to justify the funding for that program. By saying, look, SOV rate in this neighborhood was X. And after the program, SOV rate is Y. And if I can't prove this, this program doesn't deserve funding anymore.

And that was this kind of looming gray cloud over our project team the whole time, the years that we did this programming and reflecting back, it's like, wow, we were so narrowly focused when we were thinking about like, why are we doing this type of programming and does having these hyper quantitative metrics do an incredible disservice to the good work we are trying to do. But also doesn't challenge us to ask why is this important, not from a metrics funding, city staff D O T perspective, but why is this important for the community?

Just looking back at how we did our work. Like I think we had a good framework, but I also think the intent and the focus can shift to really be critical about how we are being more equitable in how we do the work we do

Speaker 3 (31m 44s): From a TDM perspective. And TDM is absolutely aligned with the climate crisis, right? So we shouldn't lose sight of the fact that we need to help our cities be less car dependent. We need people to take fewer car trips. It's really, really important. And at the same time there are needs mobility needs and our communities that will never be considered a good candidate for the type of, of TDM investments or programming that we've been talking about because we won't move the needle, let's say on car use. So I have a couple of examples for you.

One is a program we have the chance to advise in the rogue valley, which is in Southern Oregon, a a lot of veterans move there because it's fairly rich in veteran support services. And most of these folks do not own cars. So any program that focuses on them will not reduce vehicle miles traveled and it will not reduce single occupancy vehicle trips. However, the fact that these folks do not have reliable transportation is leading to really, really significant like public health, quality of life, economic problems for these folks.

So I thought this was very enlightened at the road valley transit district RVT D they decided to do a program for veteran. They hired a veteran to help them design the program and deliver it. So for veterans by veterans, that was really a travel training program at, you know, helped provided people with individualized support and training trip planning, took them on group outings on buses on bikes, really, really hand holding intensive wraparound. Here's what they found before the program. 52% of veterans said they missed medical appointments.

Regularly 29 said they missed work or employment opportunities. And 65 said they missed social or recreational opportunities. Here's what it looked like. Afterwards. Medical appointments dropped from 52 to only 13% said they were missing medical appointments, work or employment dropped from 29 to only 9% said they were still missing out unemployment opportunities and social recreational from 65 down to 24%. These people live richer lives. They are more able to participate in their communities.

They can get jobs. Now I think that's really important. And if it's not TDMs job, then somebody else better claim it. So we need a way to validate the importance of, you know, I think that's like mobility, justice work, and we need funding sources and we need, you know, experts who go to conferences. And I think it should fall under the TDM umbrella, but we're gonna have to find ways to make that not sort of always be the awkward stepsister. That's like, I'm important too. And you're like, yeah, you're important, but you didn't score very well. You know? So I don't know if we can keep giving you money.

Like we've gotta find a way out of that corner we've painted ourselves into.

Speaker 2 (34m 23s): And the thing that comes to my mind, you know, we had Carol Martin's on the show and Carol has a book called transport justice. And basically, you know, in one part of the book, he talks about the philosophical reasons for providing sufficient access for everybody. Right. And so if you're thinking about it from the perspective of one of the examples he uses in the book is the desert island idea where if you're going to a desert island and you don't know on the other side, when you get there, if you're gonna be a richer or poor person, how would you design a transportation system? And so I feel like the discussion that you're talking about is exactly the same in that, you know, we're talking about making people's lives richer.

And I think that that TDM provides solutions for people to get to the places where they need to go, where they might not have otherwise gone. If the car is the only way to get around,

Speaker 3 (35m 4s): I think what's happening right now is we're, we're talking about the same problem. And we're thinking about different solutions that are not mutually exclusive. We need to get all the systems working better for everyone. So, you know, abundant transit all day, seven days a week, not just peak hour, right. You know, connected networks, hopefully rational pricing. And if we can get that, then access will be improved for everyone. And that's true. I co-sign that. And also what I have in mind are more of these kinds of programs that are really specially focused on the population they want to serve.

So like this veterans program that I brought up, there was an example of a universal basic mobility program in Oakland, California that had some really interesting results that focused on Hispanic, Latino, black residents, really pretty exclusively, right. And tried to design the program around their need. And through those communication channels, I'm thinking also some programs we had the opportunity to do for Metro, our regional government here in the Portland Metro area for two different parts of the region that are very non-white, but in really different ways.

Right. And the problems they told us they needed, our help solving were really different in each place. Right? So one, I feel like is this like wraparound, like social safety net, like we just need like the land use and transportation to be rich and available to everyone. And also I think that in the us, you know, we're so far from that, that taking this kind of like population by population approach makes sense, too, that

Speaker 2 (36m 33s): Also brings up this idea of the nine to five trips. Aren't really necessarily something that everybody follows. And I always think it's strange that we focus on like the 18, 19% of trips that are all at the same time of day, even though there's another, you know, 82% that happen that we should also focus on. Can you give an example of TDM targeting those types of trips? The trips that people take that might not be in that normal commute hour, but are still important?

Speaker 3 (36m 58s): Well, my first answer to you is, is not programs that focus like exclusively on those, but rather that are just about all trips. So my team's area of special expertise is residential TDM, where you would take a neighborhood. And this is what we, we worked on with Tim, Tim in Austin, for example, and design a campaign just for them. Now what's different about a neighborhood based TDM campaign and an employer based one. I mean, there are many different things, but one starting place is we have a common origin, but not a common destination. It's the opposite with employer TDM, diverse origins, common destination.

So even that starting place leads you to some really different solutions. Like van pool would never work in a residential program because why would anyone be going to the same place? There's no efficiency. There's no logic to that. So what we found in, you know, many, many years of running these programs is that usually the commute trip is not the one to leave with. It's the longest, it's the most habitual, it's the one where it's usually the most stressful to try something else. That's like the worst time of day to get on a bike. If you don't usually bike, the bus is probably stuck in traffic.

It's, it's a little bit of a hard sell. Even if driving is miserable and the consequences for many people of trying something new and not having at work, you could lose your job, not everyone, but I mean, you know, it's, it's kind of a big deal, whereas the trip to the library, you know, maybe you drive to that one library because it's bigger, but there's one in your neighborhood that you could walk to, or you're meeting a friend for coffee and they're willing to come to you or, you know, you can pick the place or, you know, just, you wanna go on a walk, I call them

home based discretionary trips. And I think there are trips that could be taken by multiple modes that are much shorter where perhaps the power of habit is lower and where I think people are just like, you know, the stakes are lower.

So that's when we design these programs. We are, we are usually explicitly or implicitly focusing on those kinds of trips and we see them as an easier sell. And then the other thing I would highlight that we've learned over the years and this kind of surprised us, it took us a long time to understand it. These are transportation programs. So we were just transportation, transportation, transportation. And then we started hearing back from people, community, community, community. So for example, we did five residential areas over four years in Chicago. And we asked them open, ended questions of people.

And we started to hear, like, I feel more connected to my community because of this program. So we started to put it formally and we found that like 60% of people in the target area said, I feel more connected to my community because its program or one quote was like, I love seeing our community come together and learn from each other. I've never seen the community so engaged or like this is an amazing program that helped our diverse community come together. I think Americans are hungry to know each other and know their neighbors and feel a sense of place in belonging. And if that were the only thing we were doing, then probably it shouldn't be funded by TDM funds.

But I think it's like a co-benefit it's like the Trojan horse, but it's also like an authentic, like meaningful thing that we are accomplishing. So I would say that's a rationale for focusing on these types of programs. And it's also something we shouldn't forget in our evaluation. We should ask these questions and we should celebrate the wins in this area.

Speaker 4 (40m 4s): I was just going to add to that, that one. I totally agree. And the other thought I had about how we've been hyperfocused on the commute trips, one of the ways that we can get away from that is from a policy perspective and to kind of take several steps up and say, how can TDM policy really change that kind of foundation? You know, we're seeing so many cities completely overhaul their parking policies.

We're seeing cities getting rid of parking minimum requirements. We're starting to see parking maximums. Like these are the things that are, you know, fundamental. It will take time, but this will make that on the ground TDM that Jessica is talking about, be incredibly successful going on into the future. And that is kind of like the nerdy policy perspective, married with building community TDM perspective is where I think we're going to really, really be successful.

Speaker 3 (41m 16s): And I would like to add examples. I completely agree. And I think other examples are cities that are, you know, revisiting their, you know, doing a great bus network redesign and redesigning their service, not to focus on on assuming that their, their most important passengers are the ones traveling to the city center nine to five, Monday through Friday, but really seeing the potential and the ridership that's there all day long off peak on weekends evenings and acknowledging that through service and hopefully coupling it also with

bus priority infrastructure and signalization investments that make the bus time competitive with a private automobile, which make it easier for us to sell.

So it can become a virtuous cycle. But for example, if your bus service only serves nine to five commuters who, by the way, these days are the ones with the power to say, I'm not leaving my house again. Are you kidding? That's a real, what's the opposite of future proof. That's misaligned with our current situation. And I think a mistake.

Speaker 2 (42m 12s): Well, it's interesting how much, you know, I imagine the pandemic has changed the discussion about demand and what the D part is in TDM because of, you know, what we've all been through over the last two, three years.

Speaker 4 (42m 22s): Yeah. I mean, we're seeing that in Boston, we're, we're seeing the ridership rates increase more in the times outside of the common, you know, what we consider the peak commute. And those are coming from the communities that are higher proportions people of color, low income residents, folks that are not born in the United States folks that have commutes that are outside those traditional hours. So there is definitely this kind of eye opening perspective.

Now, thanks to the pandemic.

Speaker 2 (42m 58s): Are there new core metrics, Tim, Tim, that we should see as standard? Are there ways to measure success in terms of TDM?

Speaker 4 (43m 4s): You know, I feel like we have been hinting at this talking about this throughout this conversation. And you know, I'm gonna say yes again, vehicle miles traveled. VMT is incredibly important from a sustainability perspective, but we need to measure access to critical things like jobs, doctors, appointments we need to measure the perspective communities have about whether their neighborhood is a safe space.

So kind of what you talked about Jessica about, yes. I feel more connected to my community like that is so incredibly important from a TDM perspective. And I think how to measure that and measure that in a way where we can bring it back to the folks that are holding the money and saying, this is just as valuable as proving that single occupancy vehicle rates have shifted down.

How we do that is I think something that our industry needs to continue to talk about, continue to figure out from a really holistic perspective.

Speaker 3 (44m 18s): Yeah. We could spend a lot of time talking about what metrics we wish we had and which ones are realistic to collect. We could spend a lot of time talking about how, you know, apps both enable new kinds of metrics, but have their own like really deep biases, you know, baked in. But I think I'm gonna pick up on something Tim Tim talked about, and that is that for many types of travelers, but especially for, you know, fem identifying folks and also

black indigenous people of color, you know, fear of, and, and not an irrational fear around personal safety and especially around discrimination and harassment is real.

And if you look at what people are confronting every day, like I said, it's not an irrational fear. So this was something we heard a lot of when we worked in the Rosewood part of the Portland Metro area where, you know, people there, they know how to use the bus, but they've had a lots of, you know, situations. These might be like, let's say immigrants of refugees, situations where, where really like hate speech or physical threats have been expressed against them on public transit. And the bus driver has done nothing. Is that a TDM problem? Well, it sure affect, you know, our ability to succeed.

So this expansive idea of like, well, who do we need to partner with? And what are the kind of larger societal problems that, you know, we might not be able to solve single-handedly but we also dare not ignore. So, you know, I think that the city of Portland, but also some folks I've talked to in king county, which is the Seattle region are doing some really deep thinking about like, well, what does it mean for transportation professionals and TDM folks to kind of tackle head on like, you know, is it nonviolent mediation? You know, is it, is it teaching people self-advocacy techniques? Is it teaching drivers like bystander intervention stuff.

These are new kinds of conversations that are very important and very hard and very exciting.

Speaker 4 (46m 3s): Yeah. We had that exact conversation when I was at the T talking about bystander training and several of my colleagues and I at the T took bystander training. And at least before I had left, we were working with the diversity equity and inclusion director to see how bystander training could be standard for all T employees. I think that is incredibly important.

Speaker 2 (46m 31s): Does that make it hard to focus on TDM when there's so many other things that need to be addressed as well? I mean, you have driver shortages, you have maintenance backlogs, you have homelessness epidemic, you have all of these incidents that happen on buses and trains in terms of the transit system. You're starting to pile on a lot of responsibility on TDM. It seems like a lot.

Speaker 3 (46m 51s): I bet everyone thinks it's a lot, right? I mean, this moment in time, when all, yeah. All our social safety nets are crumbling. Right. I think probably everyone, I mean, talk to people who work in libraries, right? Like their jobs have suddenly become like Narcan administration. You know, I think this is a way bigger societal problem than just for TDM, but yeah, it's, it's real, right. Like I've been doing a program in Seattle and you know, normally if you hear people talk about like, oh, those I don't know about transit, it's so dangerous, those bad, bad people at ride transit. And then I saw a news article with a video of 18 drug addicts passed out on a single train in Seattle.

And my colleagues tell me, I see that every night, all of a sudden I'm like, oh, this isn't necessarily like something that I can be like, oh, you have, you have wrong impressions of what writing transit is. Like, I don't have good answers for like, that's not a messaging problem.

Speaker 4 (47m 40s): Yeah. I, so one of the things I think kind of Jeff, you're saying there are all these societal problems and a lot of it kind of being re highlighted because of the pandemic or exacerbated due to the pandemic makes it overwhelming. And I, I think the answer is yes, of course it makes it incredibly overwhelming, not just in the TDM space and the transportation space and whatever space you're in and it makes our jobs really difficult. But I also think it forces us to start to think creatively.

It forces us to stop thinking about transportation, demand management solutions as such a narrow window. And at the end of the day, I think, you know, if we can work through like our lives suck sometimes, and it is really difficult to work every day, we can be so much more empathetic as an industry than we have in the past.

And I think that is where I see the TDM space going is with a whole lot more empathy, with a much broader perspective of what we think TDM is and how we can be a part of the broader transportation solution, transportation and land use solution, transportation, land use, affordable housing, all of that. We've created this opportunity to challenge ourselves. And I see a lot of folks doing that.

And that's really exciting.

Speaker 3 (49m 17s): I think our colleagues in the active transportation industry are maybe a bit ahead of us here where, you know, I think there has been a bit of a reckoning about like the whiteness of that industry, for example, and like, you know, how well are we serving the whole communities? And, you know, I think there's been some really good like introspection challenge dialogues around what needs to change. And I'm not saying Dr. Transportation industry is perfect, but I, I think they're a bit ahead of like, well, we can't accomplish our goals without, you know, forming really productive alliances with, let's say like, you know, housing folks or people who are working on environmental justice, right.

That we need to tend to those kinds of broader partnerships. And I think that could be really exciting for the TDM industry. And I'm thinking for example, about the freeway protests and the youth climate movement, I don't think the TDM industry is working with those folks now. I, I'm not sure even a lot of them are tracking it, but they are on our side and they need us. And they're working in a really different realm towards similar goals. So, you know, we should pay attention to them. I think also an example is like, what's going on with shared mobility, you know, Uber and Lyft are, are they collapsing?

I mean, they lost their money bags, CC funding, they're raising their cost to closer to actual. They've had a pretty negative impact on our cities, which we I'm sure you spend three podcasts talking about. So we have kind of the legacy of like what Uber and Lyft have done and,

and how they've eroded some of the public transit support. But that's changing right now at the same time I'm seeing maybe market consolidation or possibly market collapse coming for like E scooters and shared bikes. I would hate to lose everything we've gained, but that's an opportunity for, for dynamism, right?

That's an opportunity for partnerships or for new kinds of funding or ownership models. I think we could also think about, you know, our friends in transit. Maybe we could work more closely with them. Lots of people are working on reclaiming streets. I'm seeing resurgence in the like kind of parking advocacy movement. So yeah, I think it's time for a bigger umbrella for many reasons. And perhaps some of the like societal crisis things you alluded to Jeff are both a very real challenge, but also, you know, a call to action to like talk to people outside of our industry and start to think more broadly about what it will take to get where we need to go.

Speaker 2 (51m 26s): Let's close out by asking you each what tactic or policy campaign that's out there. Do you want other cities or agencies to take on? Is there anything that stands out to you as something that folks should really be thinking about? Maybe a top line. I know there's so many things, but maybe like a top line thing that's of greatest importance. There's

Speaker 3 (51m 42s): So many, so many

Speaker 4 (51m 43s): Things. Oh my goodness. Oh, wait, two things I'm really excited about one is parking reform, parking policy, the citywide type policies. The fundamental shift to moving away from parking minimums, I think is so exciting. And pairing that with things like residential bulk transit passes for multiunit developments. So kind of like had that marrying of policy and program.

I would love to see that the other thing also with parking, but it's because like these things are coming up and it's so exciting to see is the creative way of taking parking revenue and funding programs that are transportation access and equity focus. So taking a cut of parking meters and funneling it to universal basic mobility programs, I would be so excited to see that pop up in cities everywhere.

Speaker 3 (52m 44s): I couldn't agree more, Tim, Tim, those are beautiful examples. They are perfect. I, I think I don't even wanna bring up anything. Other than that, what I would add is that like free parking has been probably the most disastrous transportation policy decision that America ever made your listeners don't need me to tell them why, but anything we can do to erode the stranglehold that that has on, you know, the way we use our space, whose needs our prioritize, you know, the unfunded mandate, like who pays for the streets, anything we can do to charge drivers for parking, I will through a party for.

Speaker 4 (53m 21s): Yeah, exactly. And one of the things I have been thinking about a lot is I want us to get to a space where we can recognize that like two competing thoughts can coexist that there is a high cost to free parking. There is, and there is also equitable impacts to pricing

strategies. And how do we have those two thoughts coexist? And it is through the really cool programs, like taking parking revenue and putting it into universal basic mobility programs.

Like that's where I want us to be able to coexist. And those like both of those opinions are real. How do we merge them together?

Speaker 3 (54m 1s): So everybody wins. It's that easy. Jeff,

Speaker 4 (54m 4s): Come on. How have we not solved that? Of course.

Speaker 2 (54m 7s): Well, Tim, Tim and Jessica, where can folks find you if you want to be found?

Speaker 3 (54m 11s): Yes, you can find me on Twitter at, at Jessica Roberts. And given that it's the most boring name tells you I've been on Twitter for a long time.

Speaker 4 (54m 19s): And man, I, I feel so old. I'm not much of a Twitter user, but you can find me on LinkedIn. I can share my email.

Speaker 2 (54m 30s): Awesome. Well, Jessica and Tim, Tim, thanks for joining us. We really appreciate your time.

Speaker 1 (54m 48s): Thanks for joining us to listen to more shows or find more resources related to transit and livable communities. Visit us on the web@railvolution.org. If you have feedback about this podcast or ideas for topics, we should cover. Let us know, email us at podcast@railvolution.org.