

The New E's of Transportation Podcast

Episode 1 - Introducing the New E's of Transportation

Opening:

Jennifer Toole: For almost a hundred years, the work of transportation professionals has been guided by 3 E's: Education, Enforcement, and Engineering. Unfortunately, the US is falling behind other countries when it comes to providing safe, efficient, and sustainable transportation options. At the same time, the way we move is undergoing a sea change. It seems like hardly year goes by without new mode of travel coming out from the scene. It's time for us to rethink our traditional focus on the 3 E's.

Andy Clarke: Not only are education, enforcement, and engineering not enough - in some cases, they are actively preventing us from solving problems that exist that we know how to solve.

Jennifer Toole: To create a 21st century transportation system that moves people, and centers on the needs of communities, we need Ethics, Equity, and Empathy.

Leah Shahum: How can we use the emotion and the passion we are talking about - that's really been missing from a lot of the traffic safety work - how can we bring that to bear to help our safety work be truly equitable?

Jennifer Toole: From Toole Design group, this is The New E's of Transportation. I'm **Jennifer Toole:**.

Conversation:

There's really no better example of the reasons behind this than the Vision Zero movement, so we have on the line with us today Leah Shahum. Leah is the Executive Director of the Vision Zero Network, which is a national advocacy group, with a mission to support cities implementing Vision Zero. They put out fantastic resources - Leah, we are so excited to have you on our very first inaugural podcast.

Leah Shahum: Thank you Jennifer. It's an honor to be here.

Jennifer Toole: We also have Andy Clarke, Andy is the director of Strategy here at Toole Design Group, and among many other hats, has managed quite a few of our Vision Zero projects. So welcome to Andy.

Andy Clarke: Thank you I'm very happy to be here, and delighted to have Leah here with us because for me, Vision Zero has broaden our focus the reason why engineering, education, and enforcement aren't enough. I've spent 30 years organizing my professional life around those 3 Es, but it turns out they are not really providing us the tools and the guidance and the information and the structure we need to do the job in front of us.

Jennifer Toole: Yeah, when I think about how many presentations that I've done that started out with, "ok everybody needs to understand the 3 Es, or the 4 Es, or the 5 Es." Leah, what it is about Vision Zero that demand a different approach, and why it isn't a conventional way of tackling traffic safety enough?

Leah Shahum: One of the strengths of the Vision Zero approach is that it really is bringing people and the human experience more front and center to the work of traffic safety. You know for a long time, it's been very kind of professionalized and everybody's got their worlds, right? You know, you've got your engineers and you've got your police, you've got your policy makers, and I'd say unwittingly, we've gotten very siloed in that work. And I think a big component that haven't taken main stage as much, is really the communities that this is really benefiting, right? It's about people. And then we take a little deeper and we find, hey, you know, there are certain communities that are really hardest hit by unsafe streets. And there are certain communities that have really been underserved. So how do we really dig underneath, you know, the data, which is so important, and really get to the communities we are actually serving with this work. And I think that's a big part of what you guys are doing, trying to expand the Es.

Andy Clarke: And this isn't one of the E's what we are trying to talk about initially, but emotion is clearly a key part of Vision Zero, and the ability gives you to go beyond the warrants and the manuals and stuff, and actually get mad about people getting killed.

Leah Shahum: That's a great point, Andy. It's not like people in the past didn't care - of course they cared! - but, it's almost as if kind of, again, the professional world around traffic safety has above board, and "well, this is our job, and we can only do this, this, and this." Things like level of service, design standards, they're real things, they're important things. Yet, I think partly this emotion that you are referring to with the work of Vision Zero, and frankly, getting more survivors involved, victims' families and victims themselves. Part of what that's doing is, frankly, bringing that emotion forward more and I think, questioning the status quo. With 40 thousand traffic deaths a year in the country, in the US every year, we know that's unacceptable, right? We should be morally outraged, and I think we need this kind of emotion, the fire in the belly, in order to change the status quo.

Andy Clarke: As Jennifer mentioned, I've had the privilege of working on a number of Vision Zero projects for Toole Design, and, one of the early ones is a jurisdiction where they've got a great trail system, and where the trail system crosses big roads, they've had a number of traffic safety issues. And one crossing that's had two fatalities where traffic engineers - because of the warrants, and manuals and level of service and speed requirements - haven't been willing to putting a protected crossing to get people safely cross the major road - t's like a 45 mile an hour, 4 lane highway - because they don't want to stop traffic.

They try through education, through signs, through warning signs, through more warning signs, to try and prevent people getting killed, and it hasn't worked - twice, in the space of twelve months. And engineers were not prepared to do what it takes to stop fatalities from happening, even though they knew exactly what it would take. They weren't prepared to do it because of those rules that it would break.

And in a separate location, another fatality where engineers did suggest a good solution and implemented it temporally, it was actually police who came in and said "Well, you can't do that. We've got to deal with this issue with enforcement." And they could only see their solutions and their problems through the views of enforcement. Those were the moments when I realized, not only are education, enforcement, and engineering not enough, there are, in some cases, because of the stovepipes that those disciplines are in, they are actively preventing us from solving problems that we know exist that we know how to solve. and I think the power of emotion is it gives us the ability to break through that and say "Listen, we just need to fix this problem, we know how to do it."

Leah Shahum: Yeah, it's often the case that the challenges or the barriers are less of a technical nature and really more of a political type of barrier. You know, we have such smart people out there – engineers, planners, law enforcement, policy makers - who know what works, whether that's about how to manage speed, how to redesign a road, how to build a complete street, right? We know what works to keep people safe. I think unfortunately what we see is that there's sometimes pushback, right? It's often NIMBY pushback, you know that "Not in my backyard" sentiment where...you know, some residents or folks think they don't want any sort of change on their streets, and of course that's not their street, right, it's a public street.

So, you know, I think part of what Vision Zero is doing is, and really again is bringing that emotion, that heart, and that experience into the work of traffic safety more predominantly. I think what that's doing is helping build more or push more political will to do the right thing. Even if they're the hard things, you know? We think a lot about, "oh you know, people don't want to slow down" right? But, we know they also want safety. When you ask people, of course they want safety. You know well that's a trade-off, right, if we're going to have safer conditions, we need to slow people down a little bit. So how do we really bring more of the community or public - I'd say - outcry, or call for the politicians, especially policy makers, to make the right decisions there and not just crumble to that NIMBY push sometimes.

Jennifer Toole: Yeah, yeah, I think that's a great segue actually, to another one of those Es. So, we have an internal Vision Zero group here at Toole Design, and in that group we share information across our offices, and we had a presentation the other day where someone had put up the High Injury Network map, showing the streets that had the highest percentage of the crashes in that city. And they overlaid with the old redlining maps of that city, and lo and behold they were an almost perfect match. Have you seen Vision Zero projects change the conversation around equity and communities?

Leah Shahum: You know, it's interesting. I would say, you know, having been a long-time advocate for better bicycling, safer bicycling before I got more directly into the Vision Zero work, I'll be the first to say that many of us in the traditional biking and walking advocacy movements, and transportation safety movements, you know, I don't think we have a great track record around really centering equity in our work.

I think there are certainly willingness and interest and desire, but not necessarily a great track record on that yet. I'll say that I do think the way Vision Zero have such a strong, data-driven approach. First of all, you can't deny some of the realities and trends that come up with the data and I'll just show a couple of things:

National statistics show that, specifically low-income people in the U.S. are twice as likely to be killed while walking. African-American and Latino people in the U.S. are twice as likely to be killed while walking. Meanwhile, low income neighborhood and communities of color are half as likely to have good sidewalks, like consistent, safe, good sidewalks. So not a surprise there that that's an inverse relationship, right?

And I mentioned those national statistics, you know, that may not shock people listening right now, but how our communities have been built out over time, or perhaps not built out, or underserved, really has a lot to do with the safety patterns we see today and the kind of lives that people lead. Today, a lot of communities and especially those communities without real, traditional political power, live in neighborhoods, and work and travel in neighborhood, that have been less safe. They are the areas where the freeways touch down, with the high speed, massive, multi-lane arterial state roads run through, and frankly less-comfortable sidewalk, and safe sidewalks, and good dedicated bikeways, etc.

How can we use the work of Vision Zero and the emotion, the passion we are talking about that's really been missing from a lot of the traffic safety work...How can we bring that to bear to help our safety words to be truly equitable?

In the city I live in, in San Francisco, you know like many cities, we're divvied up into a number of city council districts. For us, we have 11 different districts, and traditionally, each one of the council members would kind of have his or her pot of traffic safety funds that they would use in their districts. But through the Vision Zero work over the last five years - and it really has been that recent - through the Vision Zero work, we've been really digging into the data really showing that 2 of those districts, bear the disproportionate burden, or brunt, of unsafe conditions. Interestingly, these are also areas where we have high percentage of low income people, people without cars, transit dependent, etc. Thanks to the Vision Zero focus, the city council members in my city have really recognized this and said, hey, we understand that, we might need to divvy up this pie, or the budget, the resources, differently. So now, more resources are going to those two districts that are really bearing the brunt, and the other supervisors and council members really understand and say, ok, we get it. There's a difference between equality and equity, and I think that's a great case of it.

Andy Clarke: Hey Leah, I'll take you from where you live now to where you grow up in Jacksonville. We saw that conversation change, or tried to use the Vision Zero to change the conversation around traffic safety in Jacksonville. Because its for years, it has a terrible traffic safety record, they don't shy away from it, but they've too readily...sort of, excused the problem by saying "well, that happens to people there where they're are doing the wrong thing or in this neighborhood, where they are not doing X or Y or Z," and Vision Zero gives you the opportunity to say, "It doesn't matter about that, we have to stop people getting killed."

And in Jacksonville, you know, it's a hundred people a year in traffic fatalities, a third of which are pedestrians, and a high percentage of those are in poor or underserved neighborhood. This gives you the opportunity to say, as you just described in San Francisco, "we have to stop these crashes from happening, it doesn't matter who the victims are, we need to stop it."

Jennifer Toole: So, one of the things that I've always felt is the most powerful part of the Vision Zero movement is the fact that it's really centered on completely changing the way we do business. Really, it's rethinking the way we look at safety, and I was curious, what are some good examples of things that cities have done, cities and counties, and jurisdictions have done, to change the way they do business through the Vision Zero program?

Leah Shahum: The big change here, the biggest change that Vision Zero makes happen, is that this is an ethical responsibility. This is the moral responsibility, right? Just like people, we believe, people in a civilized society have the right to clean and safe drinking water, clean air to breathe, right? That's really considered a basic right. We need to think of safe mobility as a basic right. That's really what's underlying all of this.

So, I think, in terms of "how are we seeing communities actually was really embrace that?" I think we're seeing them change some of the long-held standards, or push back and start to revise some of the long-held standards. Portland, Oregon has been doing such a great job around questioning the way we think about speed. And, by the way, a lot of cities are doing this also - Charlotte, North Carolina's getting into this now, so not just your typical left coast-y cities.

We are seeing more and more communities that say "Hey, why are we setting these speed at, you know, 45 miles per hour, when we know there's going to be people walking and biking here, and we

don't want them interacting with cars moving at 45 miles per hour? Why aren't we setting them 25, 30 or sometimes even lower, you know, 15 miles 20 miles per hour," depending on the situation, and really, kind of turning this around and saying "hey, we've got to prioritize safety over speed."

It is a choice, that's more of a political choice, but it's also an ethical choice, so people are going to complain, they are going to get there 2 minutes, or maybe 5 minutes, later than they would have, it's going to take a little bit longer, but, that's an ethical choice.

So, I think we are seeing more cities council members, mayors, staff at agencies, push back and say "we have to do this because we don't want people to die." And I think we are seeing that street redesigns too. Places like New York City, with what they called the "boulevard of death" – a terrible name - but Queens Blvd, the "boulevard of death" in Queens. You know, they've seen tons of traffic deaths there, yet they weren't making the changes needed because there were so much push back from a small member of vocal neighbors or residents. And finally, and again, I think this is partly because of the Vision Zero momentum and the emotion, and the political power there, they have made major changes on Queens Blvd, even despite some push back. And they are literally saving lives. They've seen a dramatic reduction in severe injuries, and severe reduction in fatalities, thank goodness. But they weren't be able to make the street design changes until they really brought that kind of moral or ethical power or argument to the situation.

Andy Clarke: To me, Vision Zero has brought tremendous power to what NYC has done over the last few years. A lot of the progress that we've seen there for safety, but also for walking and bicycling, is because of the Vision Zero mindset and the safe system approach to the work they're doing. And I think you are seeing there exactly the kind of change that you're describing. They are willing to provide protected left turns to motorists, for the benefit of motorists and pedestrians, and to preserve the safety of people crossing at intersections with left turns and so forth. Even though that means a few seconds of delay, or it means an extra few seconds in the signal cycle, because its worth it in terms of saving people's lives.

And I think those changes, they can be hard-fought, they can be highly political in the instant, but honestly my guess is once they are done, people actually have no ideas that any change has been made or they are not really conscious of any difference in their travel time or overall trip comfort or convenience. And before you know it, in a matter of days, that just seems to be routine and normal.

So, I think Vision Zero gives you the courage and ability to say "We are doing this exactly as you say, for ethical reasons, for moral reasons, for the right reason," and maybe it will cause a little bit of inconvenience, but honestly within a matter of days and weeks, I'm sure that's largely forgotten.

And I have a quick question that I want to ask, Leah. You mention your background, shared with mine in the bike movement, and our progression from that, What was it about Vision Zero that captured your attention and made you to, not change course because it's clearly highly related to bicycle advocacy, but, what was it about Vision Zero that set you on this course for the last two or three years with Vision Zero Network?

Leah Shahum: Yeah it's interesting, I think I really reacted a strongly few years ago. My background was leading bicycle effort in the city of San Francisco and I loved it and felt really proud of the work we were doing, etc. -lots more work to do, but good progress. One year, we had, it was 2013 into 2014, we had a particularly awful year for traffic deaths, particular people biking and walking, as many places did around the country that had really been trending badly these last couple years.

And I'll just say as an advocate, I was really feeling frustrated and frankly, kind of despondent about the lack of progress we were making. And you know, as an advocate figuring out, like "Gosh, what do we do to be more effective?" And policy makers, electeds, how do we push them to do the right thing? And I was really reading a lot about Vision Zero in Sweden and other countries and then New York City was really just starting to publicly take this on. As you know, New York City was really the first Vision Zero city in the U.S., and they were getting rolling, and I think for me, it really kind of click at that time that without this big underlying kind of moral argument, we aren't going to change business as usual. You know, we're just playing around the edges. To really make a seismic shift, and get away from this tragic number of 100 traffic deaths a day in this country, its more than a hundred, or 40 thousand per year in the US, to really make a serious dent in that, which we have to, we are going to need to do things differently.

And that's really where the Vision Zero piece struck me when we say, hey this is a moral responsibility and again, just like clean air and clean water, we have to be doing this in a civilized society. People have a right to get to work, to get to school, to get to parks, to play and get some exercise, to get to friends' houses to socialize. People have the right to safe mobility, and we really, frankly we've been doing them in this service, and many of the systems and policies we've set up. So, how do we start to question the long-time systems and policies to say there is a different way, and we as community members want to choose it, and hey politicians, we're going to hold you accountable. I think that's really been, to me, something very empowering, where, you know, the advocacy for everyone, whether they're walking, biking, motorcyclist, driving, transit, it's all is under the same umbrella. Everyone deserves the right to move around their communities safely.

Jennifer Toole: Leah, you know, I think having a national advocacy group that's focusing on Vision Zero that has been so important to helping provide resources and coordinate between cities. I know one of the first times I went to your website, I saw that map with all the Vision Zero cities that have made a pledge to eliminate deaths and serious injuries, and I'm just curious - Tell us a little bit more about the Vision Zero network and the work that you do and how people can support you.

Leah Shahum: Well, thank you for that. We are a small non-profit project. We've been around just about five years now, and it's really been such an honor to be able to support this growing Vision Zero movement, because when you look back five and half years, there were zero communities in the US working on Vision Zero, and today there's more than 42. So, just in five years, that's been a really, really great trajectory, and our work has really been "how do we support them?", and as you said, "how do we connect them." Because while every community is different, we share a lot of the same challenges and opportunities. So rather than people recreating the wheel and frankly, wasting time and resources, we want people to connect and learn from each other. So, we are always looking for supporters, whether that's business sponsors, individual supporters, pro-bono helpers. We are a non-profit, so everything we do, we are rising our own fund, and we'd love to be able to reach more communities. I know we are all thinking a lot about "Hey, how does Vision Zero grow in the suburbs, in rural areas, in other parts of the countries, particularly, say, the South?" We'd really love to expand this reach, help people do the good work, and if anybody can support us, we would love that! Check out more at visionzeronetwork.org.

Andy Clarke: You know, one of the thing I admire most, Leah, is your expressed commitment to kind of keeping the Vision Zero idea pure, and not letting people back track or come out in a compromised manner. I love Complete Street to death, but I think there's probably a lot of agencies that have adopted complete streets policies, and get kudos for doing that, but don't honestly live up to the principles and the ideals of Complete Streets, if one is completely honest. I love the way that I believe

you are able to keep people focused on the two specific goals: zero fatalities and serious injuries by a defined time. And that's pretty key I think to your progress and your success and sort of the magic of the endeavor.

In several of the communities that I've worked on projects, the city starts by saying "Can you tell us what we need to do? What are the action items and action strategies that we need to adopt?" And they are kind of taken aback when we say "It's not for us to actually tell you what to do - we can, but you are not gonna have any sense of ownership or any sense of what those action items really mean unless you come up with them yourselves."

The people responsible and the agencies responsible across the disciplines - they are the ones that actually need to come up with the action items, understand the real implications of what they mean, and own them and implement them. And we can say, yep, that's a good way to go, and you'll find other cities that have done X, Y and Z that match that. It is not our role - sometimes it is really tempted to play that role but it's not our role - to just give them on a plate to what they need to do. They've got to come up with it themselves.

Leah Shahum: Thank you. I think it's important, I think, for all of us - how do we help people understand that Vision Zero is not a slogan. It's not just a tag line. In fact, it's not even just a program, right? And I think at first, people misunderstand maybe a little bit, and they think "Oh, great we'll just start calling our work, our regular work, 'Vision Zero.'" And, you know, I think at the local level, at the state level, at the national level, we need to really call people on that, and help them understand, as Jennifer was saying, it really is about transformative work, and about changing business as usual.

That is not going to be fast. It's not going to be easy. We really need to help move out of our silos and work across realms more regularly. So, we need to bring the community more, we need to use the data more, we need to hold ourselves more accountable, and really do what works, even if it's politically challenging. All those are hard thing, but they are possible.

You know, when we look at the countries that used to have, 20 years ago, they had the same traffic death rate we did. Today the US has about 12, roughly 12 traffic deaths per 100,000 people. And other countries, developed countries that had that same number 20 years ago, now are under 3 traffic death per 100,000. So, they've cut traffic deaths significantly in this 20 years, by doing a lot of what we've talked about here. So, it is possible, it's doable, and there's really no excuse for not doing it. So I think the biggest thing we can do is really keep making the case that this is an ethical imperative. That, you know, folks care about their own families and their own friends safety, you know, this is the way to do it. We really need to commit to zero.

Jennifer Toole: Alright, I think that's a great way to wrap this up. Just want to thank Leah for joining us today, and thank you Andy for joining us as well, and thank you to everybody who is listening.

Next up, I'll be talking to Bill Schultheiss and Jeff Paniati with ITE about Ethics.

Andy Clarke: Leah, thanks a bunch for being part of the conversation, and for really kind of embodying the ethics, the empathy, the equity element to the conversation we are having around these E's. There's 27 other E's that we can and will talk about over the next few weeks, I'm sure, but I hope you'll see at the NACTO conference that we are going to start this conversation, and kind of unveil the opportunity to talk about these new E's and hopefully give some extra attention to the work you're doing, and we're all doing. So, thanks for being a part of the conversation today.

Leah Shahum: Sure! Thank you guys, honestly. Thanks to Toole Design for being such a strong leader in this field. You know, I'm always pleased to see you guys working with communities and seeing the ethos and commitment to equity, engagement in the work you are helping communities do. It's really clear, so thank you.

Closing:

Jennifer Toole: You can learn more about the Vision Zero Network in the show note in this episode, or on their website at visionzeronetwork.org. At Toole Design, this conversation is focused on changing the core values of our profession and focusing our work on the needs of the people and the communities we serve. We are asking you to be part of this discussion around the new E's of our industry.

For more perspective on the new E's, visit our website at tooledesign.com/theNewEs. Join the conversation on social media by searching for Toole Design with the hashtag #theNewEs. The new Es of transportation podcast is produced by Nate Graham, and edited by KO Myers. I'm **Jennifer Toole** – thank you for listening.