



Mpact Podcast Episode 83

Advancing Active Transportation in the Delaware Valley

With Cassidy Boulan, Associate Manager, Office of Transit, Bicycle and Pedestrian Planning, and Thom Stead, Assistant Manager, Office of Mobility, Analysis, and Design, both with the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission

[00:00:04] **Kammy Horne:** Welcome to the Mpact Podcast. This is Kammy Horn, CEO of Mpact, formerly known as Rail~Volution. More than a year ago, we launched our new name and tagline, Mpact: Mobility, Community, Possibility. We are a national organization working at the intersection of transit, related mobility options, and community development. The podcast is a chance to hear from a range of voices as we go deeper into how to leverage transit to make communities better for people.

[00:00:47] **Jeff Wood:** Hey there, I'm Jeff Wood, Principal of The Overhead Wire and your host. This month on the MPAC podcast, we're joined by Cassidy Boulan and Thom Stead of the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission. We chat about their work in Philadelphia, Trenton, and greater New Jersey related to complete streets and creating safe infrastructure for biking.

[00:01:03] Stay with us.

[00:01:17] Cassidy Boulan and Thom Stead. Welcome to the podcast.

[00:01:20] **Cassidy Boulan:** Thanks for having us.

[00:01:21] **Jeff Wood:** Yeah. Thanks for being here before we get started. Can you tell us a little bit about yourself? Let's start with Cassidy and then go with Thom.

[00:01:27] **Cassidy Boulan:** So I have been at DVRPC for about 13 years now. In that time I've almost worked exclusively on bike, ped transit work. I work now in the office of bicycle transit, bicycle and pedestrian planning. I was fortunate to start a DVRPC right out of grad school. It was, you know, just those few years after the recession. So I was happy to have something that was aligned as this position is and was. And I moved to Philadelphia from the Southeastern Michigan area, and I moved to Philly to go to Penn. And before that, I lived in Michigan and went to the University of Michigan. So that's the full bio.

[00:02:11] **Thom Stead:** I am originally from Appalachia. So, like really rural Southern Ohio. Moved to Cincinnati as a teenager, got really into riding transit as a teenager because I didn't like driving, went to college in Indiana and eventually moved out to San Francisco where I had my first job in planning interning at the San Francisco Bicycle Coalition. And so that's sort of where I cut my teeth, doing business outreach about different bike projects in the Bay Area. After that, I moved to New York City and did my master's degree at the Pratt Institute in City and Regional Planning and had internships at New York City DOT and the bike ped department and also transit development there. This is also my first job out of grad school. So I moved from New York to Philly for my job at DVRPC and I've been here for almost 10 years now. I started in Cassidy's group, the office of transit bike ped. And two years ago, I moved over to our office of mobility analysis and design to be the assistant manager. Our work is similar to transit bike ped, but we work on the more technical side of things. I do a lot of traffic analysis to support bike and transit projects. So that's me.

[00:03:31] **Jeff Wood:** And Cassidy, Thom gave us riding transit when he was a kid as an interest. What was something that got you into this space early on?

[00:03:38] **Cassidy Boulan:** I have a, I think an atypical planning origin story, which I knew in high school, I wanted to be a planner. One of my teachers actually gave me, and I still have it, I'm looking at right now, a copy of *Suburban Nation*, the new urbanism Bible that, you know, came out, I guess that would have been in the very early 2000s.

[00:03:58] So that just read that was like, Oh yes, like this, whatever this is, so went to undergrad. I actually did environmental studies and sociology, which I usually say is what I think underpins my overall interest in planning and what I do now. I think, you know, both of those have strains and how I would like define my mission statement.

[00:04:21] I did AmeriCorps after undergrad. I worked at a community development organization in Detroit, felt really passionately about working in Detroit and thought that that was going to be a really good fit. And it ended up feeling like not as good of a fit as I thought it would. I still wanted to do planning, but that particular part just felt like, especially at that time that I wasn't sure, you know, that sort of like, you have to always be chasing money and, you know, it's a, it's a hard way of being in the community development space.

[00:04:51] So, being from Detroit, transit, bicycle, and pedestrian stuff has not traditionally been a strong suit, but, you know, is so directly connected to sustainability and, you know, I think a lot of things about our society can come from that. Kind of be seen in different ways in our transit network or our transportation network.

[00:05:12] So I, a little bit rolled the dice going into grad school thinking transportation feels like a good fit and it turned out it was. And I think, you know, we're really fortunate in what we do that we can do the real design part of things. So, you know, Thom and I have traditionally done a lot of bike infrastructure design, but we can also work on other aspects. And funnily enough, I think, you know, the work we'll talk about in Trenton gets kind of back at that community development space. Maybe I've found my way back there in the end anyhow. But yeah, I think we're lucky in our jobs to be able to do a lot of different aspects of planning and transportation planning that hopefully really can move the needle long term.

[00:05:55] **Jeff Wood:** It's all connected, right? I mean, everything.

[00:05:58] **Thom Stead:** Yeah. Cassidy and I's bond is that we were both sociology majors in college too. And then after school, I ended up in Indonesia for a year and was riding around on motorbikes everywhere. And they had BRT in front of my house. And it was the only air-conditioned bus that you could get anywhere, so people would pay extra to ride it.

[00:06:17] I think that my desire to get into planning was really coming from a sociological perspective and an equity driven perspective. Where I grew up in rural Ohio, if you don't have a car, you're stuck. And then in Cincinnati, the transit network growing up was not particularly well-funded or frequent. I got to see firsthand what that struggle looks like. And biking there is tough too. There's a lot of hills and things are spaced out. So people are really, you know,

dependent on cars to get places there. So I think it was really important to me to try to work at. Fixing those things, but also to live in places where I had access to those things, too.

[00:07:03] **Jeff Wood:** Yeah, I appreciate that. I love hearing people's origin stories because it kind of gives also, you know, we have young listeners who are like, well, I don't know if I could get into planning. I like this stuff and I'm an advocate, but I don't know how other folks get into it. And then I've gotten emails from folks saying, Hey, I heard this story and it's just like, maybe you want to do this, or maybe I should go to grad school, or maybe I should do this.

[00:07:20] Change the way that I'm thinking about planning because I can do it too, because you know, it's not always the traditional way of, of you're in high school and you want to be a planner actually for me specifically, I didn't even know it existed until I got to applying for grad school. So, uh, just kind of come about it from a different perspective, all of us.

[00:07:36] So I, I like that. I do want to ask you all about the DVRPC, which is the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission. I'm going to use DVRPC throughout the rest of the episode, but I just want to make sure folks know what it is, but I want to ask you, what do you all say to people when they ask you, where do you work?

[00:07:49] **Thom Stead:** I don't say DVRPC. I say that I work at the Philadelphia MPO.

[00:07:55] **Cassidy Boulan:** It's funny. We are having a lot of conversations around work. And 1 of the things has come up is that we need an elevator speech. So I think MPOs are particularly challenging to describe what they do and why someone should care. And I think, I don't know about you, Thom, but I know when I tell people generally what I do, that I designed bike lanes, people are immediately like, Oh, you must work for the city of Philadelphia, which is a natural reaction.

[00:08:21] But then, you know, trying to like redirect that of like, well, no, not exactly, then it gets a little bit, a little bit harder to say what it is. I guess I say, The regional planning agency, which again, I don't know if that really gives people a sense of what that means. Sometimes we'll get into, if you want to get sort of the next level down of wonky is like, we take federal transportation

dollars and distribute them across the region and then make sure people are coordinating.

[00:08:50] But you know, I'm sure most people's eyes glaze over if you, if you're at that sentence.

[00:08:56] **Thom Stead:** Yeah. If I'm trying to go very simple, uh, I tell people that I try to keep people, pedestrians, cyclists, and transit users from getting hit by cars. That's like my, like, number one goal with my job is just safety and trying to make it safer for people to use those modes.

[00:09:12] **Jeff Wood:** Yeah, that's, I mean, that's what we're all here for. I feel like that's been such a huge thing because of the amount of people that are killed on the roads every year. I do want to say that most MPOs. Metropolitan planning organizations, if we're doing the TLA is three letter acronyms, our planning agencies around the country are in often an only one state.

[00:09:28] So I'm curious how you all hop over between Pennsylvania and New Jersey, because that's a kind of a rare animal there.

[00:09:35] **Cassidy Boulan:** Yeah. And actually at our origin, there is a suggestion that Delaware would even be part of it too, but they didn't, they didn't join the compact. So we do actually some activity, planning activities for the Delaware.

[00:09:46] Okay. The Wilmington metro area, I think, like, how that operates day to day is complicated, I guess, in a way, you know, there's each 1 of the of their own kind of particular personality and things they want to see done. But, you know, our work program is developed through requests by our planning partners and our board members in particular.

[00:10:08] So. You know, through our counties, which there's 5 in Pennsylvania and 4 in New Jersey, we get those requests for projects. And so our year to year mix really varies depending on the requests that we got. I think both Thom and I, our groups have developed more programs over time too. And then once it's a program and it's ongoing, I think we do seek to have that geographical, if not direct, um, The quality, you know, something that approaches offering services on both sides of the river, but I think as a practitioner, it's really interesting because you really have a better idea of what can differ between state to state.

[00:10:47] So, if you just worked in 1 state, you might take for granted. These 10 things are true across all the states. And I think we really have a sense of how much really does vary state to state, even if the feds ask the states to do something. And what that looks like can be. Pretty different. So I think it really allows us to have a greater sense of how states and their laws and the D.O. T. S. themselves really impact what's done. How money spent. What kind of activities are done at the local level.

[00:11:17] **Thom Stead:** Yeah. Just to dig deeper into that. I mean, if you're comparing New Jersey. In Pennsylvania, specifically for what we do, the topic of road ownership comes up a lot. So in New Jersey, the state owns mainly highways and interstates.

[00:11:35] But in Pennsylvania, PennDOT owns Many of the arterials in the city of Philadelphia, a lot of like more local roads in our suburban counties. And so that ownership makes a big difference in terms of the work that we do. And specifically the work that I do in our PennDOT connects bike friendly resurfacing or now we're calling it complete streets resurfacing program.

[00:11:58] We're now trying to do something similar to our work in Pennsylvania in New Jersey, because while the state doesn't own those arterial roads, the counties often do. And so we're working at a more local level, trying to look for similar types of opportunities for bike and pedestrian facilities.

[00:12:17] **Jeff Wood:** How hard is it to get agreement from the states or from localities on what you're going to do with the road?

[00:12:23] I know in other states like Utah, you know, when the state DOT gets involved, it often gets harder to do something like a streetcar or complete streets or those types of things. And so I'm curious how that kind of operates where you're at.

[00:12:34] **Cassidy Boulan:** I think probably similarly to what you just described, you know, the degree might vary from one state to the other, but our tactical urbanism support program that we call Expo, we've really found that we have to work directly with municipalities on municipal owned roads, because, you know, we've had some opportunities to work with counties in New Jersey, but for the most part, you know, working with those folks who can make the direct decisions about their roadways is the easiest way to get things done.

[00:13:04] We also do tend to find that the municipalities are more open to maybe trying more innovative things or new things, because they just don't have the years worth of, like, processes and red tape that has developed around some of these things. So, I think it really does make a big difference. And I think, you know, sort of.

[00:13:25] The same way that federalizing a program or using federal funding ads, you know, all of this stuff to a project. I think the, the bigger the government entity involved, you know, the more processes and sign offs and history that you need to be working through and with. Not to say that there's not folks who want to do that.

[00:13:45] **Thom Stead:** Yeah, different entities have different priorities. I would say that in recent years. PennDOT has really shifted towards improving conditions for bicyclists and pedestrians on its roads. That isn't to say that they don't care about level of service and queuing and have worries about gridlock, but I will say that there is certainly more acceptance of the importance of cyclists on their roads. In New Jersey, just because like NJDOT doesn't own that many roads where you can physically cycle, that conversation doesn't come up as much. But I think at the county level, we are having more of those conversations and slowly I feel like we're starting to turn a corner. I think people have seen all of the improvements that the City of Philadelphia has made in recent years, and, you know, is sort of wanting to do things like that for themselves.

[00:14:41] I think our trails program has been really successful for a long time, but people are recognizing that people need ways to get to the trails. People want to be able to bike to the trail, not to drive to the trail. There's also 1st and last mile to transit and looking for opportunities to bridge those gaps and recognizing that.

[00:15:00] Um, Hey, like these roads are maybe the key to getting there. So especially like working with Penn Dot, you know, I think that a lot of it for me has been like learning to speak the language. So I'm a planner by trade, but I've had to learn how engineers work and think in these spaces and like learn to talk the talk and be that sort of in between and a bit of a translator.

[00:15:23] So, you know, I learned how to do traffic analysis, do. Synchro and VESEM to make the case that we can do these facilities. We can build protected bike lanes without causing gridlock.

[00:15:35] **Jeff Wood:** Cassie, I want to ask you about Trenton, New Jersey, specifically. What can you tell us about the city and what you're doing there?

[00:15:41] **Cassidy Boulan:** The city is a really interesting place. It's the capital of New Jersey. I think it was an industrial center at an earlier point. So it has a lot of those post industrial problems. And unfortunately being the state capital did not save it or significantly turn the tide on those. It also has a really strong community of folks that are new to the U S and that's mostly people from Central America.

[00:16:11] Although I think it represents several different countries. So there's not always the organization that might come if it was, you know, all from one particular area. But that is really interesting. About 35 percent of residents don't speak English at home. I think the folks that are in Trenton now, you have a lot of people really dedicated to this city, which is really interesting to see.

[00:16:35] So a lot of people that feel really strongly about working in their community and bettering their community. I'm also really struck when we do projects there at the real strong, and maybe this is not for a good reason, but the real strong consensus around traffic safety being a problem and being something that people want something done about.

[00:16:57] So I think when you have. People who show up to meetings at the very least all agree that, like, it's not dangerous to be out walking and biking in my community. I think that is a starting point. I think can be really strong to, you know, offer other opportunities and potentially make changes. I think it has about 90, 000 people, so it's not a particularly big place.

[00:17:22] It also does have some really strong existing transportation infrastructure. There's a transportation hub that has Amtrak, it has New Jersey Transit, it has SEPTA, which is Philadelphia's transit provider. Um, and it also has some big regional trails that run through the city. So there's a lot to build on.

[00:17:40] And there's also a lot of issues that a lot of overburdened communities experience. And, you know, Trenton is one of those in that way. So it's a really interesting place to work. And in some ways being from the Detroit area, there's a lot of things about it that remind me of a Detroit and obviously a much smaller setting, um, but in a really positive way, like some of

the things that I've, especially when I was younger, that I just really loved about Detroit and it having so much potential and all of these motivated folks.

[00:18:08] A lot of that comes through in Trenton too.

[00:18:10] **Jeff Wood:** Where does that strong sense of motivation come from? Is it the communities that are there already or is it just people feel like they have an issue with the safety that had been happening before?

[00:18:20] **Cassidy Boulan:** I think in part as again, which is unfortunately more common than it should be.

[00:18:27] A lot of the places that most need good governance don't have good governance. And the city's gone through a number of things with past elected officials, you know, being indicted. And, uh, I don't think they ever went bankrupt, but you know, some different levels of state oversight that I think the city really struggles to provide some of those basic services.

[00:18:53] And that's, you know, basic, not even just some of these things that we would never consider, you know, more than basic, but unfortunately are especially around transportation. So I think that they both see a need. That's not being responded to by the city government and potentially other governments and.

[00:19:14] They can get things done in that way that, you know, it's a small enough place. There's potential. There isn't a lot of processes and regulation around things. So you can be scrappy and get things done in that way that I think can be really gratifying and for, you know, motivated. Residents can really. You can see the change that you can make.

[00:19:34] And I think through our complete streets work, we've met a lot of those folks. And that's what it makes it really enjoyable to work in the city of Trenton is, you know, connecting with those folks and kind of bringing their work and their talents to make our work better, or to hopefully even like catalyze their work to a bigger stage or a bigger level, which I think we're doing with a couple of them.

[00:19:57] **Jeff Wood:** So there's a new bike plan, our streets, and it's coming soon. I imagine what's notable about it in your mind.

[00:20:03] **Cassidy Boulan:** 2 things immediately come to mind. 1 is we pretty much set a requirement that the vast majority of things, especially on arterials or are more higher volume, higher speed streets would be separated by claims.

[00:20:16] There are very few, if any conventional bike lanes in the plan, and that was just something that we felt like this is. A 21st century plan is not going to be filled with conventional bike lanes, especially in a community where the understanding is streets aren't safe, you know, that those two things don't go together.

[00:20:35] I think the other thing I'm sure there's other communities have done similar things, but certainly, to our knowledge, we really took the engagement process to be one of the most important parts of the plan itself. And I think there was a couple of reasons for that. 1 traditionally engagement hasn't happened to the level that it should or could.

[00:20:58] They've also, you know, the city has had a really hard time in the past connecting with that Latin X popular folks. Those folks, you know, it's been hard. They're not necessarily organized in community groups or other groups that you can kind of tap into that that grass tops level. That's a new phrase.

[00:21:14] I've learned recently. There's not a lot of grass. So it's been really hard to, you know, bring them into city outreach processes. And that's, you know, not even then considering, like, the language barrier that can exist. I think the other part that we knew was really important is to date. The only thing that exists in Trenton is like, maybe one conventional bike lane and one buffered bike lane.

[00:21:39] So when you want to tell people, you know, we might take some parking or consolidate parking, or, you know, make these street changes, and they haven't experienced themselves, what would be on the other side of that? I think you have an education gap that needs to be filled before you can even get meaningful feedback from people about, you know, what they might be willing to do.

[00:22:00] And then what they could get for, you know, making those changes. So I think the, the education part of it was really critical as well. And we did that in a couple of different ways at each 1 of the events. We use temporary materials, create pop up bike lanes. So 1 of them, we had a protected bike lane

when we had a cycle track to really, like, let people see, you know, oh, there's like a delineator.

[00:22:22] That's sort of what it would look like. To be able to like touch it and feel it in real life. We also made a project video that we took GoPro footage of riding around in bike lanes around Philadelphia, and then use that footage in the video to show folks like, this is, you know, what a protected bike lane feels like.

[00:22:41] Here's some of the attributes of it. You know, this is what it feels like when someone's parking next to you, but like, they can't get to you or they can't hit you because there's like a barrier in between. So I think. We really tried to think through both of those pieces that we could get something that ultimately is implementable, which, you know, if one of our top goals was separated facilities, the second top goal was something that could be implemented.

[00:23:04] **Jeff Wood:** And Thom, I wanted to bring you in here as well, because you focused on streets in Philadelphia and are probably sharing some of those same issues with folks that you're working with as well.

[00:23:13] **Thom Stead:** Certainly. Yeah. So, I mean, every neighborhood in Philly has, you know, different attitudes, feelings towards bike and pedestrian facilities.

[00:23:23] This program has touched every part of the city at this point, but some of our biggest wins have been in places like West Philadelphia. So, yeah, I think some of the biggest challenges were about, like, going out and doing that, like, engagement work. So, just to, like, Step back and talk through like what the program is to begin with.

[00:23:44] So DVR PC works really closely with the City of Philadelphia. We identify streets that aren't exactly low hanging fruit, but, you know, we think that there might be the possibility of a road diet there. So, it's possible going into these projects that it might just not be possible at all and everything is been for naught, but When you win, you win and it feels great.

[00:24:10] So the City of Philadelphia and DVRPC pick out two arterial roadways per year to study. DVRPC goes out and we do traffic counts at all the intersections along these corridors, and then we pull that into traffic modeling

software called Synchro. And we also simultaneously work with the city to, you know, come up with An initial design that they want to test.

[00:24:37] So we have these existing conditions and we have these ideal designs In mind and then we test these designs in synchro and see What the level of service is at each intersections what queuing is like? So how far do cars queue back from each of these intersections? And the reason that we have to do this is that These are Penn DOT owned roadways.

[00:25:02] And so in order to get the approval to move forward with these projects to even go to these communities and like, do this outreach, like, we have to have this go ahead from pin dot in the first place. So we basically have to prove that the project is possible without creating total gridlock. And in some cases, like, you know, we've been able to squeak by with a few intersections where, you know, things aren't ideal, but the rest of the corridor is doing so well that it's, you know, okay.

[00:25:32] But yeah, I think a couple of our biggest projects have been in, in West Philadelphia and for people that come to the Mpact conference, I hope that they will get an opportunity to get on a bike or maybe take the train out to the very Western border of Philadelphia to Cobbs Creek, where you can then get on a bike.

[00:25:51] On, I think it's chestnut street. Yeah, chestnut street. And you can ride on a facility that we worked with with the city of Philadelphia. It went from being no bike lanes whatsoever. 3 lanes of traffic, lots of swerving, lots of crashes happening. And we turned it into a parking protected bike lane with 2 lanes of traffic.

[00:26:10] And now there's, you know, A continuous parking protected bike lane that goes from Cogs Creek Avenue, all the way to 34th Street in University City. That's 3 consecutive miles of parking protected bike lane. So we did this analysis pin dot said after some quibbles after some design. changes. Okay. And then the very heavy lifting came and Otis was like, okay, we have this design that we know on paper will work, but will the city or will the people that live in the community get behind it?

[00:26:40] And so, you know, Otis folks went door to door talking to people, putting out postcards, getting people to, you know, Community events, doing videos to get all of this buy in and they got the support of the council member,

Jamie Gauthier, who was instrumental in getting this through. And so, yeah, now they have one of the best bike lanes in the city of Philadelphia, and it goes both ways.

[00:27:06] So you can go from West Philly to university city and vice versa on, on Walnut street, um, climbing. So. I think of it as like a new spine in terms of bike facilities in our city.

[00:27:18] **Jeff Wood:** You guys have put together also some great story maps and a page that shows kind of all the success that you've had. I'm interested what the feedback has been on that and how people have been responding to kind of some of those successes that you have had.

[00:27:30] **Thom Stead:** I mean, I think the successes have been. Like I said, each place is very different, so we also have a program that works in the suburbs. So our work on Complete Streets work using resurfacing to construct bike lanes started in the suburbs, identifying these like low hanging fruit opportunities where pin dots going to resurface a road.

[00:27:52] There's space in the roadway to construct a conventional or buffered bike lane. And through the process of resurfacing, they just add it in and, you know, they go to the municipality and they get that, they have them, you know, write a support letter and it gets constructed. And we've had good feedback from the communities on that thus far.

[00:28:12] Others have been mixed bags. Sometimes you don't get to use all the treatments that you want in order to get it through. And I don't like to think of these facilities as like. The end game per se, but rather a step towards, you know, a more permanent and high quality facility. So one example of a project that I worked on was 15th street and center city, which people, it'll be very close to the conference and people will be able to go and check out.

[00:28:39] This is a really, really busy street with like off ramps from a highway. It goes right by the new police headquarters. Has some really tricky intersections at Vine Street that people have to go through. And some of the trade offs that we had to make at a couple of these intersections in order to get it built were not what we wanted.

[00:28:57] But we're hoping that by the process of constructing these lanes, calming traffic and creating like a culture of cycling in this place, we can

eventually get to a place where, you know, our next step is to do it the way that we wanted to do it. Not just use delineators and quick curb or plastic curb, but rather, you know, put in granite curbs, you know, put in hard separation all the way through.

[00:29:22] So I think of it as this is just the beginning rather than an ending in itself.

[00:29:27] **Jeff Wood:** And for both of you, I mean, this is something that politically comes up is it's hard to design a street that, you know, you understand how you're going to be able to make it safer, but there's these compromises and other things that have to happen to actually implement it in the place where you want to put it.

[00:29:41] **Thom Stead:** Yeah, definitely. I mean, I think with me, we're constantly in conversation with. Engineers from pin dot and streets that are like, if you build it like this, then, you know, there's going to be significant traffic. And like, that's who we hear the most from. So it's like, who are the loudest voices in the room?

[00:29:59] And when you're building a facility in a place that has like no bike activity whatsoever, you know, it's hard to make that case at first, but it's I think building the facility and doing careful tracking of, like, how it gets used after the fact is really important. Also, in making your case in the future.

[00:30:18] So, yeah, it's definitely can get political and city of Philadelphia council members have a lot of say over what gets constructed. 15th street was in a district where there hadn't been much built because the council member at that time, you know, was not really in favor of, you know, Constructing new bike facilities that leadership has changed, but the fact that we got it built in the first place was really a testament to how much outreach the city of Philadelphia did.

[00:30:47] And the case that we made through our analysis to get it done. So it's really about teamwork and using all of the steps in that process to their greatest possibility. So yeah, politics play a big part in what gets constructed, but you know, I think that we're definitely seeing changes and wins in recent years.

[00:31:09] **Cassidy Boulan:** And I would say in the Trenton context, the issue is a little bit different in that the money's limited, you know, that that becomes the 1st impediment and the political will to either hire more staff to find more money and manage more money, or with the very limited resources that exist to allocate more to these issues is Really where we see the problem or why we're not moving forward on some of the things that maybe we would like to, you know, when you're resurfacing 2 streets a year or something like that, that's not a whole lot of opportunity to really be building out the network, you know, let alone, how are you going to pay the cost for, you know, the lowest cost might be delineators and, you know, then we know there's all the maintenance issues.

[00:31:58] So I think the work we've done in Trenton and we've done. Okay. Some tactical urbanism work that has utilized delineators and some new striping, but already we're seeing the maintenance issues. And I think there isn't enough political will to say we want to spend more on this or do it. Differently, so even I think if there's community support, and I think there is, it's just really hard to then translate that into a next step.

[00:32:28] **Thom Stead:** Yeah, money is definitely also an issue in the city of Philadelphia to not quite at the same level as Trenton, but, you know, when we're looking at the facilities, sometimes we have to look and see, like, oh, it's like, putting a bike signal in here is not going to work. Like going to cost a lot of money and we physically afford to do this.

[00:32:49] Are there grants that we can pull from to do this? And luckily I'm not the money person on the city side having to make those decisions, but you know, it's, it's certainly an issue in Philly as well.

[00:33:02] **Jeff Wood:** You all talking about the, kind of the conflicts between DOTs and some of the money things, but also there's the working with maybe some agencies or others who aren't as representative.

[00:33:12] And in the report that you released Cassidy about transit and biking, there's kind of a missing piece of, of talking with transit agencies about this too, because it's, it's something that I feel like, you know, it doesn't happen that often.

[00:33:24] **Cassidy Boulan:** Yeah, that project, which was looking at bike bus interactions for New Jersey transit.

[00:33:31] And, you know, I think they are seeing complete streets elements be installed across the state, you know, a lot of times, you know, one of the first things they said to us is these things just go out, no one even talks to them. So, you know, already, you can see that coordination piece, which, you know, is one of the major things that MPOs do is being the coordinator, the convener, So there's not that conversation, even at the beginning, but then we're really seeing changes need to happen to accommodate all the users safely.

[00:34:01] And I think for that project, we did a scan of what other places are doing. And I think the, the bike bus issue is far from settled as establishing best practices, especially if you're not fully reconstructing the street with a large budget. And I think that project was really interesting. Because, you know, again, we went to Trenton to kind of do a case study because we knew about the bike plan.

[00:34:27] We have these established relationships with the city folks, the advocate folks there, and then the county with it, which within which it is, which is Mercer County. We have relationships with them. So, we did a workshop with the transit agency and the road owners and advocates to talk through, you know, what could we do?

[00:34:46] So on one side that's owned by the county, there's existing buffered bike lanes on the Trenton portion in the bike plan. There's a proposal, or the recommendation is for parking protected and just separated bike lanes. And we really had everyone talk through, you know, what could we do here? What would that look like?

[00:35:05] And I think there was a particular need for that context, which was, you know, there's not no bikers, but there's also not. 2, 000 bikers a day. You know, what do you do in that middle case? And same for buses. There weren't no buses, but if there's bus every 45 minutes or every 30 minutes, you know, what, what is sort of the appropriate level of additional infrastructure and additional efforts to make those conditions safer for both users?

[00:35:30] Transit drivers and transit users and also bicyclists. So it was really interesting to work through that with folks. And again, back to that question when he came up of, okay, let's say we've, we've identified these new toolbox of best practices. Now, who's, who's paying for that? You know, like, whose budget does that go into when.

[00:35:50] You know, I think there could be a lot of pointing fingers, but, um, it was a really interesting ability for us to kind of take our existing relationships and, you know, the sort of trust we've built with a lot of those folks and then bring it to other projects. I think that can be really powerful. I think it's also really.

[00:36:08] Powerful and interesting that because our group is transit bike pad, I think we really get to focus on all 3 of those modes and bring kind of our specialties within, um, you know, transit sometimes can be siloed by pad can be siloed, but we get to work across our group to bring those perspectives to our project.

[00:36:28] So I think that. For a lot of the projects really can strengthen them because we have that transit perspective and that bike perspective on staff and they're working together on the project. So, I think it allows us to usually deliver something that, you know, isn't from maybe 1 of perspectives more than another.

[00:36:47] **Thom Stead:** Yeah, just to build on that, I mean, the reason that we changed the name of our program from Bike Friendly Resurfacing to Complete Streets Friendly Resurfacing is that we were looking at roads that the city of Philadelphia and SEPTA were interested in adding bus lanes to. And so suddenly we weren't just like looking at impacts on cars, but also impacts on transit in the area.

[00:37:08] How can we speed things up in new areas? So we have a new project starting off soon. That's looking at adding bus lanes to a corridor to see how we can speed up service in those areas. So, yeah, it's exciting stuff. I think SEPTA for us has been part of the conversation pretty much throughout almost all of these roads that we work on these.

[00:37:32] Major arterials have SEPTA service, so we have to be really careful of what we do so that, you know, we aren't trying to put a bike lane where, like, a current bus stop is, and then we suddenly have mishaps between buses and bikes, or, you know, suddenly we're taking away a lane where a bus has to So, yeah.

[00:37:50] That's it. You turn in order to, you know, then pull over and get to its layover spot. So having those conversations is really important so that

you're not going and, you know, implementing something that adversely impacts a bus service in those areas.

[00:38:04] **Jeff Wood:** I am interested in what the bus drivers feel about this.

[00:38:07] It's a perspective. I don't think I've heard much of is how they feel about cyclists. Cause you often hear about the conflicts between, you know, buses and vehicles and vehicles and bikes, but not often between buses and bikes, which are two vastly different. Different geometries, right? Do you have a huge bus and maybe a tiny person on a bike?

[00:38:24] **Cassidy Boulan:** Yeah. You know, I think some other places have done, I'll point to the New York city training they do with drivers is really amazing. We talked to the MTA as part of that project and they have just gone all in on vision zero, you know, to talk to some folks who. You would otherwise not necessarily pick them out of a room as being, you know, number 1 Vision Zero proponent, but like, they got it so much and the way they've really incorporated into their training.

[00:38:57] I have to imagine. Those bus drivers, the way they would talk about it is really different. I also think that from the anecdotes we heard, it's similar to how. Drivers might talk about bikes, which is like, they come out of nowhere and they're always. Being neurotic, and we never know what they're going to do, which all of those things to me say that there's not infrastructure for them because people that sort of behavior when there is not an otherwise safer way to be behaving.

[00:39:28] So, I guess I would take it with a grain of salt, not that those aren't completely valid and they're not right about some of that, but I think, you know, there's, we haven't done a lot, or we haven't don't have a lot of places in our region. Where the road has been designed and built to safely accommodate both of those modes.

[00:39:45] And I think once we have some of those, I'd be really interested to talk to bus drivers who, you know, maybe are driving sometimes on those roads and then sometimes on roads where everyone just has to mix and like, what is that experience? Like, because they, they are looking at the road all day. You know, they have a real sense.

[00:40:02] I think of how people are navigating those streets. So. Yeah, I would say, I'm not sure they're ready to be advocates yet, but I bet they would be. They can see real results of, you know, people having clearer paths to like more predictable behavior.

[00:40:21] **Thom Stead:** That's what I was going to say. I think the bus drivers really want to see predictable behavior.

[00:40:26] Like if a bike lane keeps the cyclists in the bike lane and they don't have to think about. You know, engaging with them, then that makes their life easier as drivers because, you know, they have enough going on inside with the bus and in front of them. So yeah, I think Cassidy's right on about that.

[00:40:43] **Jeff Wood:** I've also chatted previously with Dr.

[00:40:45] Ryerson at Penn on her work about cognitive workload and the stress cyclists feel at intersections. I'm curious if like that cyclist perspective and stress idea was something that was taken into account in either of your work, you know, designing bike lanes and thinking about these projects from the Trenton perspective or from the Philadelphia perspective.

[00:41:00] **Cassidy Boulan:** Yeah, I certainly think obviously intersections, you know, protected bike lane is not going to solve the cognitive load at an intersection or certainly some things can do a better job. But I don't think the bike plan, you know, totally nails that completely. But I think the overall idea of a separator protected bike lane, I think.

[00:41:22] You know, that's why we set that as the standard for the report. And I think we've had more and more conversations lately about really needing to, I don't know if it's bringing out the best practices from other regions or help educate our road owners about different ways to do protection. I think the death of the delineator is probably around the corner.

[00:41:46] It is not a good option for almost anything from a money perspective, the maintenance costs, you know, I don't know the life cycle that can not be any cheaper than an asphalt curb. And I think for a bicyclist, I don't think any bicyclist would choose a delineator over something with more heft. So. Yeah, I think that with not particularly thinking through intersections, which I think there's more to do there.

[00:42:16] I guess we see separated facilities is, and the research shows it's, it's the thing that's going to get people to switch modes. So, you know, I think in Trenton, first and foremost, we want to make roads safe for the folks already biking. But, you know, that's the first step. And then the second step is, especially for people who need more options, more affordable options, you know, to get those people comfortable trying to bike and ultimately for climate change, you know, this is, this is our task for as long as humans are here.

[00:42:47] **Thom Stead:** Yeah, absolutely. I mean, stress plays a huge part in the designs that we develop. I think that we really want to work towards making facilities that are in line with best practice, but at the same time, like we're very money constrained. And so we have to be really cognizant of like, trying to like, strike the balance of creating the most comfortable facility that we can with what we have.

[00:43:13] I know that it's not a great excuse for using delineators. Um, but I think that we're just trying to get things in the ground and trying to improve things where we can. In recent years, the city has put in more bicycle signals in places to help reduce some of that stress at intersection. So we're, you know, reducing the interactions between turning vehicles and cyclists going through intersections, which I think is huge in terms of the stress that cyclists feel in places.

[00:43:46] Yeah, as a cyclist in Philadelphia, I feel stressed out a lot and you make a mental map of like the facilities that feel the least stressful, but also the streets that you can write on that feel less stressful. I'm encouraged by other work that the city is doing in terms of like creating slow zones. So they're, they're neighborhood slow zones where they're, you know, doing traffic calming in order to reduce speeds on streets, doing all kinds of different.

[00:44:18] new treatments that we haven't really seen here before. So I think that doing what you can in order to make streets that, you know, probably can't really fit a bike lane to make them at least a little bit less stressful for bikes and peds is a step in the right direction. But yeah, we're just doing the best that we can in order to create the best facility that we can and still get the permission of our state entities.

[00:44:42] But I definitely have seen in my work with the city of Philadelphia, especially in recent years, they're really pushing. To do very high quality facilities wherever possible. So yeah, we're trying our best.

[00:44:56] **Jeff Wood:** It's not too bad. I saw, you know, reports that crashes and serious injuries have dropped 34 percent on dozens of streets in Philadelphia that have been reconfigured with safety projects.

[00:45:05] So I think that's positive direction. And I appreciate that. What's next for you all in terms of projects or, you know, positive outcomes.

[00:45:13] **Cassidy Boulan:** Our most exciting thing, even though it's pretty abstract still at this point, is all of this work with Trenton has culminated in us using some leftover and otherwise expiring coronavirus money to fund a position for 4 years that a position or a full time equivalent that will be solely focused on completing Various complete streets implementation projects in Trenton.

[00:45:41] So, you know, we have already laid out some of the barriers of, you know, the challenges to that mission, but I think it really will allow us to dig in in a community in a way that at the MPO level, we rarely if ever do. This is definitely a 1st for us as an agency, but. To be able to continue to build on our existing relationships to, you know, ourselves go after foundation money or other money to implement some of these things and just decide of see what we can accomplish.

[00:46:13] You know, their staff is kind of up to their limits. Just making the city, you know, do the things it legally has to do. to do, but this will allow us to, you know, again, based on what we've seen and learned in the last several years, help them hopefully do some things that otherwise would certainly not happen.

[00:46:31] And we have a competitive TDM program in our region called travel options program. And with some folks in Trenton, we submitted an application. That will do some in school travel lessons, you know, teaching kids about how to safely walk and bike and the trend has its own cycle advocacy group. And right now they have a community outreach garage that's staffed exclusively by volunteers.

[00:47:00] But with this money, we'll be helping to support and give them an opportunity to professionalize their staff to, you know, hire staff for the first time in their history. And then that staff will be operating the garage with more hours. I think we also, as part of that, they get a lot of bikes donated. So we hope to pilot a citywide bike giveaway program.

[00:47:22] So I think there's a lot of things. We see the potential for, and we see folks who could help make that a reality. And I'm, I'm excited to have the next four years to see, you know, what we can do with all of those opportunities and see how much money we can find to make that happen.

[00:47:42] **Thom Stead:** In the Complete Streets world, I think that.

[00:47:45] As I mentioned before, some of the excitement over seeing these road diet projects in the city of Philadelphia has, you know, inspired places outside of the city to try to get in on the act. So one of the things that our program has started doing in the last year or so is to do road diet analysis for our suburban counties.

[00:48:08] Also, so in the past, we were really just looking for that low hanging fruit, what we could sort of easily implement. But as we were going along, we were like, well, you know, this road could also be road dieted. And that's not something you can simply do during a resurfacing like you need to do this analysis.

[00:48:27] But like, yeah, Why can't we do the analysis? And now we are. And I think that we're making some moves on that front outside of Philadelphia. We'll continue our work in the city of Philadelphia. I have a project in Northwest Philly. I have a project I did in South Philly that I heard rumblings that potentially a bus lane is getting built with also some bike facilities, but fingers crossed for sure.

[00:48:51] And we'll be picking two new corridors soon to study. I mean, part of it is that We're really dependent on, like, what's in the resurfacing list for PinDot. Some years are more exciting than others. Some roads are more, you know, optimal for what we do than others. And so we're looking forward to figuring out which roads we'll continue to look at.

[00:49:15] But I think we also have more work with SEPTA coming up, looking at opportunities for doing, you know, bus lanes BRT esque service. And so we'll be helping with that kind of analysis as well. SEPTA's bus revolution has been adopted and so there are big changes to the network happening and a big part of that will be redesigning streets in order to optimize the performance of those routes.

[00:49:43] And hopefully we can continue to be part of that moving forward.

[00:49:48] **Jeff Wood:** So the Mpact Transit + Community conference is going to be in Philadelphia in October. What's the less obvious thing or place you would encourage people to visit when they come?

[00:50:00] **Thom Stead:** Come to South Philly. I'm a proud South Philadelphian and it's like not a place where lots of tourists will come other than to get a cheesesteak.

[00:50:09] I would encourage you to keep going South and try to make it down to FDR park to the Southeast Asian market. I think it's one of The most special things that Philadelphia has going. So the Southeast Asian market goes on through, I think it's like spring through fall in Philadelphia. And it brings together folks from all over Southeast Asia.

[00:50:31] So we have a big Indonesian community. We have a lot of people from Cambodia. Lao folks from all over that make some delicious food that you're probably not going to find in too many other places. And the vibe is incredible. So I would really encourage people to come down to FDR park and see that we also have like an incredible new playground that got built there.

[00:50:56] That's uh, all about the

[00:50:57] **Jeff Wood:** playgrounds now.

[00:50:59] **Thom Stead:** I just took my nieces there this last weekend, but they have like a three story high slide that kids have to like climb up to. And, uh, my nieces are like, this is scary, but fun, scary, but fun. So I think FDR park is like a hidden treasure and they're doing a lot of work there.

[00:51:14] And it's a place where I think some of the really unique communities that Philly possesses come together in a really great way. You can take the broad street line pretty much all the way there and then walk into the park. So come to, come down to South Philly.

[00:51:29] **Cassidy Boulan:** I feel like Jeff, that is the, the hardest question you have asked us for a bunch of reasons.

[00:51:38] You know, I think I was convinced to move to Philly based on some of the really beautiful neighborhoods. So I would encourage folks to get beyond or maybe go south of south of spruce. I live in center city. It's easy to

stay in center city. It's got everything you need, but there's some really, you know, beautiful row homes, lots of really beautiful historic streets.

[00:52:01] Um, we have some really nice park spaces around Independence Hall. So I would say take a nice evening walk. Hopefully it won't be 98 percent humidity. Yeah. In October, who knows, but that I think would be one of my recommendations.

[00:52:20] **Thom Stead:** Quinn Street is my favorite street in the city.

[00:52:22] **Cassidy Boulan:** Yeah, that's right by my house and it's lovely.

[00:52:24] **Thom Stead:** Yeah. There's like houses there from like the 1700s and it's people fly all these flags. It's so beautiful. I think it's one of the things that makes Philly really unique.

[00:52:36] **Jeff Wood:** It looks like, um, some comments in the chat here. I'm almost like, I feel like I'm on a YouTube now doing some mobile sessions that are going to hit a few neighborhoods.

[00:52:43] So folks can sign up for the mobile sessions as well. Mobile workshops that go to different spots. And then PK Slam obviously is something that impactors have been loving since it began and that'll be at the okay. Yeah,

[00:52:54] **Thom Stead:** It's like a, it's a former high school that they turned into like a mixed use community space.

[00:53:02] So it has like a bunch of like artists studios in it. Restaurant that has a rooftop bar. Jefferson University has like a clinic for the community there, a medicine clinic. There's a great coffee shop and it, it's, it really like transformed that part of South Philly because it brought all these like really awesome things into one place and like created an affordable space for like independent businesses.

[00:53:28] So I think it's amazing and would totally recommend that people do that. Definitely walked on Pashunk Avenue. That's my neighborhood and has lots of great little, you know, independent businesses, some of the best ice cream in the city, great restaurants, you know, award winning restaurants. So big fan of Pashunk.

[00:53:49] **Jeff Wood:** We're going to have to get you guys to be tour guides.

[00:53:50] **Thom Stead:** I'm proudly, proudly, I've gotten several people to move to Philadelphia based on giving them tours. So happy to do it.

[00:54:00] **Jeff Wood:** That's quite a track record. I love it. Well, so where can folks find out about the work that you all do at DVR PC? Is there a place where they can go and get more information?

[00:54:08] **Cassidy Boulan:** Some of our formal reports are on dvrpc.org. Our Tactical Urbanism Program Expo does have its own webpage at dvrpc.org/expo. I think some of our things are maybe You know, don't have a polished deliverable. So it'd be a little bit harder to find information about, but our communications group does a great job with the, with the social media.

[00:54:33] So there's probably some posts, various things about some of the projects that we talked about.

[00:54:40] **Jeff Wood:** And Hilary will put stuff in the show notes and we'll have stuff in the notes on the Mpact website as well. Cassidy and Thom, thanks so much for joining us. We really appreciate your time. Yeah. Thanks for having us.

[00:54:50] This was so fun.

[00:54:51] **Cassidy Boulan:** I always want to talk about the work.

[00:54:59] **Kammy Horne:** Thanks for listening. And thank you to Hilary Reeves, who leads Mpact VOICES and the development of this podcast. Find out more about our work by visiting our website: mpactmobility.org. That's M as in Mobility and Pact as in agreement. mpactmobility.org. Sign up for our newsletter to make sure you hear about new podcasts as they come out.