

# She Drives Mobility 45 - Doug Gordon

speaker\_SPEAKER\_01 (0:16)

Hi there. My name is Katja and this is the podcast 'She Drives Mobility'. Every two weeks I talk with some experts about the future of mobility. And I think it's really important to have those different types of views because diversity matters and diversity also means we don't have blind spots because when you just think about your own mobility, you will always have a lack of mobility for people who are in other needs as you are. Doug Gordon is the co-host of 'The War on Cars', which is a really strong title, I guess. But he's, I think, right. If you just put away one parking slot, there is something feeling like a war because we think it's normal that we have car-centric cities and car-centric mobility and everyone not only a car or driving a car is always the one who has to look upon even better and future SUVs upon the space we are taking in cities. And Doug is really pointing out that our politicians and all the governments are really shy to make a better solution for everyone, which means a child-friendly city, which means a walkable city and which means to regain the space for humans and not cars. I think it's really interesting to listen to him on how he sees his city and how he sees other cities who are doing it very right, also in the US and in Canada. And I think you can earn very much of an insight of someone who is doing this work for 10 years now. So hopefully you will enjoy this little talk between us, between New York and Hamburg and leave some comments or stars or even some reactions. I'm looking forward to hearing from you what you have learned from this

episode, maybe. But now have fun because it was fun for me with Doug.

speaker\_SPEAKER\_01 (2:20) So we are live, my dear. I just thought it was so funny that I also was unable last year to think such format as, okay, we can do it in virtual reality. But it's good to learn always for the better. So, if you introduce yourself, please, who are you, where are you and what you are doing?

speaker\_SPEAKER\_00 (2:41)

Sure. My name's Doug Gordon. I live in Brooklyn, New York, and I am the co-host of a podcast called 'The War on Cars.' I also am online on Twitter at Brooklyn Spoke, and I'm a cycling advocate, a safe streets advocate. I do a lot of writing about those subjects in magazines and newspapers and my own blog and elsewhere. Yeah, that's the quick 101 on me.

speaker\_SPEAKER\_01 (3:07)

We just had a quick chat before, where I told you I was really struggling embracing being an activist, which started for me in 2020 regarding all the car stuff happening here in Germany. And you say you're an advocate for riding the bicycle. How did your journey start?

speaker\_SPEAKER\_00 (3:30)

A couple of different ways. So, I run, I've run the New York City Marathon and the Chicago Marathon. And many, many years ago, I would get home after work and I would want to go for a run in Prospect Park, which is like the central park of Brooklyn. And at the time, cars were allowed in the park almost all day up until about 7 p.m. And so, I would get home from work, 6.30, 6.45, and I would go for a run and I would hope that the majority of my run would be in a car-free park. But after 7 o'clock, cars were still streaming through the park and I thought this was just not right. And so, I started reading things like Streets Blog, found Transportation Alternatives, which is our local, the big advocacy group here in New York City, and I just started getting more involved. And then about 10 years ago, exactly 10 years ago actually, I started my blog, Brooklyn Spoke, and I, you know, I wasn't sure exactly what I was gonna be writing on. I was riding around the city, riding to work every day. And I just started asking sort of these basic questions of myself, like, okay, I rode to work yesterday and there wasn't a bike lane on the street. Today there is. How did it get there? What's the process for that happening? And so I kind of threw myself into the subject and the more I wrote about it, the more I learned about it, the more active I got in like local neighbourhood politics, things like that. So, I tend to not do things lightly. I will throw myself all the way in and I threw myself all the way into Safe Streets advocacy.

speaker\_SPEAKER\_01 (5:12)

So, when you look back upon these 10 years, did it get more emotional and more like, yeah, they are part of a community like car, bicycling, commuting, going on your own. I think it's some-

times a bit, yeah, not in connection. We are not talking about our problems. We are just having this, the war on cars or the war on the streets. Did it get worse for you as you think back like 10 years ago?

speaker\_SPEAKER\_00 (5:46)

I think, well, I mean, I think personally I've matured as an advocate. I was probably much more emotional when I started of like not understanding how things work. So, I would default to a more emotional point of view. Today, I have a much more holistic view of how all of this works and I'm still educating myself even more. So, it's a weird question because I think personally I'm less emotional than I used to be. However, I think I have a greater understanding that the subject itself is so emotional that sometimes you can be as calm and level-headed as you wanna be and as fact-based as you wanna be and that doesn't matter because it's a fight for territory on the street. Every parking spot feels like we were saying a war on cars if you take one parking spot. But I think like my maturity as an advocate and I mean that more in terms of let's just look at like growth and education than anything else has helped me understand when it's important to understand people's emotions, when it's important to just appeal to facts and reason and how to balance all of that.

speaker\_SPEAKER\_01 (6:56)

Sometimes when people are dropping into my Twitter threads and trying to gardening them, they are like: I can't believe that you are doing this every day because it's always emotional. It's

always kind of sexist sometimes because I am a woman. And it's always like pointing out, I would like to put a fact in the thread. Sometimes I explain it in like eight steps and afterwards it's just: You're not right. It's just this putting away from everything because I think the problem is that people seeing the status quo as a norm, as something that is right. And if you change it, it's not right anymore. They can't imagine being a car driver and that this room and space is taken from me. I will breathe their air. I will get my room to them. And so, the war on cars is a really strong title of a podcast. How did you decide to have it like this very pushy?

speaker\_SPEAKER\_00 (8:04)

The title sometimes confuses people or maybe gets in the way of what we're really trying to do. We still really love it. So, there's the broader sense, right? Like I was saying before, anytime you take a single parking space, could be a hundred parking spots on a street, you take one to put in bike parking or an improved bus stop, you're accused of waging a war on cars. And in the US, especially, anytime you threaten the status quo, you're accused of waging a war on something, right? So, there's the war on Christmas or giving more rights to women is seen as a war on men, things like that. So, cars are sort of one of those big status quo subjects. And so, if you take anything that threatens their primacy, it's a war. The former mayor of Toronto, Rob Ford, now deceased, when he took office many years ago, he was elected by a sort of like suburban ring of Toronto voters, and he declared that the war on cars is now over. And so, when we were deciding what our podcast name would be, we went through all

kinds of stuff, some humorous, some pretty dry and straightforward. And my co-host, I think Sarah was the one who came up with it. She said: “How about we call it ‘The War on Cars’?” And we just like: “Boom, that tells you everything.” And it’s provocative, but I think it actually brings more people to the table than you might think, because they want to know: Wait a minute, why should there be a war on cars? And they start to ask questions, and you can have a really good conversation about it.

speaker\_SPEAKER\_01 (8:43)

And do you know what is funny about it also? That people are feeling so connected to their cars that they can’t put away this offense because you’re telling them it’s a war on cars. It’s not a war on people who are driving cars. And that is something that I always see when I having like a chat on Twitter, when people are really so connected to their kind of mobility, that they are not able to see: Okay, this is a machine putting me from A to B. It’s more like I have to defend it. And I talked to the 80-year-old Professor Knoflacher who started to make Vienna more like PTO business, bicycling and also having a war on cars. And he’s doing this for 50 years. And I was asking him: “How did you put your energy level back to normal when you have all this kind of?” He’s really a smart person. He was like: “It is so nice when I see people who are using their bicycles. Again, it’s such energy that you see that they are choosing their way of mobility.” So, what I want you to ask is, are people really seeing they’re addicted to cars, that they can change it, but they are not able to see the solution?

speaker\_SPEAKER\_00 (11:09)

Yeah, I mean, I think people, I guess what we like to say sometimes on the podcast is people do like their cars, right? People are very emotionally committed to their cars. Some people give them names. They spend a lot of time taking care of them, but very few people like driving. Driving is a chore. We talked about this on a recent episode, you know, driving to work, driving to get groceries, driving to drop the kids off at school. None of that is fun. That's not the driving that we're promised in car ads where there are no other cars on the road. You're driving through a city, you're driving through the country, you can go as fast as you want. That's never really how most people drive. That's not to say there aren't hobbyists and people who go out on racetracks or off-roading who love it, but most people are not doing that. And so, I talk to a lot of people who say: "Oh man, I would love to be able to live somewhere where I didn't need a car." I think most people do see it as like an enormous drain on their finances. It kind of stinks to have to drop down, you know, \$300 a month just to pay for your car, not to mention insurance, maintenance, all the rest. So, I think more people, it's not, I wouldn't call it an addiction. I'd call it a sort of codependent relationship because we could quit our cars if we had the ability to do so. It's just that most people, especially in the United States, outside of a few cities like New York, San Francisco, Boston, and even then, only the most walkable, bikeable parts of those cities, very few people can make that choice. And it's actually a luxury for many people to make that choice, separate from the people who might be poor, who can't afford a car and have no choice, but to navigate their towns and cities without one. But like I said,

few people I think really enjoy driving. And so people are more open to this conversation, I think, than you might think.

speaker\_SPEAKER\_01 (13:06)

So, let's step back to the beginning of our COVID age and the things you observed at this time and you as someone living in New York, can you tell some stories that were a success and they are still there? Or is it like here in Germany, people are starting to build back the pop-up bike lanes, Munich is leaving them behind and they will check if it's really working. So, I was like: "How will you check if it's working if you build it?" But okay. So, is there in New York something that really changed and that will stay for longer time? Or is it also like more an ad hoc business?

speaker\_SPEAKER\_00 (13:51)

Yeah, so you know our temporary bike lanes and things like that were really not much to write home about. There weren't that many of them. The ones that the city put down didn't really work. They just plopped down some traffic barrels that were easily moved by drivers. They have installed some permanent ones since and rushed through some previous planned ones that were older. And now they've made them permanent. So, I would say that I'd give the city sort of like a B- on bicycle infrastructure during the pandemic. A success was the open restaurants program. The city changed permitting, changed the process for allowing restaurants to take curbside space, parking spots, wide sidewalks, things like that. And that started I think at the end of June, beginning of July. And our restaurants obviously are in real



dire straits because people are not eating indoors, business dropped off, especially in tourist heavy spots. So, since that program started there are now about 10,000 restaurants that are using either parking or outdoor space on a sidewalk. And that's been a real success because the economic necessity of doing that supplanted the usual process for getting this done. Which is that you know one or two restaurants that want to put a couple of tables out will apply to their local community board or their city council person. And then there's a huge fight that the businesses are all going to die and no one's going to be able to park and emergency vehicles will not be able to get through. But here almost with like the snap of a finger, the city said: "Go for it." And lots of restaurants took them up on it and the world hasn't ended. People are enjoying it. People who would never know that that process usually takes months or years are just out enjoying it. And it's helping. Not that restaurants aren't going to have a really hard time of it going forward because of the winter and uptick in cases. But that's been a huge success story and a real model for a lot of the rest of the country. And other cities are doing the same thing as well. It's been a big success.

speaker\_SPEAKER\_01 (16:00)

In Germany, there was this reopening, so to say, of airports and people. I felt that there have been so many people under pressure to have a vacation somewhere else, not in their own country. I ask myself sometimes, why don't we build our cities like we like to live there and be there, even if we have free time? Can you tell me how Americans are doing their vacations? Was there the same pressure to get away after the first pandemic weeks?

speaker\_SPEAKER\_00 (16:40)

Yeah, so a lot of people did leave New York as things shut down in March and April. Now, obviously, those people tend to be wealthier, more privileged, people who have somewhere to go. In some cases, they weren't necessarily wealthy people, but they were people who, maybe they were 20-something who had just moved to the city and figured: "It's not worth it for me to live in this studio apartment that I'm paying a lot of money for. I'll go home and stay with my parents or family until this end." Interestingly, I think the New York Times showed that garbage collection rates in some of the wealthiest neighbourhoods went way down because people in those places were in second homes, in the Hamptons or upstate. And so, and in the poorer neighbourhoods, working-class neighbourhoods, it remained the same. Obviously, those are neighbourhoods that were hit hardest by the pandemic because there was a lot of essential workers. So, there was this weird narrative of like, New Yorkers are leaving, everyone's clearing out. It's like, well, which New Yorkers are you talking about? Wealthy New Yorkers, maybe. You know, I think, look, I live in a two-bedroom apartment. I have two kids. My wife is working from home. I'm working from home. They are schooling from home. And we are in about 1,000 square feet, converting to meters. I'm not that good at that, but it's small. And so, I understand if you have the means and the ability and you want space, like, leave. However, I did go out of the city to see my sister for a little bit, and she's in a small town. And, you know, I kind of missed being able to just walk to the corner to get my coffee or take the kids for a walk and take them to the park or like easily

go for a bike ride and not have to worry about high-speed traffic. So, it's kind of like, it's six of one, half a dozen of the other. You make up for in space when people left. I know a lot of people who regretted leaving because they were just bored in the suburbs. At the same time, I know people who were like really happy to get out because now their kids can spread out and run around and, you know, open the door and they're in the backyard. So, things seem to have returned to like an interesting equilibrium. If you were to walk around my neighbourhood, you wouldn't actually know that much is going on except for the fact that everyone's wearing masks. But the general traffic levels and activity at a lot of businesses is more or less the same as it was. So, it's a very, it's strange. It depends on where you are in the city.

speaker\_SPEAKER\_01 (19:10)

And I just scrolled to your episodes again and there was one that the street riders connected the dots between Black Lives Matter and regaining the streets for bicycling. And that was really interesting. How did this come from?

speaker\_SPEAKER\_00 (19:32)

Right, so I'm sure a lot of people who are listening know that at the end of May, there was a terrible killing by police of George Floyd in Minneapolis, and that sparked a new wave of Black Lives Matter protests across the country. And very quickly, some of them in New York took the form of massive bicycle rides, black-led bicycle rides. They would do hundreds, thousands of people

taking over streets, bridges, and riding all over, chanting, carrying signs on their bikes, making it to lots of different neighbourhoods. And so yeah, I interviewed one of the organizers, and it just kind of took off organically. Those guys were providing support to a lot of the marches on foot, basically using their bikes as barricades between the demonstrators and police sometimes. And then they would ride ahead to the next location or regroup. And then that just spun off into its own set of protest rides. And it's been remarkable to see, you know, it's a white male, like, this is not something that's in the forefront of my brain all the time. But now every weekend, there is a justice ride, there are other groups that have sprung up, and they're using bikes as a protest tool, which has a long history in many countries. But it's enabled the Black Lives Matter protests here in New York, which was already huge and very effective in many ways, to, you know, one of these rides can hit 10 neighbourhoods in the course of a couple of hours, where a march on foot would go to two or three. So it's been really an awesome demonstration of just, and like you said, connecting the dots, they're really connecting the investment in bicycle infrastructure to equity and equality and how oftentimes, bicycle infrastructure tends to accrue to wealthier neighbourhoods, to whiter neighbourhoods, to neighbourhoods that have organizing power or have the ear of their politicians in ways that people who are poorer, who are people of color might not have. And so, they're shining a really important light on that inequity. I've really loved watching it.

speaker\_SPEAKER\_01 (21:48)

On this weekend, there was a kind of, yeah, 120 women were connected in Germany to talk about feminists and mobility. And this is something where many people in Germany: “Oh, feminists.” it's always this kind of, I don't know what kind of impression they have in their head. But they taught me in one sequence that women weren't allowed to ride a bike in the 1920s. And they have this kind of bicycling trousers established in Germany. And for me, it's also this picture of people who were building cars, got to their work in the 50s, also with a bicycle. So, it has been, yeah, until the 50s, maybe, really a mobility in Germany that was enabling everyone who can ride a bike. It is not about having...

speaker\_SPEAKER\_00 (22:52)

Actually, right now as we're talking is a famous Susan B. Anthony quote here in the US there at the forefront of the women's suffrage movement uh... I'm trying to find it but she said... oh yeah here it is: “I think the bicycle has done more to emancipate women than any one thing in the world.” And similarly here in the US that you know when women started riding bikes fashion changed because they had to wear trousers or pants instead of long skirts and uh... they could go out unsupervised without a chauffeur chaperone uh... and so uh... that that what's i'd love that piece of the bicycle because it's it's always a symbol of freedom no matter where you go no matter what the era whether it's a you know i know the feeling from being a kid when i was able to start biking to my friend's house by myself without a parent coming with me or having to drive me uh... just that basic

personal level of freedom to the larger broader social justice idea of freedom. It's really common across countries.

speaker\_SPEAKER\_01 (23:55)

And how are your children? Are they riding the bikes or how are they going through New York?

speaker\_SPEAKER\_00 (24:03)

Yeah, so my kids, not surprisingly, when your dad's a bike advocate, my daughter was able to ride a two-wheel bicycle before she turned four, my son shortly thereafter, after he turned four. And early in the pandemic, when car traffic was really low, that was sort of like what we did in the afternoons. We'd finish up with school or whatever and just three, four o'clock go for a nice bike ride. And now there are enough protected bicycle lanes that even with the return of traffic, there are some routes that we can take that are pretty good. My son, who is seven, he and I bike into Manhattan over the Manhattan Bridge on a pretty regular basis. And it's a big ride for him, but he really loves it because it could just take us pretty far. I mean, and that's a kind of freedom as a parent. You know, I think I wish more parents in New York understood what bicycling allows you to do. I don't have to lug, you know, I never really had to lug a stroller anywhere. If we wanted to meet friends, I call bikes, 'yes machines', because, you know, when you live in a city and someone invites you to something, you have to think through the logistics sometimes. How am I going to get there? Are the trains running this weekend? Is there, you know, is a street closed and the bus isn't

going to pick me up? But with the bike, I never really had the excuse to say: “No, I can't make it.” I always could say: “Oh yeah, that sounds great.” And you're always on time on a bike, you know, you leave exactly when you want to leave and you arrive exactly when you want to arrive. So as a parent, that's like, that's a godsend to be able to be that, you know, have something that reliable in your life in a world where that is always chaotic when you're raising kids. So, I love the bike for that reason.

speaker\_SPEAKER\_01 (25:54)

Because that's also interesting regarding wrong narratives because I know people who are having three or four children and they told me: “It can't go without a bike. If I put all my four children to school, it would destroy our day. It's not manageable.” It was in Cologne and they tried to find out where the best ways are, but the mother of them, she told me: “I don't like the newspaper always telling, yeah, it's the families who need the car. I can't do it with a car. I want to have, yeah, for my children, a safe ride on a bicycle.” And is it sometimes maybe that we need to nudge people to see our cities from a children's perspective?

speaker\_SPEAKER\_00 (26:47)

Yeah, I mean, I think kids are some of the best urban planners there are, because they, first of all, you know, kids don't really have the sort of political filter that adults have to have. They just will say what they want. And, you know, kids, my kids being city kids, like, they want to be able to walk to see their friends and they want to be able to go to the park. My daughter's 10 and has

just started middle school and she's started to really expand her, you know, area, her walk shed around the neighborhood and she's going to the park. And, you know, yeah. And I wish we could listen to kids more and ask them what they want, because they don't care about parking. Kids don't care about grocery shopping and how am I going to get all this stuff home? They just want to have freedom. And so, I really, I listen to my own kids and talk to them about, like, what would a perfect city be for them? And that informs a lot of my advocacy, because ultimately, I feel like it's the biggest test of your city. If a kid can walk around safely by themselves, then who else can do that? People with disabilities, older people, people who don't know where they're around, their way around that well because they're new to the city. Kids are a really great barometer for the health and happiness of your city.

speaker\_SPEAKER\_01 (28:08)

I think children from the future will ask us: Why there was this fence put around an area we called it 'Spielplatz', where the children were able to play safe?" Hopefully we can regain the streets also for them to have a playground because for me it's so annoying. I live here in a really quiet area of Hamburg but I always hear mothers shouting: "Just go there and stop." They are always like having this feeling of: Oh I have to really look after the cars and have a look. I can't concentrate on my own mobility, I have to look where the others are doing it. Do you think that we have to show that for more and more masses of people, a car is getting back just being a car? Because sometimes I think, as you mentioned before, there are car ads where the German car in-



dustry puts 2.3 billion, I guess a year in the desert. They are driving through the waves there in the mountains. It's always just this only one driving there and having this enjoyment. For me it's sometimes like the Marlboro Man. How can we make transparent that people would leave their car behind if there were alternatives? How can we enable people to to say out loud: "I don't want my car anymore, please build a bus lane" or something like this?

speaker\_SPEAKER\_00 (29:53)

Yeah, I always think car ads, when they show that, you know, the person driving on the very slick, empty, urban environment or through the mountains, like should have a little disclaimer at the bottom that says, caution, you will never drive like this. Like truth in advertising, right? Should just be like, you're stuck in traffic and your ice cream's melting in the grocery bag in the backseat. Yeah, you know, it's a weird discussion because I think in New York, where I live, is so different from a lot of the rest of the country that the things that I sometimes focus on or talk about don't always apply to other places. That doesn't mean that those things, what has worked here can't work there, but sometimes people say: "Oh, but you live in New York and everything is so close by, right? Like I can walk to that coffee shop or just run to the corner to get groceries." But I do think some lessons apply to other places is that like, we have a lot of older suburbs that were built, you know, streetcar suburbs where you could come out from the city, step off the streetcar, and there was a row of densely packed shops and behind that are apartment buildings and behind that are the bigger homes. So, we have neighborhoods where it's possible to live car-free that aren't quote un-

quote cities. That's different, I think, from your more recent, like 1980s, 1990s, 2000s, very sprawly development that you might see, you know, around Atlanta or Dallas or things like that. But I still think a lot of these things can work. It's hard because we've talked about this, you're trying to convince people of a thing they can't see in their own life. And the only way to convince them to do it is if you build it for them, but you can't build it for them unless you convince them. So, it's this endless, like, just spiral that you just can't solve sometimes. So, I think that it requires really bold leadership. You know, we were very lucky here in New York that we had Janette Sadik-Khan and her team at New York City Department of Transportation that basically said: "This is what we want. We're gonna work with the communities, we're gonna talk to people, but ultimately we're just gonna do it." And in the doing it, you created a larger constituency for more. You know, like I always say, it's very hard to mobilize and organize the residents of a building that hasn't been built yet because they don't exist. And so, it's very hard to look at a street and say: "We want all the people who might bike on this street, if only it were safer, to come out to this meeting to advocate for it." You're not gonna get that. You're only gonna get the people like me, the advocates who have the time and the imagination and who've been thinking about this stuff to come out. So, I think it really does require bold leadership. At the same time, it requires like awesome advocates like Transportation Alternatives here and people in other cities who do know what's going on in other places and say: "Yeah, it worked in New York. Of course, it's gonna work here. It worked in Paris. Of course, it's gonna work here." And so, it kind of takes an approach from all angles. But I think leadership, as we've seen, like Paris being, I think, the best

example in the world, like Mayor Anne Hidalgo is just forging ahead and she's getting a lot of criticism, but the proof is in the number of people who are out there biking.

speaker\_SPEAKER\_01 (33:09)

And I always, when we have here in Hamburg, this kind of street parties, where you close the street for cars for like a weekend, everyone is enjoying this. Or when you have something, a new build on the streets and everything is put away just because there's someone working, everyone is saying: "Oh, it's really nice houses here." Because normally you go like this, just to go through your city. But as in our chat before, you said we have to come to scaling. It's no more about having, we know that we have to act. And how, beside of this bold leadership, what do you address to car industry? Because here in Germany, we are now telling the story of: "Oh, every car just has to be electric and then everything is fixed." Which is not true.

speaker\_SPEAKER\_00 (34:03)

Right, yeah. I mean, we know that electric vehicles are not the climate solution. We know that they are not a congestion solution because a traffic jam doesn't care if the cars are all being powered by gasoline, electricity, or unicorn tears. It doesn't matter. It's still a big metal box and it's got to fit somewhere. Look, to the extent that we have cars in the world, they need to be electric as soon as possible and that electricity that powers them needs to be generated by solar and other renewable energy, wind. And so, yeah, to the extent that we have cars, make

them electric. But they are not alone going to be a solution to climate change. They require massive amounts of resources to build, to extract, to ship all over the world. There are tons of embedded carbon. There's also the carbon that is created when you dispose of this thing, the battery, the lithium that's required, all of the rest. So that's one part of it. We have to transition to more walkable places where people can make choices that don't involve a car. Cars should be, we talk a lot about transportation alternatives, biking and public transit and walking, but really a car should be a transportation alternative. It should be the last thing that you need for the most extreme scenario.

speaker\_SPEAKER\_01 (34:04)

So is it about, yeah, how can you make a suggestion to people who are feeling, I can't do my, in German, I call it 'maximal-eventual-Bedarf'. It's always the biggest car because you have once in a lifetime, you have your granny, and you have the dog and maybe a friend of them. And then you can't imagine: "Okay, normally I just need a smart. Because I'm just on my own." So, people are always buying something they never need because it's also cheap compared to other, because you don't have it, you can lease it, you can just have a car from the company you're working with. And how do you see the solution that people feel secured, that their needs are fulfilled even without their own car?

speaker\_SPEAKER\_00 (35:54)

Yeah, I mean, I think a little bit we're talking a lot about individual choices versus institutional solutions. So, you know, I can't convince that person, that individual person, that they don't need a car. I don't know that they're, what their individual circumstances are. I don't know how often they have to go pick up their grandmother and load the dog into the car and the kids and go somewhere. That's fine. That's, they can figure that out for themselves. And I shouldn't, that's not the advocate's job. The advocate's job is to say: "Hey, city leadership, like the more options you give people in your city, the less likely it is they will need to own that big car." So, I have two kids and every year we think about buying a car because they're getting bigger. We want to go more places. Every year people say to us: "Oh, you're, you're definitely getting a car as you get older. You'll have to." But since I've lived in New York, there's bike share has rolled out. More bike lanes have rolled out. There's car to go, which is now gone, but there's zipcar. There are just your basic car rental places. So, the need for me to get that car has diminished. The analogy I like to use about mobility is that you should think of it like a Swiss army knife, like a multipurpose tool. If I had just a giant machete blade and I tried to use it for every task I needed to do in my house, whether it was like, you know, filing my fingernails to whittling a stick to like just nicking off a piece of paper, I'd probably, I'd probably create a lot of problems. But the Swiss army knife says, you know: "Okay, well you need to file your nails." There's a little nail file. There's a toothpick, there's a corkscrew. And every once in a while, you can open up the big blade. And when you need the bigger job, that's what you do. Like we all have a toolbox, right, probably buried in a closet somewhere with the screwdriver and the hammer and all the rest. It's like,

that's how I think about mobility. It's like, I mostly need to walk, also bike a lot. Every now and then I need the car and even every now and then I need the big car. But if my default, if I'm driving to the office in an SUV that is designed to carry a refrigerator in the back, that doesn't make any sense. And it's going to cause untold amounts of harm to other people, to the planet, to myself. So yeah, mobility, I think really, we need to think of it more of like offering people a toolkit that they can choose from.

speaker\_SPEAKER\_01 (38:51)

Because you are so connected to many of the people who are establishing the mobility, is the problem maybe also that SUV drivers are doing our mobility? Is it also about everyone who will be a minister of transport has to bicycle once a week? I don't know. Because sometimes I think that it's not that they are bad and mean, they just have this kind of blind spot. Everyone in Germany was laughing about Elon Musk's pickup thing.

speaker\_SPEAKER\_00 (39:25)

Oh, the big, the cybertruck.

speaker\_SPEAKER\_01 (39:28)

And I was telling them: "You can laugh about this, but when I bicycle through Hamburg or Berlin, I still feel that this vehicle is on the streets because I feel when a SUV is driving me by like this close, it feels always like this horror truck." And I think sometimes when people don't have this feeling of how it feels to be in-

secure, vulnerable, and always be asked to wear a helmet and some lights and like a Christmas tree. So, is it also nudging the politicians to have another perspective?

speaker\_SPEAKER\_00 (39:44)

Yes, I mean, I'm not saying anything revelatory when I say that empathy is a really, or the lack of empathy is a big problem in politics, especially in the US right now, as we're seeing with our president. The inability of people to think of people other than themselves, to step outside of themselves and wonder how their actions affect other people. And more locally in New York, our mayor Bill de Blasio famously is driven everywhere, driven from his home, from the mayor's mansion on the Upper East Side, 11 or 12 miles to go work out at a gym in my neighborhood where he used to live, or is driven to go take a walk. And we've been saying forever, like: "Take the subway every once in a while, take the bus, ride a bicycle, just so you can see what it's like. Because we can't really teach you how to empathize with other people. You just have to experience it for yourself." Where I'm encouraged is that in New York, there is a larger number of younger politicians who do bicycle everywhere, or who take transit and are proud of it, and who don't feel the need to make it a big political statement. It's just how they get around. So, I do have hope in that sense that there are a larger number of people running for elected office who understand these things, who practice what they preach. And even if they don't 100% practice what they preach, because their realities are a little different than everybody else's, like they at least are encouraging policies that allow everybody to make the best choice for all of us. So yeah, I

think you do, it's like what I said before, you need that good, bold leadership. I mean, part of why Anne Hidalgo is so good is because before she was mayor, she was doing a lot of this stuff. And she was practicing it personally, but also using her position to advance these ideas. And once she became mayor, was able to do even more. And so that's what we need here in New York, especially.

speaker\_SPEAKER\_01 (42:05)

And as our time is nearly over, which is funny. Like 45 minutes. I told you that I always have the problem. Yeah, Katja is from Hamburg. She's living in Berlin sometimes. And of course she can tell so many nice stories of mobility in really nice cities. But what about the rural areas? What about the people who are driving to work for like 30 kilometres? And how do we change the mobility? In Germany, we cut it down. We lost 6,000 kilometres of railways. And I think in the US it was the rubber and big oil thing that also cut it down transit a bit, or in a huge way. And how can we enable people to see that even in rural areas mobility change can happen?

speaker\_SPEAKER\_00 (42:14)

Yeah, so there's two things. One, we just did an episode about rural areas. My co-host Aaron Naparstek, he was in Vermont. And he spoke to people in these small towns who are relying more and more on e-bikes to get around. And in that case, the state utility company and some local organizations are partnering to offer rebates and credits towards the purchase of electric



bicycles, \$200, \$300, which as the price of e-bikes continues to fall, that goes a lot farther than it used to. So you think about, like we were saying before, most people might like their cars, but they hate driving. Most people also, we always talk about when we're going to change a street, but what about the contractor with the heavy tools or someone making a big delivery? Most of us, when we're getting around, like when I was traveling to the office before the pandemic, I had my laptop and my phone. Like I don't need a truck to get me there to do it. And even outside of commuting in the United States, most trips that people are making are, depends on where you live, but it's five miles or less, three miles or less, right? It's taking my kid to the neighborhood school. It's taking my kid to soccer practice or to a friend's house, picking up groceries, going to my local doctor's office, whatever it is. And those are trips, I think in the US, and this is true in bicycle planning as well, we are really focused on commuting and that's fine. People do need to get to and from work, but we really neglect the majority of all the other trips that people make in the course of their daily lives. So we need to be less focused on commuting routes and more on local trips. And I think the other problem is when we're focused on commuting routes, then we're sort of biased towards people who go to an office and we're ignoring people in caretaker roles, right? Which are largely women still. We're ignoring older people who may be retired. We're ignoring people who don't have a job and just need to get around just cause. And so, I think the less we focus on, look, the pandemic has probably, it's shrunk a lot of people's worlds, right? It took us from taking those commutes to the office to really being focused on where we live and our most immediate needs. And it showed the needs for safe streets so

that we can carry out those trips without fear of being hurt. And so, I think the more that we can focus, the more that planners can focus on local neighborhood trips enabling my daughter, someone who lives in a rural area to just bike to a friend's house without worrying about that big truck, like you were talking about brushing her too quickly, too closely, the better off we'll be. And these things will work. If anything, rural areas probably have a lot of advantages to urban areas in that like you can't create more space on some of our streets. In a rural area with a really wide arterial road, you probably have the room to make a very wide bicycle lane on either side. So those are the things I think we have to be focused on.

speaker\_SPEAKER\_01 (46:17)

As your last comment, do you have seen things or cities where they always rearranged the mobility and do you have something where we can look upon to have it like a role model of new mobility?

speaker\_SPEAKER\_00 (46:36)

Yeah, I mean, I think we often focus on the big cities, right, New York, Paris, London, Berlin. But here in the States, I would say, you wanna see really great leadership and a lot of change in a short amount of time. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, their mayor, Bill Peduto is awesome on these issues. And they have a great local advocacy community that has worked with the mayor's office to advance a lot of changes. And that is by no means on paper, the most bike friendly place in the world. It's very hilly, it's cold a lot

of the year, the weather's not great, but they've done a lot of stuff. Minneapolis also, they had spent many years getting federal money to change a lot of railways into trailways, the Rails to Trails program. But now that's extending to a street network. They were one of the first cities in the country to have bike share. So that's a great city now for bicycling. And Washington, D.C., which I think outside of the US you might not think of as a cycling city, but they have done a lot there and transformed some of the most iconic streets in D.C. to be more accommodating to cycling. They still have a long way to go, but they, I think, are a lot farther along than many other US cities, including, I'd probably even argue, New York.

speaker\_SPEAKER\_01 (47:53)

Thank you so much for your time. Now I have to leave you alone in this situation with Mr. Trump or Mr. Biden.

speaker\_SPEAKER\_00 (48:03)

Yeah, wish us luck. Could be a long week.

speaker\_SPEAKER\_01 (48:07)

Yeah, I'm really not feared, but I really feel like grumbling into my stomach. It's like really a weird situation to see it from, yeah, separate by an ocean, but it feels so near because it will. One of my guests just told me in our talk: "Climate will be killed if Trump wins". And I was like...

speaker\_SPEAKER\_00 (48:30)

It's bad news if Trump wins for the climate for a lot of reasons. But yeah, you know, it's middle of the day Monday here. So, I think if I just go to sleep now and wake up in a week, I can probably save myself a lot of nervousness. Yeah. Yeah.

speaker\_SPEAKER\_01 (48:49)

Yeah, I'm keeping fingers crossed and stay healthy. It was so much to see you nearly in real time.

speaker\_SPEAKER\_00 (48:54)

This was great. Hopefully in person sometime in the future.

speaker\_SPEAKER\_01 (49:00)

Have a nice day. Bye.

speaker\_SPEAKER\_00 (49:01)

Thanks. Bye.