

Transforming Transportation Systems

Dale Bracewell talks about how Vancouver proactively engineers their continuous transportation evolution

How does one approach managing transportation in a place that aspires to be the greenest city in the world? Vancouver's Dale Bracewell explains.



Q. How did you come to be Manager of Transportation Planning at City of Vancouver?

A. I'm a professional engineer with a few decades of experience in transportation and urban planning. I have been in municipal and provincial government settings as well as in the private sector. Before serving in this role, I led the City of Vancouver's Active Transportation team. We were responsible for planning and designing the city's pedestrian, bicycle, and greenways networks.

Prior to that I was responsible for Vancouver's transportation planning and operations for the 2010 Olympic Winter Games. When we hosted the world for the Games, we wanted to show the public that with less road space and more transit options, we can deliver a different, less car-centric urban environment.

Right after the 2010 Winter Games, I helped to co-lead the development of our customized, city-wide, long-range transportation plan (Transportation 2040). We are now currently implementing our transportation plan. It is designed to create a smart and efficient transportation system that supports a thriving economy, is accessible and affordable, and is healthy for people and our natural environment.

Q. [Transportation 2040](#) is an ambitious plan, outlining inclusive, healthy, prosperous, and livable future goals that require significant resources. How do you prioritize what to work on, and when?

A good strategic plan for a major urban city is a must, but so is having a good implementation plan. The "how-to do sustainable urban transportation planning" handbook does not exist. It is a constant learning, adaptive process to help our city grow sustainably for our residents and businesses. We have to be able to maintain our existing infrastructure while also implementing our transit priorities.

We also want people to choose cycling at the times of day that work best for them. We want to proactively manage our curb sides. Vancouver enjoys not having freeways and managing our demand with a limited amount of road networks. Over time, we want to repurpose our road networks to accommodate more sustainable transportation modes. As we do, we are thoughtful about the planning process and equally thoughtful about the implementation.

Transportation planning is (in part) about predicting the future and taking steps to ensure that we are ready. It's about being adaptive to new technologies and weaving them into the goals we already have - as opposed to being reactive to it. We need to respond to our public's needs in real-time, while also understanding the larger, long-range picture.

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Q. You survey annually to see how well you are progressing to your [Transportation 2040 goals](#). Any interesting / unexpected findings thus far? How do you use this annual data to adjust course?

A. Data collection and analysis is a hugely useful tool that helps us understand what our prioritization is resulting in. Annual data collection and review allows us to proactively adjust. We constantly look at our annual panel survey data to inform our next set of transportation priorities.

So far, we have not seen the data point to any surprising findings. More so, we see it pointing to scales of magnitude differences in mode choices within our nine macro-zones of the city. Having a larger set of data to look to, coupled with being able to (subjectively) ask our Vancouverites what is of best use to them is resulting in more proactive and informed implementation.

Q. The City of Vancouver has participated in several Carbon Neutral Cities Alliance (CNCA) transportation projects. You worked with Portland OR on [Deep Carbon Reductions in the Transport Sector](#).¹ What are your thoughts on bridging the equity gaps in the transportation sector - especially around access to public transportation in the face of a rising cost of living?

A. Equity considerations come up a lot more now than they used to, especially in relation to the major transitions happening now in the transit sector. We do not want to be creating and adding more public infrastructure that does not serve the needs of everyone. This reminds us more often that the most affordable options for all are walking and biking.

To that end, transportation planning groups need to be working more closely with their land use planning institutions. We need to collect and understand land use data like how many walkable destinations there are in any given neighborhood, so we know if we are putting the right transportation infrastructure in the right places.

Putting historic traditional transportation modes onto our transit corridors is not the full answer. We also have to keep one eye on emerging shared mobility technologies – without getting too awestruck by it. We cannot afford to lose sight of the people we serve who cannot afford the cutting edge of new mobility options.

Q. The City of Vancouver is also observing Copenhagen's ongoing Scandinavian Green Public Procurement Alliance work.² What has it been like to work with peer cities internationally? What have you gained from this interaction?

A. I had a great opportunity to visit Sweden this year, meeting my transportation peers in both Stockholm and Gothenburg. Both of these cities have mobility pricing, which I wanted to learn about since we are undergoing this at a regional level here in Vancouver. I was surprised how much I learned from both cities. I felt like we may be a decade or two away from some of the type of transportation systems thinking they already have in place. In particular, I keep thinking how quiet their electric buses are and how it would be great to electrify Vancouver's remaining diesel bus fleet with these types of buses.

I was also glad that both Stockholm and Gothenburg wanted to learn from me as well. We have the longest autonomous transit line in the world ([SkyTrain](#)), and transit planning remain a high priority for Vancouver. In short, we always have the opportunity to learn from each other and improve together our collective knowledge of city transport planning.

¹ A CNCA grant to the City of Portland OR grant funding to research issues of displacement and gentrification related to development of a future bus-rapid transit (BRT) line through the eastern part of the city.

² A CNCA grant to assess procurement within the cities of Copenhagen, Stockholm, and Oslo's Non-Road Mobile Machinery (NRMM) fleet and direct tendering of transport services. This grant will close in 2018.

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Q. The City of Vancouver has also participated in a USDN Peer Exchange dedicated to advancing EVs on the west coast,³ after which the City of Vancouver released an EV Strategy. Currently, you are working with Portland OR on capitalizing carbon to accelerate electric vehicles (EV) charging investments.⁴ What are some lessons you could share with your peers around EV deployment?

A. Much of the EV attention has been on electrifying private vehicles. I feel a lot of responsibility to make sure that city utility vehicles are not left out of the EV conversation. Fire, police, garbage, ambulances, etc. also need to advance. We need to pay attention not only to making sure public parking is EV friendly, but also to our municipal city fleets - including large trucks - so they are not left behind.

Q. The City of Vancouver is now participating in a CNCA Special Project to explore Autonomous Vehicles (AVs) in the Pacific Northwest. What outcomes are you hoping for from this work?

A. We are glad to be participating in this research. Being proactive with other west coast cities is critical to securing cities as voices at the table shaping the national conversation, not just reacting to the technology requests from private companies. The value-add of doing this type of collaborative work is that you are mining the best from a collective set of minds on policy development and implementation. We (Seattle, Portland OR, and Vancouver) more or less have the same goals; we just express them in different ways.

This work will give all of us along the Cascadia Corridor a more solid foundation in this emerging technology policy and implementation conversation. There is not a playbook or a handbook yet for cities to reference. We will soon be reporting to Council on this shared research effort, and eventually may bring to Council a policy paper that explains the who, the why, and how to best achieve the full benefit of accommodating AVs and continued EV adoption.

Q. Looking back over your career, what would you like to underscore to other cities around developing sustainable transportation systems?

A. Land use planning and transportation planning need to be hand in glove. You also need to keep the local context in mind. For centuries, humankind has been trying to develop better ways to get around. If you do not understand where you are and where you are trying to go, then you aren't being strategic.

You need policy goals, a long-range plan, an implementation plan, and an outlet for shared learning. This is how we collectively can make bigger contributions to the global conversation on how to grow sustainably. Lastly, if people are saying anything good about Vancouver, it is important to note that we do not work alone. Our city partnerships are our strength. We rely on them to go farther faster.

³ A USDN Peer Exchange to explore the role of government in accelerating electric vehicle charging infrastructure.

⁴ A CNCA grant to provide EV charging infrastructure investors with access to a new source of revenue to help achieve a compelling business model: voluntary carbon credit markets. This grant will close in 2018.