



VISION 4 ERONETWORK

An Interview with Norman Garrick

Norman Garrick is a professor of Transportation and Urban Planning at the University of Connecticut. He holds a Ph.D in transportation engineering from Purdue University.

It's the United Nations Global Road Safety Week. And the focus this year is on managing speed for safety. Speed is such a critical factor in preventing traffic fatalities and injuries. As an engineer, what are the strategies you think work best to slow people down to safe, appropriate speeds?



Designing for lower speed is absolutely the top priority for reducing road deaths. There are many tools available in the toolbox that engineers can use to manage speed for safety, but the most basic includes narrower carriageways, smaller turning radii and removing center-line markings on most streets in cities. These are simple steps, but they are hard to implement because the design standards used by most cities and states, and that are promoted by the federal government, prioritize efficient vehicle movement above all else. The belief is that efficient vehicle movement is essential for prosperous communities. But now we are seeing just how wrong this approach is. Places, both here and abroad, that put the wellbeing of people first are generally the places that are the safest, as well as having the best quality of life. These places have shown that facilitating rapid vehicle movement requires steps (such as bigger roads and spread out development patterns) that actually do more harm than good. We have consistently seen that retrofitting places that prioritize the comfort, well-being and movement of people over the movement of vehicle results in safer and better places. This switch to a people-centric approach to transportation requires that we revamp the methods and policies that are currently used to design and plan streets in most places in the US.

We're leading a campaign calling on the Biden Administration to commit to a goal of zero traffic deaths by 2050. Do you think that's achievable? And how will managing speed for safety play a part?

Many countries in the world have fatality rates that are several times lower than that in the US - in many situations in these countries, they are approaching zero traffic fatalities. Even if we were only able to match the numbers of these countries by 2050 it

would mean saving more than 30,000 lives each year. That would be a tremendous achievement. It is doable! If we look at the numbers, many of these safer countries had traffic fatality rates approaching that of the US in 1970 and in just 50 years they have managed to reduce their fatality rates by 80%. It should not take us 50 years to achieve this level of reduction because these countries have paved the way for us - developing proven strategies for reducing fatalities as they made their cities, towns and villages cleaner, quieter, more livable, more equitable and more affordable. The tried and true strategies exist - the question is whether or not we can muster the political will to implement these strategies. To do this we need to make it clear that a people-centric transportation system is not only safer but will also lead to healthier people, a healthier planet, to our long term economic well-being, to equity and to a higher life quality.

What are two near-term changes you would urge at the Federal level to manage speeds for safety? What about at the State & local levels, generally?

Traditional the role of the federal government has been twofold: setting policy guidelines and encouraging changes by dangling funding. Currently, both of these mechanisms all too often encourage the wrong things. The federal government could help to bring about speed management by developing new policy guidelines for street design (including such tools as the MUTCD and changing the focus away from level of service in design - a practice which just encourages larger, less safe roads). The federal government can then encourage the adoption of these new standards by offering financial incentives to state and local governments. They would also need to then evaluate and monitor progress towards safer streets.

If reducing speeds is so core to improving safety, why do you think it's not done more often and fully? What's holding us back?

See above.

How can the professionals in your field do a better job meeting the challenges of the day?

Professional organizations need to recognize the need to educate their membership in a new practice paradigm that puts speed management at the heart of the discussion about safety. They also need to provide continuous opportunity for training in this new paradigm. Finally, they need to provide assistance to cities and towns as they try to transition to a new way of thinking about streets and safety.