

Curb Enthusiasm Episode 16 Transcript

00;00;02;17 - 00;00;17;15

Emily Weidenhof

Welcome to our season two launch of Curb Enthusiasm. I'm Emily Weidenhof in a fresh new studio with a fresh new administration. So, who better to kick us off than a fresh new commissioner—Mike Flynn! Welcome.

00;00;17;17 - 00;00;21;29

Commissioner Mike Flynn

Thanks, Emily. Very excited to be here. Huge admirer of your show.

00;00;22;07 - 00;00;28;07

Emily Weidenhof

Thank you. Appreciate it. Tell our listeners your journey to transportation.

00;00;28;09 - 00;01;05;11

Commissioner Mike Flynn

Sure. So, I guess at a pretty young age, I became really interested in social issues. Social. Environmental. And in parallel, I was basically a computer nerd, and the internet was becoming a big thing. And so, I kind of latched on to that and said, you know what? This is a great way to kind of, advance or, you know, try to improve the world, improve your community, like, the internet's this thing that's going to get the message out there. And, and felt like the right platform.

00;01;05;14 - 00;01;33;05

Commissioner Mike Flynn

You know, fast forward to, college and kind of a little later on. And I got involved in a whole lot of, different kinds of, advocacy and organizations. And, somehow, became less interested in the internet and computer side and luckily stumbled upon urban planning when I moved back to New York City and said, you know what? Like the physical world, that's really that's really what excites me. And I feel like that's where I can really have an impact.

00;01;33;06 - 00;01;34;00

Emily Weidenhof

Yeah.

00;01;34;00 - 00;01;52;10

Commissioner Mike Flynn

Once I discovered urban planning, which was a little bit of a roundabout thing, you know, it kind of clicked and it brought together all the things I'm interested in, social issues, environmental issues, infrastructure, trains, all the good stuff. And, kind of launched me on my journey.

00;01;52;12 - 00;02;07;01

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Emily Weidenhof

Amazing. Yeah. And what better agency to land at than one that touches New Yorkers lives every day? Could you share a little bit about your vision for DOT as commissioner?

00;02;07;03 - 00;02;35;10

Commissioner Mike Flynn

Yeah, it's definitely the dream job. A dream job for me, and it's an honor and a privilege, and a responsibility. Because you're right, it really does affect New Yorkers day to day lives in so many different ways. And that by itself is actually one, I think, real theme for me of what I want to focus on and what I want our team here to focus on is the real-world impact of the work we do.

00;02;35;13 - 00;03;03;25

Commissioner Mike Flynn

We've become such an innovative agency over the past ten, 20, you know, or more years. And, I think, you know, it's important to take a step back and say, okay, you know, what's the impact here? How is this affecting people? And then how do we take it to the next level? And Mayor Mamdani has clearly laid out some really strong principles, around affordability, around excellence in government, which I really also strongly believe in.

00;03;03;27 - 00;03;24;25

Commissioner Mike Flynn

And, so my vision is well, I would say it's, it's it's really twofold. To boil it down. There's kind of an outward peace, which is, all right, all that work we do, all the innovative work we do. How do we take it to the next level? How do we say, okay, these are our goals. What do we need to do differently to hit those goals?

00;03;24;25 - 00;03;49;03

Commissioner Mike Flynn

Whether it's bus speeds, whether it's, bringing crashes down even more. They've come down a lot. But how do we get closer to Vision Zero? How do we really, reimagine the public realm in a way that every community can benefit from high quality public space that's maintained. Right. That's programed, and all the other kinds of work we do, even some of the basic infrastructure, state of good repair, which is so critical.

00;03;49;06 - 00;03;49;23

Emily Weidenhof

Yeah.

00;03;49;23 - 00;04;10;02

Commissioner Mike Flynn

It doesn't always get as much attention. So that's one piece is basically doubling down and leveling up the work we do that's actually building stuff. I'd say the other piece is a little bit more internal, maybe less, glamorous, but still exciting, which is how can we work better as an agency? It's that government excellence.

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00;04;10;08 - 00;04;20;15

Commissioner Mike Flynn

How can we deliver more for New Yorkers, deliver it more efficiently, more effectively, and really even unlock the potential of our own staff to, to do their jobs better.

00;04;20;19 - 00;04;45;20

Emily Weidenhof

And you were, at DOT previously had the pleasure of working with you, in the past and in some ways never really left the agency because you are very present as a consultant and a thought leader on so many important projects. Now that you're back in this role, has there been anything that surprised you? Given all of your prior experience?

00;04;45;20 - 00;05;15;15

Commissioner Mike Flynn

I mean, it's not a surprise, but it's there's aspects of this job that are very comfortable and things that I've been doing a long time. There's like, any time you take on a new job, there's aspects of the job that are new, right? And that have a little more of a learning curve. So, you know, definitely the more kind of, media, being out there, right, being the public face, the politic political side, you know, that's, I find it just as interesting and exciting.

00;05;15;23 - 00;05;19;16

Commissioner Mike Flynn

And I love a challenge, but those are maybe the pieces that are a little newer for me.

00;05;19;19 - 00;05;33;28

Emily Weidenhof

Yeah. So, speaking of, the political side, as you mentioned, our mayor is laser focused on fast busses. Could you talk about, how you and the agency are working to achieve that goal?

00;05;34;00 - 00;06;04;17

Commissioner Mike Flynn

Absolutely. You know, I need to give credit to our, transit team here at DOT for the incredible way that they've really evolved and innovated the bus priority work that they do. You know, that said, the mayor has been clear that he wants us to level up and to set, even more ambitious goals when it comes to things like bus speeds, and other metrics of how we're really serving riders, taking care of riders, putting bus riders at the center of the work.

00;06;04;19 - 00;06;27;09

Commissioner Mike Flynn

And so that's, you know, that's kind of the theme for that. What tools are we using that are really working well? And where do we actually have to work a lot harder to have a much more significant impact on speeding busses up. And that's not easy, right? It means it's going to be hard work. It's going to mean a lot of, partnering with communities and elected officials.

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00;06;27;12 - 00;06;31;02

Commissioner Mike Flynn

But if we want those dramatic results, we got to do the hard work.

00;06;31;05 - 00;06;42;07

Emily Weidenhof

Yeah. One, announcement recently was about the Fordham bus lane, center running. Could you talk a little bit about that and what you're hoping to achieve with that project?

00;06;42;08 - 00;07;06;28

Commissioner Mike Flynn

Sure. You know, every corridor is unique. And I would say Fordham Road, actually, in many ways is particularly unique because of the street grid in that part of the Bronx. Fordham Road is one of the only East-West streets that really connects to other major, regional connections. It has very high traffic volumes, twice as much as other bus ways we've done.

00;07;07;00 - 00;07;35;16

Commissioner Mike Flynn

And there's a whole lot of people riding the other bus routes that go across Fordham Road. So it had some really unique aspects where we were kind of weighing the different options. Whether it's a bus way, whether it's offset bus lanes or other options and, you know, it's, we have to balance a lot of considerations when, when we're designing streets, especially complex streets like Fordham Road, where seemingly every possible thing is all happening there.

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Commissioner Mike Flynn

And that's, you know, that's why we, we landed where we landed, and, you know, we approach every project as its own challenge, but, we're very excited to be, cooking up some big ideas for other routes and, have a lot more to share about that in the near future.

00;07;55;00 - 00;08;06;00

Emily Weidenhof

I know that safer bicycle infrastructure is another huge priority for you. Could you talk a little bit about, your ideas for leveling up our cycling network?

00;08;06;03 - 00;08;26;13

Commissioner Mike Flynn

I think there's a few different pieces to that. Part of it is simply expanding the bicycle network coverage, right? We've. It's incredible. If you actually look back at the bike map from, say, 20 years ago and look at it now, how far we've come, but there's still pretty large areas of the city where you don't have dedicated bike space.

00;08;26;13 - 00;08;58;01

Commissioner Mike Flynn

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So, you know, one basic thing is simply expanding the bike network. Another piece is how we account for the proliferation of all these faster devices e-bikes, standup e-scooters, cargo bikes, things like that. Right? And there's a few different things we're doing there. But one simple thing is, do our bike lanes need to be wider? Something I, you know, just thinking out loud, I've often wondered, is once you hit a critical mass of riders on a route on some of the main routes.

00;08;58;07 - 00;09;23;00

Commissioner Mike Flynn

Do you even want almost like a slow and a medium speed lane, right? Like the kind of, human powered bikes, the e-bikes, and then, you know, the faster devices belong in traffic, with the cars. But, so that's I know there's been some innovation here, and I'm really interested to see how we keep evolving with, with and, you know, an industry and a world that keeps changing.

00;09;23;03 - 00;09;47;23

Commissioner Mike Flynn

And then I guess the third piece is, like I said earlier, it's a super power of DOT that we're able to build things quickly with our in-house resources. But I really would like to see also and we are, but it's very important to me in parallel that we be thinking about the long term build out, especially of some of the real high use routes once we feel really good about a particular design.

00;09;47;25 - 00;10;09;17

Commissioner Mike Flynn

I feel like you need to physically create a city, you know, that reflects your values, that takes care of New Yorkers, that takes care of the most vulnerable, street users or kids or older adults, those with disabilities. So, I'd like to see some some more movement there, too. Quick action, but also long-term change.

00;10;09;19 - 00;10;45;12

Emily Weidenhof

Yeah. And I think something that maybe is easy for people to notice is that if you're just repaving a roadway, that green paint can go away. And so building out, different designs that elevate the bikeways that provide greening, all these added benefits, can really make a longer term substantial difference. Are there any particular, you know, elements to cycling infrastructure that you've seen in other cities that you'd really like to bring to New York?

00;10;45;14 - 00;11;19;02

Commissioner Mike Flynn

I think we have a lot of the ingredients already, but they're only in very limited locations, you know, raised bikeways, two-way bikeways on greenways, but also maybe on some other key routes, landscaping, like you mentioned, I love how, Copenhagen and maybe Amsterdam use tinted asphalt instead of paint. It lasts a lot longer. I know we have some technical challenges with that, because there's all the stuff most of us never think about.

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00;11;19;02 - 00;11;34;02

Commissioner Mike Flynn

Like where does the aggregate, the stone in our asphalt come from? And what color is the rock? And how does that all work? But, you know, I feel like there's plenty we can learn from other places. When it comes to, how we're how we're building out our, our bike facilities.

00;11;34;05 - 00;11;53;18

Emily Weidenhof

Great. So you are leading the agency at an amazing moment in the life cycle of Vision Zero. We are at an all-time low in terms of traffic fatalities. What does the future of Vision Zero look like for you?

00;11;53;25 - 00;12;19;25

Commissioner Mike Flynn

I think we can't overstate the success that DOT and our partners have had with Vision Zero. Right. Traffic fatalities are down 30% or more since the advent of the program, just over a decade ago. That's incredible. And it's something to celebrate. What does it look like going forward? I think there's two major parts. One, we need to double down on the things that work, especially when it comes to street design.

00;12;19;28 - 00;12;43;13

Commissioner Mike Flynn

You know, we've learned a lot, right? We're always looking at data, which types of treatments we're using have the greatest impact? And are there new approaches we haven't used yet or we haven't used as much? And should we be, should we be scaling them up? So, you know, I think that that's the first part is basically what have we learned? What works. Keep doing it. Do more of it.

00;12;43;13 - 00;13;19;00

Commissioner Mike Flynn

The other piece, which I think, you know, is kind of where there's maybe even, more potential is the, bigger policy and regulatory, things that are out there, whether it's automated enforcement, which we know works dramatically. Right? I think it's, red light cameras reduce red light running by, I think, 70 some percent. And speed cameras reduce high speed, high speed speeding by 90 something percent, 94% maybe. That's incredible. That's huge. So more of that, please. Right?

00;13;19;03 - 00;13;19;16

Emily Weidenhof

Yeah.

00;13;19;16 - 00;13;37;10

Commissioner Mike Flynn

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But what else can we be doing? I think what we've seen is that there's a small segment of recidivist, dangerous drivers who cause a disproportionate share of speeding, and of crashes. And how can we really, ensure accountability for that?

00;13;37;10 - 00;13;57;27

Commissioner Mike Flynn

I think part of it might be the types of penalties. Right? And, things like intelligent speed assist or speed limiters, which we're seeing, discussion of in Albany. Right now with the state budget, where the city may get the ability to do that. You know, I think that's a really powerful tool.

00;13;57;27 - 00;14;07;23

Commissioner Mike Flynn

So those kinds of things that are more systemic, that really complement the physical work we're doing to redesign our streets, I believe, hold a lot of promise.

00;14;07;25 - 00;14;18;29

Emily Weidenhof

What is a common transportation misconception that you hear? And can you shed some light on, on maybe the truth behind that misconception?

00;14;19;01 - 00;14;42;21

Commissioner Mike Flynn

Well, one thing that I think my entire career, you just always hear every retail area that you're going and working in is that a lot of businesses really, truly believe with all their heart that the vast majority of their customers arrive by car. And that's even in some of the most transit friendly parts of the city. And look, I think it in some places that's true.

00;14;42;21 - 00;15;02;26

Commissioner Mike Flynn

I think in most parts of New York, I would say that's not the case. And there's been a lot of research out there that that has proved that. But I don't know why. It just, it just remains this, this, this thing that so many businesses just instinctively seem to feel. I don't know if it's because maybe business owners tend to commute by car more.

00;15;03;01 - 00;15;28;21

Commissioner Mike Flynn

You know, they're coming from another neighborhood, and, maybe transit's not an easy option for them. I'm not sure. But you even sometimes see things like, the business owners are the ones parking in front and feeding the meter, right? So I think the we can always do more to try to use data to address those kinds of concerns. But, sometimes, you know, feelings are a strong thing.

00;15;28;26 - 00;15;54;05

Emily Weidenhof

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Yes, totally. Although I will say that an important part of our work is merchant surveys, but also, shopper surveys and really understanding, how people are using and getting to business to make sure that our projects are both supporting safety and, the public realm, but also the important small businesses along so many of our, our corridors.

00;15;54;08 - 00;16;26;03

Commissioner Mike Flynn

Absolutely. And somewhat related. You know, it reminds me of something else that the mayor has talked about and that I've talked about, which is, you know, we can't only listen to the loudest voices and we can't listen only to special interests. We have to do everything we can to really hear from all New Yorkers, right? And from all stakeholders when we're doing a project and maybe for whatever reason, that in certain places, you're hearing more from the drivers, right?

00;16;26;05 - 00;16;26;12

Emily Weidenhof

Yeah.

00;16;26;12 - 00;16;48;20

Commissioner Mike Flynn

And maybe that helps explain it too. I'm not sure, but, yeah, definitely having those conversations, trying to hear from the businesses, hear from the shoppers, hear from everybody, and really understand as best we can how the decisions we're making are going to affect them. Because obviously we care about supporting business. We want to support small businesses. We want to make it easier to do business in New York.

00;16;48;25 - 00;17;14;23

Emily Weidenhof

Yeah. I think it also speaks to a challenge that you've pointed out recently in, in some of our meetings, which is when we're working in transportation, which works across so many scales, you both are thinking about network benefits, which can go through across neighborhoods, you know, across a borough. But then that network also touches down very locally in different places.

00;17;15;00 - 00;17;32;13

Emily Weidenhof

And so how do you balance and build consensus across the different stakeholders that may care about a network benefit versus care about how, you know, that bus lane impacts the parking spot in front of their individual business?

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Commissioner Mike Flynn

Yeah, that's so true. It's so timely. And it kind of relates to this reexamination lately of things like the environmental review laws and the idea of abundance. Right? It's like, how do we,

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kind of get out of our own way. And part of that is this idea of how do we even define the community for the project, right?

00;17;54;00 - 00;18;11;23

Commissioner Mike Flynn

If we're if we're going to try to meaningfully engage and really understand how these projects impact people, how are we defining who's impacted? And for a small project, that might be easy, right? But for something that really has a regional impact,

00;18;11;23 - 00;18;11;28

Emily Weidenhof

yeah.

00;18;12;00 - 00;18;17;20

Commissioner Mike Flynn

Whether it's a, bus rapid transit route or whether it's the Brooklyn Queens Expressway. Right?

00;18;17;21 - 00;18;17;28

Emily Weidenhof

Yeah.

00;18;17;29 - 00;18;32;08

Commissioner Mike Flynn

You have folks who live right there and they're clearly impacted. You have businesses there who are impacted, but also the users of that facility. And if it's a facility, again, that's providing, let's say, regional freight movement, you know, how do we factor that in as well? Because they're also stakeholders,

00;18;32;09 - 00;18;33;03

Emily Weidenhof

right.

00;18;33;03 - 00;18;42;01

Commissioner Mike Flynn

Or if you make a change here and it has an impact over here and let's say over here is an environmental justice community, but maybe we're not hearing from them as much.

00;18;42;06 - 00;18;48;07

Commissioner Mike Flynn

How do we as government do our best to make sure we're hearing from everybody who could be impacted?

00;18;48;10 - 00;19;22;08

Emily Weidenhof

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Right. Absolutely. And I think that also speaks to how we've kind of continued to evolve, how we try to communicate with stakeholders with New Yorkers and get lots of different kinds of inputs, whether it be surveys or having our street ambassadors out on the ground talking to people. I think one challenge we also faces, it's harder to interact with people when they're driving quickly by in their car versus if you're walking or cycling or, you know, getting on and off a bus.

00;19;22;16 - 00;19;50;00

Commissioner Mike Flynn

That's true. Although I'll say, I did a project, years back up in Poughkeepsie, and it was to look at redesigning their main downtown street. And we did a one day demonstration project with hay bales. It was around Halloween, and it was really fun. And one thing I helped with was we had little palm cards, and at the red light, we would give it to the drivers with a QR code and everything on the survey, because we really did want to hear their perspectives too.

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Commissioner Mike Flynn

So it's harder on a highway. But you know, there are ways and, you know, we want to hear from everybody.

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Emily Weidenhof

Yeah. Great.

00;19;58;00 - 00;20;18;28

Emily Weidenhof

Hey, listeners, we hope you're enjoying this episode of our podcast. For those of you who are as enthusiastic about transportation and planning as we are, we'd like to hear from you. You can submit topics and questions that you'd like us to cover at [NYC.gov/curbenthusiasm](https://nyc.gov/curbenthusiasm). And now back to our conversation.

00;20;19;00 - 00;20;31;20

Emily Weidenhof

So we have a bunch of questions from listeners. They're excited to hear from you. Our first question is how can we get projects from paint to concrete faster?

00;20;31;23 - 00;20;40;03

Commissioner Mike Flynn

That's a great question. I mentioned earlier about, you know, that I really believe strongly in moving, towards permanently changing our streetscape.

00;20;40;06 - 00;20;40;18

Emily Weidenhof

Yeah.

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00;20;40;21 - 00;21;05;06

Commissioner Mike Flynn

So I think there's two, two pieces to that. One is that we actually have a really incredible in-house capacity to do concrete work. More minor type concrete work, island safety features, things that help separate bike lanes. And we're working actively to scale that up so we can do more permanent-feeling work out on the street, using our own in-house forces.

00;21;05;06 - 00;21;30;05

Commissioner Mike Flynn

And that's, you know, it's more concrete, it's more people. It's more facilities for all that, it's more, even trucks, right? To get to get the concrete out there and do the work. The second piece is for actual capital projects, that go in kind of the longer-term pipeline, which are also important. We've really improved, and we continue to improve the way that we maintain and manage our assets.

00;21;30;07 - 00;22;00;23

Commissioner Mike Flynn

So when we go out and we paint something and we build it, and it's kind of an interim design, how do we prioritize which of those interim designs should then get put into the pipeline to get built out as a capital project? Maybe it's based on ridership. It could be based on equity considerations. It could be based on, other factors, sustainability, resiliency. So I think, you know, we're taking both of those approaches to be able to take things that are built quickly and make them more permanent.

00;22;00;25 - 00;22;07;14

Emily Weidenhof

Great. Another listener asks, what is your vision for BRT (Bus Rapid Transit) in New York City?

00;22;07;17 - 00;22;27;07

Commissioner Mike Flynn

I love that question. Well, I believe we need it here, but I believe you have to make it work here as well, right? A lot of times, some of the BRT systems we see elsewhere are on these, like massive highways or gigantic arterial roads. We don't have a lot of them here. We have some, but we don't have a lot.

00;22;27;08 - 00;22;48;12

Commissioner Mike Flynn

So we have to also figure out how we adapt to New York City's context. Right? How do we fit it in? What are sometimes more narrow rights of way? But we're doing that. We're developing a toolbox. We're evolving our toolbox. We're going to see one of our first BRT like projects implemented this year out on Flatbush Avenue in downtown Brooklyn.

00;22;48;13 - 00;22;49;15

Emily Weidenhof

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Very excited for that one.

00;22;49;16 - 00;23;08;02

Commissioner Mike Flynn

Me, too. Yeah. And as part of the mayor challenging us to really think bigger and plan for that. For those real dramatic improvements to busses, we're going to have more ideas to share about how we can really adapt BRT and move forward with it here in New York.

00;23;08;05 - 00;23;20;15

Emily Weidenhof

Fantastic. Someone else would like to ask, can we have Green Wave signal timing citywide? Third Avenue is a joy to bike on because of it.

00;23;20;18 - 00;23;40;05

Commissioner Mike Flynn

I think as a biker, I'm all for it. You know, I think, we maintain thousands and thousands of traffic signals. So it's the kind of thing where every time we're looking at a corridor, we can look at that, right? We can within the context of all the operations and what's going to work best for all users.

00;23;40;05 - 00;24;00;27

Commissioner Mike Flynn

But I think, as a goal of, of supporting cycling, the more we can expand Green Wave, which for those who don't know, is basically timing the signals to turn green on a one way street at a speed that really works for cyclists, right? So you don't have to go and stop and go and stop. I know we're actively looking at more opportunities to scale that up.

00;24;00;29 - 00;24;06;18

Emily Weidenhof

Yeah. And it also encourages a rate of cycling that's kind of safe for everyone.

00;24;06;24 - 00;24;19;28

Commissioner Mike Flynn

That's right. Just like in, you know, we would do this for drivers basically to keep speeds at a safer speed. We can do the same thing for cyclists. We can incentivize going at a reasonable speed.

00;24;20;02 - 00;24;29;07

Emily Weidenhof

Yes. Another listener asks, what does the future of vehicle parking look like in New York City?

00;24;29;10 - 00;24;58;17

Commissioner Mike Flynn

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There's a lot of potential there. By and large, our overall approach to on street parking in New York City hasn't changed dramatically since the 1950s, when overnight parking was first allowed, which really was the beginning of the era of lots and lots of parking on our streets. I think there is something like roughly 3 million parking spots across the city and maybe 80,000 of them are metered.

00;24;58;20 - 00;25;21;04

Commissioner Mike Flynn

And I can't do the math right now, but that's a pretty small percentage. We know it's not the most efficient way to manage precious curb space. We know in a city as dense as New York, curb space is one of the, you know, most valuable, pieces of real estate. Every neighborhood's different, but certainly in more transit rich neighborhoods and commercial areas where you really need that turnover.

00;25;21;04 - 00;25;37;23

Commissioner Mike Flynn

And we want to make it easier for people to find parking spots to not have to circle the block, which is bad for safety, for emissions, for people's time. We can manage that. And we've started doing that. And I think we're going to have a lot more, to share in the coming months.

00;25;37;29 - 00;25;47;22

Emily Weidenhof

Yeah. We had the pleasure of interviewing, Doctor Shoup to hear all about, his amazing parking, innovations and thinking.

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Commissioner Mike Flynn

Oh, I'm going to have to, rewatch that episode. He was a, a true legend in our industry. And, so much of our thinking around parking, came from him.

00;25;57;28 - 00;26;05;04

Emily Weidenhof

Amazing. And last question from a listener. Why does it take so long to repave the street?

00;26;05;06 - 00;26;25;11

Commissioner Mike Flynn

Fair question. Just to break it down a little bit. There's two or maybe three basic steps when we repave a street, right? We mill it, which is where we basically grind up the asphalt that's out there. Now. Then we have this kind of in-between period where sometimes, we need to let the utilities come in and do their work.

00;26;25;12 - 00;26;47;29

Commissioner Mike Flynn

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We certainly don't want to pave it, and then have it all dug up again, you know, a week later. So that's part of it. And then we have, another crew come out and pave it. We pave over 1100 lane miles of roadway every year. It's a massive operation. As you can imagine, there's a lot of coordination.

00;26;47;29 - 00;27;01;17

Commissioner Mike Flynn

There's a lot of logistics. We're always looking for ways to do it more efficiently and to try to minimize that period where basically the road hasn't been repaved. So, it's definitely on our, on our radar.

00;27;01;18 - 00;27;05;14

Emily Weidenhof

Yeah. And some of this work happens on the overnight as well. Right?

00;27;05;16 - 00;27;06;25

Commissioner Mike Flynn

That's right. That's right.

00;27;06;29 - 00;27;21;05

Emily Weidenhof

So I wanted to talk a little bit about schools. We're both parents. DOT recently announced that we'll be using Sammy's Law to reduce the speed limit in front of schools to 15mph. Why is that so important?

00;27;21;08 - 00;27;47;08

Commissioner Mike Flynn

I'm really, excited about this. And I want to start by acknowledging all the hard work and, advocacy by folks who really worked hard to get Sammy's Law passed. Even small changes to car speeds can have a huge impact on pedestrians, including school children.

00;27;47;11 - 00;28;09;10

Commissioner Mike Flynn

Right? We know that a pedestrian struck by a vehicle going 25mph is three times as likely to have a serious injury as one struck by a car going 15 miles an hour. And, you know, when you pair that with physical traffic calming of the street, you really can have a huge impact on the speeds that drivers are going.

00;28;09;10 - 00;28;31;10

Commissioner Mike Flynn

And speed is such a big part of Vision Zero. So the area around schools is a natural place to start. In many cases, we've already done a lot of school slow zones and other kinds of traffic calming around schools. So this is an opportunity to really take it to the next level and use schools as that organizing principle to implement Sammy's Law.

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00;28;31;13 - 00;28;40;00

Emily Weidenhof

Very exciting. We are approaching spring. We got a little taste of some warm weather, and I think New Yorkers are really anxious.

00;28;40;04 - 00;28;40;25

Commissioner Mike Flynn

We're ready

00;28;40;28 - 00;29;01;09

Emily Weidenhof

to get out and, have a bite or a drink, on our sidewalks and streets. You recently, acknowledged, an interest in reducing barriers for dining out NYC and supporting, 12 months out of a year program. Could you talk a little bit about that?

00;29;01;14 - 00;29;19;09

Commissioner Mike Flynn

Look, we know that outdoor dining is beloved by a lot of New Yorkers. We've seen the impact that it has on communities, on our economy. It's remarkable. Right? We saw a lot of innovation, and we learned a lot sometimes the hard way during COVID.

00;29;19;14 - 00;29;20;09

Emily Weidenhof

Yeah.

00;29;20;11 - 00;29;41;02

Commissioner Mike Flynn

And we've also learned a lot from the permanent program from last year. With a year-round program, we know it reduces the barriers to entry for more businesses, but that's not the only thing. What we've heard a lot from businesses also is the application process could be a lot easier.

00;29;41;02 - 00;30;07;16

Commissioner Mike Flynn

For example, there's two different applications if you want to have seating on the sidewalk versus in the roadway. That has to do with a lot of historic things, rules and all kinds of stuff. Is there a way to streamline that? And also applications in many cases have to go to a lot of different entities to be reviewed, to be approved. Just for a pretty simple outdoor dining setup, right?

00;30;07;19 - 00;30;07;23

Emily Weidenhof

Yeah.

00;30;07;23 - 00;30;18;01

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Commissioner Mike Flynn

So I think that there's opportunities to streamline that, too. The mayor has made it a priority to make it, easier for small businesses to thrive here. I think this is one of those things we can do.

00;30;18;04 - 00;30;44;27

Emily Weidenhof

Fantastic. Yeah, that really was an exciting moment to see what happened to New York City when, you know, we had, sidewalk cafes and it really only ever existed in a few parts of the city. And when we opened up the opportunity, during the pandemic, for more businesses to participate, so many other neighborhoods really were brought to life, with, the amazing, diverse dining culture.

00;30;44;29 - 00;30;59;00

Commissioner Mike Flynn

That's right. When you look at the pre-COVID sidewalk dining program and compare it to what's out there today, even with the seasonal program that we had last year, participation is quite a bit higher than it was in the pre-COVID years.

00;30;59;01 - 00;30;59;29

Emily Weidenhof

Yeah.

00;30;59;29 - 00;31;17;28

Commissioner Mike Flynn

And more importantly, maybe we see a much more of the city represented. It's not just, you know, some parts of Manhattan and some of the real kind of central business district areas. It's smaller retail districts, right? It's neighborhoods all across the city. And I think that's that's pretty amazing.

00;31;18;02 - 00;31;23;28

Emily Weidenhof

Yeah. Shows what you can learn when you, test something out or pilot a new idea.

00;31;24;00 - 00;31;25;22

Commissioner Mike Flynn

Couldn't have said it better.

00;31;25;25 - 00;31;36;24

Emily Weidenhof

So I wanted to ask you a few last questions that we ask all our guests. The first is, what is your biggest transportation pet peeve?

00;31;36;27 - 00;31;55;13

Commissioner Mike Flynn

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Okay, I'm going to I'm going to cheat and maybe do two. I know that, as you said, we've all mentally moved on from winter and snow. But it was kind of intense there for a while. Indeed. And I need to, kvetch about the dog poop. It's just, it's not okay.

00;31;55;13 - 00;31;56;16

Commissioner Mike Flynn

As a pedestrian.

00;31;56;16 - 00;31;56;27

Emily Weidenhof

Yeah.

00;31;56;27 - 00;32;19;17

Commissioner Mike Flynn

And as transit riders. I think of it almost like things like speeding and red light running, right? Not only is it illegal, but it's anti-social. And it kind of contributes to this general sense of disorder that we hear a lot in New Yorkers. You know, that that is a real concern to them. So it's funny in a way to talk about all the dog poop, but actually it's a real issue.

00;32;19;20 - 00;32;35;00

Commissioner Mike Flynn

My other pet peeve is the, the subway pole hogs. The folks who kind of, like, lean on and, like, embrace, the entire pole on the subway when clearly other people need to hold on to it. That drives me nuts.

00;32;35;03 - 00;32;45;25

Emily Weidenhof

Yes. I have to say, I am guilty of that sometimes when I can't get a seat. But I'm trying to finish an important email, and I need those two hands to be able to, to finish.

00;32;46;00 - 00;32;50;02

Commissioner Mike Flynn

We'll give you a pass. If it's a really important email.

00;32;50;04 - 00;32;57;00

Emily Weidenhof

Alright, Commissioner, what are you most enthusiastic about for the future of transportation?

00;32;57;03 - 00;33;24;19

Commissioner Mike Flynn

I'm so excited that we're dreaming big again, and we have the leadership, and, you know, the vision is there. And we have such an energized team here at DOT who's ready to deliver. It feels like a really special moment. It's wonderful to be serving as commissioner during

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that moment. And, I'm just I'm just really thrilled for all the, good things to come and big things coming up ahead of us.

00;33;24;21 - 00;33;34;05

Emily Weidenhof

Fantastic. Well, we are too, really grateful for your time, and so excited to continue to deliver on such an amazing vision.

00;33;34;08 - 00;33;55;10

Commissioner Mike Flynn

Thanks so much, Emily.