

Curb Enthusiasm Episode 7 Transcript

00;00;02;14 - 00;00;05;09

Emily Weidenhof

Welcome to Curb Enthusiasm. I'm Emily Weidenhof,

00;00;05;11 - 00;00;06;27

Diniece Mendes

and I'm Diniece Mendes.

00;00;06;29 - 00;00;10;09

Emily Weidenhof

On this episode, we chat with Doctor Anne Goodchild

00;00;10;11 - 00;00;17;18

Diniece Mendes

Anne is a professor of civil and environmental engineering at the University of Washington and founding director of the Urban Freight Lab.

00;00;17;21 - 00;00;25;09

Emily Weidenhof

She leads the university's academic and research efforts, focusing on supply chain, logistics, and freight transportation.

00;00;25;11 - 00;00;36;00

Diniece Mendes

Goodchild is an international expert in the area of public private collaboration, and her approach to research has resulted in almost 100 novel publications.

00;00;36;02 - 00;00;50;27

Emily Weidenhof

Welcome, Anne. So excited to have you today. Hello. Over there in the Evergreen State. We'd like to really just jump right in. Why should our listeners care about freight policy?

00;00;51;00 - 00;01;06;26

Anne Goodchild

Freight policy affects people's lives quite directly. On the sort of exposure to traffic and freight vehicles side freight vehicles tend to be some of the largest on our roads.

00;01;06;26 - 00;01;26;18

Anne Goodchild

They tend to be some of the most polluting in terms of emissions per mile. So being around them is something that we need to put a lot of care and thought into. So, you know, on one

side there's, there's kind of managing those vehicles and making sure that they can operate safely in our, environments where we live.

00;01;26;21 - 00;01;53;26

Anne Goodchild

And then on the other side the, the cost of afraid. So, the cost of moving goods has a direct effect on the cost of the things that we need to live. So, food and you know, retail products and appliances, everything has to be moved to you. And so, if there are very high costs, if that's very slow, it increases and adds to the costs that consumers pay.

00;01;53;27 - 00;02;16;14

Anne Goodchild

So those are the two, I think, most direct ways in which, you know, freight affects our lives. We try, right? To sort of deliver a freight system that isn't so visible. So sometimes I think it's easy, depending on where you live, to kind of move around in the world and not see it. But it really does have, those two very distinct effects on people's lives.

00;02;16;16 - 00;02;51;27

Diniece Mendes

Yeah. I, I've really appreciated, you know, that reference and thinking about the necessity and sort of why we need freight access to fresh supply of goods, services, etc. But there is certainly a balancing act and understanding that freight is governed by federal, state and local regulations, how do you see that balance and sort of nuance, recognizing that larger trucks do impose those safety challenges and sort of thinking about how we balance access to getting those deliveries with also sort of the safety implications as well.

00;02;52;00 - 00;03;25;25

Anne Goodchild

So, for me, one of the most effective things I've seen is engagement regularly with the diverse voices in this space. So, I think when we isolate ourselves, as, you know, policymakers or operators or drivers or, you know, users of that system, when we when we don't communicate with the other stakeholders on the topic, that's when we tend to overlook complexities, you know, that may not affect us or we simplify things to a single story.

00;03;25;28 - 00;03;51;00

Anne Goodchild

So I think the most important thing that we can do to work towards balance, where everybody's, you know, needs are heard, but also concerns are heard, is through that connectivity and, and in freight, you know, that happens in, in the space I work in, in the urban freight lab, we have, you know, members from a big range of kind of private sector stakeholders.

00;03;51;00 - 00;04;19;03

Anne Goodchild

So, people that are actually, you know, operating trucks, people that are receiving goods, but also, real estate, technology providers, software providers. So, sort of a wide swath of the private sector stakeholders, but also the public sector, government officials, elected officials, but also kind of the people who live near, and rely on this system. So, I think, you know, balance is something we will continue to, to pass to pursue.

00;04;19;04 - 00;04;41;00

Anne Goodchild

It's not something we figure out and then we're done it. As the world changes, as the environment changes, as the economy changes, we continue to have to update our sense of what balance is. But I think the way we do that best is by communicating with each other and hearing each other's concerns and having about, like an inclusive approach to decision making and policy making.

00;04;41;02 - 00;05;13;13

Emily Weidenhof

Yeah, I love that. I love that it's just it's an ongoing, ongoing work. Could you share a little bit about what motivated you to start the Urban Freight Lab and, and talk about some of the successes, as well as some of the goals moving forward? Yeah, I look to the Urban Freight Lab is a public private work group housed at the University of Washington, intent on improving the safety, sustainability and livability of the urban freight system.

00;05;13;15 - 00;05;43;20

Anne Goodchild

When I engaged in, you know, my kind of independent career as a researcher. So where I was leading investigations, I looked around at my peers that I thought, you know, did it really well. And I tried to learn from them. I think research that has impact on practice is like, that's the highest standard for me. There were two groups that I was really familiar with, one that, called Met Trans, which was at USC and Cal State Long Beach.

00;05;43;20 - 00;06;13;14

Anne Goodchild

And so I saw that they had, you know, this, this structure for regular ongoing engagement with the people living and creating the system that they were trying to study. And then I also saw that at MIT, CTL Center for Transport and Logistics, they had a membership based community of private sector companies tended to be more kind of retail and transport and logistics, and that was how they, you know, built trust, understood problems.

00;06;13;16 - 00;06;34;13

Anne Goodchild

And it was, again, kind of a structural component to their research. So I thought I need that. I need long and deep, relationships with the people working in this space that I'm trying to

study. You know, as a researcher, you don't live that every day until you can understand it the way people do, who who live it and work it.

00;06;34;13 - 00;06;47;25

Anne Goodchild

Yeah. So it was, you know, really being inspired to do good work and inspired to do kind of impactful work and then looking and seeing what I could learn from other people who were who were trying to do that in a little bit different contexts, but in a similar way to what I was looking to do.

00;06;47;27 - 00;06;54;02

Diniece Mendes

It's really been inspiring seeing the progression of the Urban Freight Lab, in Seattle.

00;06;54;02 - 00;07;26;00

Diniece Mendes

And I do remember, serving as one of the expert panel reviewers for the launch of the Urban Freight Lab back in 2016. For me, I think about the value of public private partnership, but also the value of bringing the academic rigor to that conversation to ground truth initiatives and really think about their impact and value. We are at really, sort of an inflection point in thinking about how do we even drive change and innovation in urban freight.

00;07;26;02 - 00;07;48;12

Diniece Mendes

What, in your opinion, do you see is the role of government in really driving this change? And that's something that New York City has really been a leader in trying to pioneer and sort of create that space, through our freight advisory committee, but also through creating a similar structure like the Urban Freight Lab, but maybe being a city led initiative.

00;07;48;15 - 00;07;52;13

Diniece Mendes

So can you speak to the role of government and where you see that developing?

00;07;52;14 - 00;08;15;15

Anne Goodchild

I think the place where I see a need is in the more complex shared spaces, like much of our urban regions, where we have a complex set of goals, a complex set of users, and it can be difficult to to balance and to meet, you know, all of the needs.

00;08;15;15 - 00;08;48;00

Anne Goodchild

And I hesitate to say that because you can't really meet everybody's desires. And so that's where our with the Urban Freight Lab, I think we've been able to play a really key role in making a space for more understanding, kind of across kind of the public and the private

sector. Shifting to this, this idea where we're going to say, well, we want public sector engagement in kind of innovation and to encourage change in particular directions with freight is very new and organized nationally.

00;08;48;03 - 00;09;11;17

Anne Goodchild

Institutionally, most of our agencies really aren't set up to do that. That hasn't been the role that they've been playing. So I think with the Urban Freight Lab, that was a space we were really able to help with, which was as researchers who want to look for how we can improve and how we can measure and, and move, you know, our kind of systems in a direction that benefit us all.

00;09;11;19 - 00;09;45;10

Anne Goodchild

That was a really needed, kind of structure and set of skills that weren't part of kind of the private sector. They they were thinking about their, their own needs. But, you know, they didn't typically think about how do we engage in conversations around public space and shared space. And they also, on the public side, really weren't used to thinking a whole lot about freight and then also about how do we encourage innovation, especially in a space that we don't have a lot of history in terms of understanding or being engaged with.

00;09;45;10 - 00;10;15;03

Emily Weidenhof

It is so encouraging to hear how much you center communication and talking to to so many diverse stakeholders. You also look at transportation and freight systems, as you said, at the regional scale and looking nationally. I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit about the influence of geography and infrastructure and how that changes the challenges to different regional freight systems as well as opening opportunities?

00;10;15;05 - 00;10;49;17

Anne Goodchild

Often when people think about kind of freight and traffic, we do take this like pretty regional concept. People will say Seattle or they'll say New York, you know, or they'll say the Bay area. And actually what we talk about in urban freight is happening at a much smaller scale than that. So some things like micro distribution are actually, you know, happening at a neighborhood scale or, you know, some of the features of our transport system, important features are not present in the whole region.

00;10;49;17 - 00;11;14;16

Anne Goodchild

So, you know, Seattle is is home to a container port. We also move goods in other forms, but we have a container port in Seattle. And so some of the, you know, regionally impactful elements of that are highly localized to the area around the port. Almost every community has kind of neighborhood scale freight challenges or the potential for new solutions.

00;11;14;16 - 00;11;43;18

Anne Goodchild

And so that doesn't even need to be kind of, at a city governance level. Right? That can be a campus, an airport, a shopping mall, you know, a medical center, a large industrial complex. Right? There's there's a Boeing facility in our region that is, you know, larger than most towns. And so they have internal transport systems that are kind of at the scale of, of other communities.

00;11;43;23 - 00;11;44;08

Emily Weidenhof

Right.

00;11;44;10 - 00;12;13;27

Anne Goodchild

And so, yeah, some of what we think about with freight and transport is regional and there are different classes of, of cities and how they might approach that. Some are like Seattle, some might become like Seattle on some may never. But I think all kind of communities do have like neighborhood scale, smaller scale challenges or opportunities to implement solutions that can be kind of similar, even though the context is very different.

00;12;13;29 - 00;12;14;17

Emily Weidenhof

Yeah.

00;12;14;20 - 00;12;27;13

Diniece Mendes

That's a really great point around potentially thinking about transferability of solutions. It's really important to think about context sensitive approaches. And I think you really touched on that.

00;12;27;15 - 00;12;37;22

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.

00;12;37;25 - 00;12;50;00

Emily Weidenhof

You can submit topics and questions that you'd like us to cover at nyc.gov/curb enthusiasm. And now back to our conversation.

00;12;50;02 - 00;13;19;09

Emily Weidenhof

Diniece and the freight team here at D O T have run and developed and are continuing to develop amazing programs that I think really unlock next level opportunities to think about our streets for people, our streets as public realm. So just thinking about blue highways, micro hubs, the locker, NYC pilot, being smart about freight in a way that centers people.

00;13;19;11 - 00;13;44;07

Emily Weidenhof

And I think we all have a strong personal connection to our packages. It's not just the stuff, but it's the people that deliver the stuff. You know, growing up a dear friend of my family, Mike the mailman, was a little bit of a local legend and, you know, an incredibly important part of the community and connected not just packages, but but people.

00;13;44;07 - 00;14;16;12

Emily Weidenhof

I feel safer at night walking home with my Amazon delivery worker who's on my block. You know, who I know. Even just around the corner from our office, there's a memorial to a UPS worker that a building felt, you know, really strongly about and really felt his loss. And so I'm wondering to, you know, see, hear from you how centering people really impacts freight solutions.

00;14;16;14 - 00;14;23;23

Emily Weidenhof

And how that is shaping the future of, of freight, particularly, you know, in the urban context.

00;14;23;25 - 00;14;46;25

Anne Goodchild

I have to shout out Diniece and her team because if you are like, not in the freight world or you're not in New York, like you might think, oh, she does great work for the city. But like, she's had an impact on the international freight world and programs that have been developed there are notable around the globe and it's remarkable.

00;14;46;25 - 00;15;15;15

Anne Goodchild

So absolutely freight fame. I have a UPS driver who's been delivering to us since, you know, we moved here almost 20 years ago. Carla, she gets a little toot toot every time she drives by, you know, she knows that my parents live next door. And if they're away, she'll bring their package over. And as you said, you know, it's it's an asset, like a community asset to have those people in our communities just present, noticing things, you know, sharing information.

00;15;15;18 - 00;15;44;13

Anne Goodchild

There are other models, right, where you have a more, more ad hoc delivery team, and people are moving in much larger sections of a community. And so they're not present so often, and they don't get to know a place so well, it's felt like and maybe this is more with the with the advent of e-commerce and the increase in the amount of delivery people are getting, that you know, you'll see pictures on the internet of someone saying, you know, why are there for delivery vehicles in my neighborhood every day?

00;15;44;16 - 00;16;02;23

Anne Goodchild

So a sense of of intrusion, you know, my perspective is we we should be part of, of saying, what do we want? And collectively, you know, what are we kind of willing to pay and what how convenient do we want this thing to be? And it should be. Now back to freight policy, a thing that that we discuss.

00;16;02;23 - 00;16;19;23

Anne Goodchild

And maybe we decide, no, we don't want four vehicles in our neighborhood every day. Gosh, you know, what could we think about for other solutions? Or we might say, yeah, we'd rather have, you know, only small vehicles in our neighborhood. We're we're willing to, you know, host a hub nearby or we're willing to wait a little bit for our packages.

00;16;19;23 - 00;16;27;22

Anne Goodchild

So those should be things that we're talking about. And we feel like we're engaged. And there's a way for us to have an opinion and share an opinion that gets listened to.

00;16;28;14 - 00;16;44;09

Diniece Mendes

I'm happy that we brought up the conversation around empathy, particularly for the folks that are on the front lines. Oftentimes, maybe the act of ordering something online separates you from sort of that, that transaction.

00;16;44;16 - 00;17;06;01

Diniece Mendes

Right. Like you make the decision to purchase a product and then it's sort of like a black box in terms of the time you do that and then it gets to your home. And so I think that's something that we've been actively thinking about. How do we engage communities to think about trade offs? How do we engage communities to think about better choices around consumer habits?

00;17;06;01 - 00;17;39;13

Anne Goodchild

Like we have all become accustomed to the convenience of ordering online. And you know, just how do you sort of approach those conversations? So if you can shed some light on

that, that'd be really great. So I've been trying to think about like what are because sometimes it's very hard to look at that model. And now that it's kind of adopted and, and enjoyed by, by a lot of people, you know, to think about changing that, I've tried to think about what are other models that people like and have worked that maybe have other benefits or other costs.

00;17;39;13 - 00;18;02;19

Anne Goodchild

And, you know, we were talking about the sort of familiar delivery person or the postal worker who, you know, has been doing your route for a long time, like that's a model that people enjoy, then has secondary benefits that are kind of, you know, hard to count. And, and I thought about, you know, post offices, right. Post offices are little warehouses.

00;18;02;19 - 00;18;25;29

Anne Goodchild

Now, they're relatively small, right? Sort of zip code level. And the other warehouses where your goods might be coming from are much, much larger than a post office on average. And they're farther away from your house. And so they tend to have, you know, larger vehicles are more efficient for driving longer distances. So and people don't mind having post offices in their neighborhood.

00;18;25;29 - 00;18;48;03

Anne Goodchild

Right? I like when there's a post office in my community. It would be lovely if I could walk there. And oh yeah, mine aren't too far away, but but I like going there and I know all the people that work there, and it feels like a community asset. There are a multiple services that I can access there. There might be voter registration, you know, there might be community information.

00;18;48;05 - 00;19;12;29

Anne Goodchild

There might be someone selling Girl Scout cookies, you know, outside of the front of it. It's esthetically a good fit in the neighborhood. You know, there's usually some green space. There's it's a welcoming place. So I think we can look to models where we have smaller, more locally accessible, you know, and like depot and warehouse is a word that doesn't sound like something you want in your neighborhood.

00;19;12;29 - 00;19;38;03

Anne Goodchild

So we need to come up with some other language. But like a post office or a corner store, right. Or a corner shop right where we can distribute and we can use smaller vehicles, less intrusive vehicles, less intrusive facilities that do offer community assets, and maybe that trusted people, maybe that other community services, maybe that's a little bit of green space.

00;19;38;05 - 00;19;51;11

Anne Goodchild

But I think that is how we can get goods into our communities in ways that that we enjoy, that bring positive attributes to our communities. And, you know, that's what I would want to work towards.

00;19;51;13 - 00;20;14;28

Diniece Mendes

I really appreciated that nuance in the reframing, particularly of sort of thinking about it as an asset rather than nuisance. And that is certainly something that will be important in terms of how we frame conversations with community and, broader stakeholders, as well.

00;20;15;00 - 00;20;29;22

Emily Weidenhof

So I want to ask you, what is your biggest breach of public transit etiquette? But I also feel like maybe we want to hear what is the biggest breach of post office etiquette?

00;20;29;24 - 00;20;30;29

Diniece Mendes

A nice spin on it.

00;20;31;01 - 00;20;38;25

Anne Goodchild

Here's what my thing about the post office lately. So, you know, you go into the post office and you're like, trying to be prepared, right?

00;20;38;25 - 00;21;05;06

Anne Goodchild

Because where I go, there's always a queue and I, I have a child who lives outside the country. So I, I'm sending things to her, and you have to fill out the customs form, and you have to get the right envelope. That's going to be good for international post or whatever. So you're standing in a queue and you're trying really, really hard to fill out the right form so that you're fast when you get up to the counter and like, you're not rejected.

00;21;05;06 - 00;21;21;07

Anne Goodchild

And then there's the ambiguity of like, do you have to go to the back of the line, or can you kind of go off to the side while you fill out the form? It's very stressful to know, like, because now some people in the line think you're cheating because you didn't go to the back of the line.

00;21;21;11 - 00;21;21;28

Diniece Mendes

Yep.

00;21;22;01 - 00;21;34;16

Anne Goodchild

And so there's like this ambiguity, you know, am I, am I able to just like fill this out on the side and then come back, which is kind of budding, or do I have to go back to the end of the queue? So that's what that is the stress for me.

00;21;34;20 - 00;21;39;10

Emily Weidenhof

Yeah, totally. Although maybe that's something you, you know about from a systems perspective.

00;21;39;11 - 00;21;47;03

Emily Weidenhof

Is that is it better for the overall flow of the network to go to the side and pause and rejoin or go to the back of the line?

00;21;47;05 - 00;21;53;07

Anne Goodchild

I think for this system it is agnostic, but for the individual it's better to go to the side.

00;21;53;13 - 00;22;01;20

Diniece Mendes

Okay, I do want to get your perspectives on the future of freight.

00;22;01;22 - 00;22;31;17

Diniece Mendes

There have been a lot of buzz about drone deliveries and whether or not that's applicable in a dense urban environment, say like New York City. But we're seeing so much movement in this space. And even for autonomous or EV tolls or electric vertical takeoff landings, related freight deliveries between ports. I'm curious what you're most enthusiastic about, particularly for a last mile delivery is in just a urban freight space.

00;22;31;19 - 00;22;58;15

Anne Goodchild

I am most excited about information, and it's not the sexy kind of technology that is so visible, but our ability as individual kind of consumers, but also as a freight system, as supply chain managers, has been completely transformed, right? Our, our ability to kind of see the system we used to just know it's like the library, you just knew when the book came in and out.

00;22;58;15 - 00;23;01;14

Anne Goodchild

But if we got put in the wrong shelf, it was lost forever, you know?

00;23;01;15 - 00;23;02;03

Emily Weidenhof

Right, yea.

00;23;02;03 - 00;23;23;02

Anne Goodchild

But now we can see and, you know, it takes money, it takes effort. But we really do have the ability to sort of see that system, intervene in that system, understand that system in ways that have allowed us to completely transform. I mean, it's really why we have e-comm and it's why we can have home delivery.

00;23;23;02 - 00;23;49;23

Anne Goodchild

I think that's the most exciting, most transformative technology. And it's happening. And we don't, you know, we kind of passively experience it, but we don't even really see that it's happening. Like hardware wise. , you know, the most exciting thing to me is the ability to do kind of lightweight electric vehicles. Most of the over the road fleet is still kind of 100 year old technology, excessively heavy, excessively energy intensive.

00;23;49;23 - 00;24;15;27

Anne Goodchild

And no, of course it costs money to shift that over. And, not everyone is in a position to do that. So to the extent to which we can kind of help and accelerate that, I think is is really exciting. So smaller vehicles, more right sized vehicles, lighter weight vehicles are good for interactions with pedestrians, are good for, sound and, and sort of noise disruptions.

00;24;16;00 - 00;24;39;04

Anne Goodchild

They're good for emissions. So I think I'm excited about lightweight electric vehicles. But I'm really excited about walking. I'm excited about people riding bikes. We can use the tools of kind of data and operations to still rely on really clean, smart solutions that include basically walking and biking.

00;24;39;06 - 00;24;39;24

Emily Weidenhof

Definitely.

00;24;39;26 - 00;24;45;23

Anne Goodchild

And I'm not excited about drones. I'm not excited about robots.

00;24;45;23 - 00;25;09;13

Anne Goodchild

I think a robot is incredibly expensive, error prone. You know, I understand that we're developing those technologies and there'll be various applications for them, but I don't see, you know, delivering packages as a use case, as a requirement for really a automated, sophisticated kind of, you know, two legged robots or four legged robots.

00;25;09;13 - 00;25;35;06

Anne Goodchild

I think they have other sensible applications. And I think there's still a lot of the human, you know, presence and the human capacity that is valuable is, probably undervalued in terms of, you know, back to sort of presence in the neighborhood and decision making. And I think we should continue to use that as a solution, particularly for kind of very last mile complex environments.

00;25;35;09 - 00;25;51;16

Emily Weidenhof

Great. Well, and thank you so much for your time today. We appreciate the conversations that you're having, the community that you're building, and the critical thinking that you are bringing to this incredible, freight layer of transportation.

00;25;51;18 - 00;26;02;23

Anne Goodchild

Well, I enjoyed it so much. And same back to both of you. I just really appreciate your work in this space and your interest, so it's been a lovely time.

00;26;02;25 - 00;26;31;13

NYC DOT Commissioner Ydanis Rodriguez

Hi. My name is Ydanis Rodriguez, commissioner of the New York City Department of Transportation. Thank you for listening to Curb Enthusiasm by New York City DOT. This episode was produced by Michael Santos with video support from Sigurjon Gudjonsson, Juan Vega, and Nazareth Battice. Theme music by Michael Santos. Curb Enthusiasm is available on Spotify, Apple Podcasts, and other major streaming platforms.

00;26;31;16 - 00;26;37;11

NYC DOT Commissioner Ydanis Rodriguez

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