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Making Sure that Walking Counts in the Capitol: TSC's Robert Schneider Reports Back on his Summer Eno Foundation Conference



Robert Schneider, a graduate student researcher at the TSC, was one of 20 transportation graduate students from around the country to win an [Eno Transportation Foundation Fellowship](#) this year. The fellowship included a week-long visit to Washington, D.C., where Schneider and other fellows meet with top policymakers and transportation leaders.

Eno also awarded Schneider, who advanced to candidacy for a PhD in city and regional planning in April, a Dr. Thomas D. Larson Fellowship. It was established in 2007 after Larson's death to the founder of the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation and the head of the Federal Highway Administration under President George H.W. Bush. The award is given to one doctoral candidate each year to support participation in the program.

Schneider's research focuses on pedestrian and bicycle travel—specifically, land use patterns that can facilitate walking and bicycling and make these sustainable transportation modes more convenient.

"My dissertation has to do with how people link trips throughout the day and how specific land use patterns may influence the mode of transportation they use," he explained.

His thesis adviser is city and regional planning professor Robert Cervero, head of the University of California Transportation Center (UCTC), whose work on land use and transit, notably transit-oriented development, complements Schneider's interests.

Historically, transportation surveys and studies have emphasized motorized travel. Pedestrian and bicycle trips can be more complex and more difficult to track.

"One of my research interests has to do with pedestrian and bicycle data collection and measuring these modes accurately," Schneider said. Historically, transportation surveys and studies have emphasized motorized travel. Pedestrian and bicycle trips can be more complex and more difficult to track. A trip using one of these modes can include someone's walk across the street to get to his parked car or someone putting her bike on a bus in order to complete one or both ends of a transit trip. Schneider hopes to measure these types of activities to get a better sense of how walking and bicycling can be more completely integrated into the transportation system.

"Instead of measuring vehicles moving from place to place, we need to start to measure people moving from place to place," he said. That way, there will be a more accurate picture of pedestrian and bicycle travel, which will help determine the potential value of investments in human-powered transportation infrastructure, education, enforcement, and encouragement programs.

Before he entered graduate school, Schneider spent six years as a transportation planning consultant in a company that specialized in pedestrian and bicycle planning.

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"We worked very closely with practitioners," he recalled. He was struck by how little pedestrian and bicycle data were available in many communities, with few detailed studies of pedestrian and bicycle activity patterns or the benefits of pedestrian and bicycle investments. "Coming to the academic world gave me a chance to pursue those issues. I hope the research I end up doing here is ultimately useful for practitioners doing pedestrian and bicycle planning, design, and engineering."

Schneider sees a major shift taking place, starting back in the early 1990s when the federal transportation authorization bill, the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act, first included significant funding for pedestrian and bicycle modes. "Initially in the 70s there was interest in alternative modes to the automobile because of the oil crisis; following that there was the growth of a grass-roots movement in the 80s and 90s to focus attention on bicycle and pedestrian needs."

In 2000, the U.S. Department of Transportation adopted a policy statement that said that pedestrians and bicycles had to be given consideration in any federally funded transportation projects.

More recently, the emphasis and recognition of pedestrian and bicycle travel has become increasingly institutionalized. In 2000, the U.S. Department of Transportation adopted a policy statement that said that pedestrians and bicycles had to be given consideration in any federally funded transportation projects. "That's an important policy change for an agency that had for decades focused mostly on building highways," Schneider said.

Exactly how far those policies have made their way into the transportation institutions in Washington is still not certain. "The Eno conference gave me the opportunity to see firsthand what a lot of the most important transportation policymakers are talking about these days," he said.

Despite progress developing plans, adopting policies, and improving community attitudes to support walking and bicycling, Schneider was struck by "how relatively little some people working to influence transportation policy in Washington actually talked about pedestrian and bicycle mobility and sustainable transportation in general. At the federal level, a lot of discussion is still about the broader economic goals of the country, reducing automobile congestion and facilitating the movement of goods over very long distances. While these are important goals, federal support for the day-to-day needs of local communities, which include safer and more convenient opportunities for citizens to walk and bicycle, must not be overlooked. More investment in pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure and programs can help meet national goals to increase safety, improve public health, reduce energy consumption, improve air and water quality, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions."

He added that even though the other students participating in the Eno conference had diverse interests, from freight logistics to intelligent transportation systems, they were "very receptive to the idea of pedestrians and bicyclists being important transportation system users."

"If I had tried to meet with all the people our Eno group met with in four days, it would have taken an entire year or more. It was a rare opportunity."

What made this year's conference especially interesting was that it coincided with the debate on the upcoming transportation reauthorization bill. "I was extremely lucky to be a part of it. If I had tried to meet with all the people our Eno group met with in four days, it would have taken an entire year or more. It was a rare opportunity."

A top executive in the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO), which is closely aligned with the state departments of transportation, "was talking about sustainability and having transportation policymakers talking with housing and energy policy people and really thinking about transportation as multi-modal," Schneider noted.

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Schneider sees the shift as a generational one to a certain degree. "Many of the people who are the policy leaders of today, when they were in school, they didn't hear very much about pedestrians and bicycles. Only recently have universities begun to teach this."

Of his fellow Eno Fellows, he said, "they were some of the most interesting, nice, and smart people that I've met in the field. All about my age, and even if only five of the 20 were focused on ped and bike issues, the other 15 appreciated the importance of pedestrian and bike transportation, so I'm encouraged for the future."

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