A Borrowed Model:
Prompting Travel Behavior Change by Using Successful Models in Other Subject Areas

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This paper is dedicated to

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Abstract
Can an analysis of social behavior change patterns in other subject areas offer solutions to influencing travel behavior in America? Can these patterns offer transit professionals tools to really change auto behavior through social constructs? In order to seek new ideas in prompting change, transportation planners can begin by examining efforts such as the anti-smoking campaign, the food movement, and HIV/AIDS awareness. These movements demonstrate examples of policy intervention that have led to changes in cultural behavior can offer insights to parallel strategies for promoting travel change.

This research starts by looking at historical auto use patterns and the social and political forces that have led to increases in vehicle miles travelled. In order to draw lessons from the anti-smoking campaign, the food movement, and HIV/AIDS awareness, an examination of how themes from the popular book *The Tipping Point* run through those campaigns and what factors struck a chord with public values. Finally, this paper offers specific suggestions for the transit profession to encourage less driving and more walking, biking, and transit use.

Introduction
Driving and auto ownership are entrenched in American society through notions of success, the built environment, rights of passage, and national identity. The four major issues of auto-dependence are 1) the inherent travel network inefficiency of moving few people at a time (resulting in congestion), 2) the reliance on a dwindling supply of fossil fuels, 3) greenhouse gas emissions (a third of all US greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) are from the transportation sector) (EPA, 2008), and 4) degradation of the built environment as a result of accommodating the automobile not people. Still, despite these well-documented issues associated with auto-dependence, driving is a seemingly involuntary part of every day life for most Americans. To understand why, we must first examine how we got to this point.

National driving trends can be most easily followed by examining trends in nation-wide vehicle miles travelled (VMT). VMT is a good proxy for understanding driving because it measures total
roadway travel and is it calculated on metropolitan, state, and federal levels. Also, it is the metric by which federal transportation dollars are dispersed at the state level (Puentes & Tomer, 2008). The convention to date is that the higher the VMT, the more need for transportation dollars.

VMT has increased steadily since World War II due to population growth, the proliferation of low-density suburban land uses, the increase of car ownership, and the simultaneous decline of public transportation provision (WDOT, 2008, Puentes and Tomer, 2008). The vast majority of VMT (92.6 percent) results from private cars and trucks (ibid). Our annual mileage has increased 40 percent, or 30 percent per person (relative to population change) in the last 20 years and total vehicle registrations increased 162 percent from 1966 to 2006 ((Weinberger and Goetzke, 2009; Puentes and Tomer, 2008). As long as VMT was increasing, the tax receipts from gas purchases increased. As a result, the Highway Trust Fund was a reliable means of funding the nation’s transportation network. But a policy of reducing VMT to reduce carbon emissions is directly at odds with current funding alternative transportation. With a reduction in VMT, so goes the revenue of the Highway Trust Fund — bringing Congressional budgets to the dire straits point of fiscal year 2011.

Figure 1: Trends in U.S. Annual Vehicle Miles Travel, Transit Boardings, and Oil Imports (Brookings)
Despite the fact that 1) Congress lacks the revenue streams to fund transportation responsibly
2) car ownership accounts for more than a quarter of household travel budget, 3) driving means
traffic affects everyone and 4) it is bad for the environment, Americans are still driving in droves.
Weinberger and Lucas (2011) hold that: “Some of these factors rest with the individual, their
personal preferences and lifestyle choices, and others arise from externally imposed factors, such
as the organization of our towns and cities, legal restrictions and institutional constraints, and the
availability and cost of alternative travel options.” Essentially, we don’t always get to choose per se.
And changing these paradigms proves challenging.

Reducing VMT as a goal is nonetheless a good idea because, as best stated by Washington State
Department of Transportation, “Reducing VMT (while the internal combustion engine remains
the primary automobile power source) will reduce GHG emissions and could also improve the
overall efficiency of the roadway system”. Furthermore, as the Brookings institute points out, “the
combination of gas price fluctuations, economic stress, energy concerns, and public financing woes”
has brought the negative externalities of driving into public conscience (Puentes and Tomer, 2008).

**Could Driving Less be a Transit Improvement?**

A transit improvement is when personal behavior has positive effects on the network as a whole.
Personal reduction in VMT multiplied across a network has significant compound effects. However,
Ampt argues that behavioral targets should “focus on the household rather than on the individual is
valid, since private car travel is generated largely by the collective activity of the household rather
than the individual” (Ampt, 2003).

To date, policy has been focused on reducing emissions or congestion rather than targeting values
of drivers (Ampt, 2003). Weinberger and Lucas (2011) say that most interventions to reduce auto
ownership can be categorized by 1) changing the cost structure of car-based travel, 2) promoting
new transit alternatives 3) bettering the role of land-use planning and the built environment 4) using
informational and communication tools.
While influencing behavior changes is one thing, widespread adoption of other travel modes has been slow. How then, have other social movements prompted changes that people society and actually stick with?

**Applying Tipping Points to Transit**

A tipping point as the point at which the buildup of minor changes or incidents reaches a level that triggers a more significant change or makes someone do something they had formerly resisted (Gladwell, 2000). Malcolm Gladwell popularized the term in his 2000 book *The Tipping Point* which points out that there is a pattern of influences that tip the scale of epidemiological change: the Law of the Few, the Stickiness Factor, and the Power of Context. Gladwell’s research is widely adopted because it brings social change findings to a broader audience. Paula Geyh of the Chicago Tribune points out that “while *The Tipping Point* is largely a popularization of early scientific work in epidemiology, psychology, sociology, and group dynamics, it is valuable because it synthesizes this knowledge, bringing insights gleaned from these disparate fields together and applying them to an impressive array of contemporary social behaviors and cultural trends. Such knowledge, properly applied, could have enormous potential” (Geyh, 2000).

The Law of the Few holds that any social movement starts of with just and handful of people. These people have social connections that enable any given message to spread fast. Gladwell identifies three types of social movement starters: 1) maven: people who are “information specialists”, or “people we rely upon to connect us with new information” (Gladwell, 2000, 19), 2) connectors: people with an “ability to span many different worlds” and use their social networks to share information (ibid, 49) and 3) salesman: the people whose charisma can “seal the deal” of change by convincing others with superb negotiation skills. In the three social movements discussed here, the Law of the Few spans from the scientific maven, the connectors who worked on grassroots levels, and the policy makers who acted as the default salespeople. Naturally, there are maven, connectors, and salespeople at each level as well, but by in large, it is easy to see similar players in each movement.
The Stickiness Factor is when a message is internalized to people and can therefore be diffused on a wider scale. It refers to the fact that there are specific ways of making a contagious message memorable and “relatively simple changes in the presentation and structuring of information that can make a big difference in how much of an impact it makes” (ibid, 25). For all three social movements, advertising and targeted marketing campaigns played a big role.

Lastly, the Power of Context refers to timing and the set of factors that foster change. Human behavior is sensitive to and strongly influenced by its environment. As Gladwell says, “Epidemics are sensitive to the conditions and circumstances of the times and places in which they occur.” (ibid, 139). It is this last point of Gladwell’s that makes transit at a unique tipping point. The transportation funding crisis coupled with society’s increasing awareness of global climate change would indicate that the time to capitalize on the opportunity (our Power of Context) is now. Who are the actors, or the “Few” that have a crucial up front role to start change and how will their efforts “stick” with society?

Big social change requires a cocktail of the right influences discussed at length in *The Tipping Point* that also includes factors such as price disincentives, personal applicability (personal health), and policy interventions. In the United States, three major behavioral change shifts have occurred that have led the rest of society to adopt a new set of values and opinions: the decline in cigarette use, the rise of the organic food movement, and the awareness of the HIV/AIDS epidemic—each the result of years of advocacy, policy, and educational efforts. All three benefit personal health and safety but have positive benefits for the rest of society.

Examining a topical issue of the high rate of US auto-use and therefore dependency on foreign oil begs the question: what advocacy, policy, and educational efforts might be able to slowly change the travel behavior of Americans?
The Rise and Fall of Smoking

Background
In 1964, 42 percent of adult Americans smoked at an average rate of 4,345 cigarettes consumed per adult per year (or about a half a pack a day) (ALA, 2006). Smoking was a ubiquitous part of American culture and the suggestion that smoking be prohibited in buildings and public spaces would have seemed ludicrous. In 2010, only about 20 percent of Americans smoke— and the average amount of cigarettes per smoker per year is also down to about 1,500 and this number continues to shrink (Institute of Medicine, 2007). The decline occurred because some people quit altogether and younger generations never started (National Academies, 2007). The dramatic shift, “widely considered to be a social movement”, began with public concerns that later led to public policy (Wolfson, 2001, 2).

The Law of the Few
Studying the timeline of the decline of smoking cessation in America yields an interesting pattern. The first decline began with the medical community prompting the Surgeon General to publish a report on the impacts of smoking even though the medical community started to question tobacco use as early as the 1920s. Early efforts were nullified by the strong propaganda on behalf of the cigarette industry citing the positive health impacts of smoking including reduction of stress. In response, the NonSmokers’ Protective League of America formed to advocate against smoking in the workplace and educate people of the fire hazards of cigarettes. Additionally, in 1938, a Johns Hopkins University research reported to the New York Academy of Medicine that smokers “do not live as long as non-smokers”. At the time, Fortune magazine reported that “53 percent of adult American males smoke and 66 percent of males under 40 smoke” (Tobacco Timeline, 2010). This is followed by three reports in 1950 that definitively linked smoking to lung cancer including “Tobacco Smoking as a Possible Etiologic Factor in Bronchiogenic Carcinoma: A Study of 684 Proved Cases,” by Ernst L. Wynder and Evarts A. Graham who proved that “96.5 percent of lung cancer patients interviewed were moderate to heavy chain-smokers” (ibid, 5).
However, the first shift downwards in cigarette purchases began with the landmark Surgeon General’s report of 1964 that took a stance on behalf of the US government that cigarette smoking leads to deaths. The momentum gained from the anti-smoking campaigns led directly into the Non-Smokers’ Rights Movement in the early 1980s. Formed primarily from three groups: Californians for Non-smokers’s Rights (CNR), Americans for Non-smokers’ Rights (ANR), and the breathing health advocacy group ALA, non-smokers rights groups inundated legislative bodies on the state and federal levels. Their efforts slowly led to the passage of indoor smoking bans and today 79 percent of the U.S. population lives under a ban on smoking in “workplaces, and/or restaurants, and/or bars, by either a state, commonwealth, or local law” (ANRF, 2011).

The Stickiness Factor

If the 1964 Act were brought to the table by a handful of influential people, it was made to “stick” when in 1967 Congress implemented the “fairness doctrine”. The fairness doctrine was a result of a federal court ruling that required the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) “to encourage and implement the broadcast of all sides of controversial public issues over their facilities, over and beyond their obligation to make available on demand opportunities for the expression of opposing views”. According to Wagner, “most observers agree that the dramatic entrance of the FCC into the smoking controversy was probably the most important single event during the three-year moratorium on requiring health warnings in cigarette advertisements imposed by Congress on the FTC” (Wagner, 1971, 175). The doctrine required broadcasters to run one anti-smoking advertisement, free of charge, for every three cigarette commercials.

The real stickiness came in the overt advertising through the beginning of the movement even until today. One 1970s advertisement, revolutionary for it’s time, showed the actor William Tallman who said: “I have lung cancer. Take some advice about smoking and losing from someone who’s been doing both for years. If you haven’t smoked, don’t start. If you do smoke--quit. Don’t be a loser.” This and other media caused a significant dip in smoking and in 1971 federal law banned cigarette
advertising on TV and radio (Gochman, 1997, 239). In the 1980s, Joe Camel ads were rebutted with ads targeted to children and teens that showed a character Joe Chemo (Figure 2).

For the anti-smoking campaign, like HIV/AIDS and the food movement, change took decades. Small messaging nuances in one generation really caught on (Figure 3). In time, health advocacy groups and scientists— the “few” lobbied around the issue until real legislation appeared in Congress. Soon excise taxes were applied and the loop kept getting stronger: laws got tougher, cigarettes got more expensive, and the health community louder.

Figure 2: Smoking and Counter-Smoking Camel Advertisements

Figure 3: Change Takes Decades: A contrast in advertising

Source: Camel and Ad Busters, 2011
Source: adweek.blogs.com and smoking adverts.com
The Power of Context

Another theme crucial to the decline is smoking is the cost of cigarettes- a very powerful player in Gladwell’s notion of The Power of Context. Early conversations about adding taxation as a mechanism to deter smoking were considered a worthless way to get to the root of the problem (Warner, 2006). It wasn’t until the timing was right of all the other factors (namely the grave health consequences) that price disincentives really moved the fight along. Economic research in the 1960s “convinced the public health community that pursuit of cigarette tax was a pragmatic, if not necessarily noble, tobacco control strategy” (ibid). Eventually, legislators joined to support cigarette tax increases due to the revenue bonuses from taxation and the positive impact on public health.

Each theme: the Few, the Stickiness Factor, and the Power of Context played a crucial role in the anti-smoking campaign. Starting with just a few scientists and health advocates, the campaign jump-started a further investigation by the Surgeon General. The SG’s warning combined with some targeted ad campaigns amounted to a social movement that stuck. It was all presented during at time that politicians, like today, were looking for revenue streams and that seemed to be the very thing that made the time right to charge higher taxes on tobacco.

HIV/ AIDS Awareness

Background

The HIV strain first entered US in the late 1970s but was not noticed until the Centers for Disease Control recorded a virus strain in five Los Angeles gay men in 1981 that resembled pneumonia. Within the year, multiple demographic groups showed signs of infection and soon it was clear the disease was more serious than pneumonia. By 1983, 1,000 Americans were infected and the CDC identified the virus as HIV and the subsequent disease we know today as AIDS (NYT Health Library, 2010). AIDS cases increased very rapidly throughout the 1980s, peaked in the early 90s, and began a sharp decline in 1996. Since 1998, AIDS incidences have increased though deaths have declined mostly due to advancements in medical treatments. (CDC, 2001).
The Law of the Few

In the case of HIV/AIDS, the Law of the Few applies both to the literal transmission of the disease with just a handful of Americans but also to early educators in small health clinics in the US who fought long and hard to get the Reagan Administration to pay attention to the epidemic (Shilts, 1986). Stemming from the medical community, advocates and clinics began to intervene in two small ways that had a big impact: preventing mother to child transmission with drug intervention and providing clean needles free of charge in areas with high drug use. Before 1985, only a few scientists who chose to research the disease and leaders in gay communities in a handful of cities who monitored health clinics were actively trying to keep the disease under control (ibid). Put best by Shilts (1986), “fighting against this institutional indifference were a handful of heroes from disparate callings. Isolated teams of scientists in research centers in America and Europe risked their reputations and often their jobs to pioneer early research jobs to pioneer early research on AIDS.”

The Stickiness Factor

For most Americans, AIDS became “real” when actor Rock Hudson died in 1985 (Shilts, 1986, xxi). The story of the AIDS epidemic prior to 1985 is largely about “the Few” trying to bring the severity of the virus to the attention of health bureaucracies. But between 1985 and 1988, the discussion of AIDS in the scientific community became very real. In 1985, the first federal resources for HIV prevention were offered to all state and local health departments. In 1987, the CDC created and AIDS hotline and the beginnings of an education campaign for young people. The Surgeon General mailed a document “Understanding AIDS” to all US households and launched the first nationwide AIDS education campaign. It was the “first and only mailing of its kind” (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2011).

The message stuck. AIDS was now officially in the American conscience and the next battle became educating the public about stigmas. Understanding more about the virus, the CDC launched a campaign, probably out of its own guilt, to combat the stigma of AIDS.
The Power of Context

While AIDS in the US is considered under control, the staggering rates of HIV infections is not. The number, an estimated 40,000 new HIV infections a year “represents the spreading of the epidemic into new, vulnerable populations” (CDC, 2001). Though HIV infection rates have dropped dramatically since the 1980s, the campaign lives on.

Still, the context of HIV/AIDS awareness is significant in that it extends beyond a health issue and into the territory of civil rights. Early statements from the CDC about potentially ending all blood donations from gay men led to an outcry to end the categorization of AIDS, then Gay-Related Immune Deficiency (GRID), as a disease just affecting gay men (Stilts, 1986). The public health implications of federal health organization “dragging their feet” on research due to discrimination have been extreme. Earlier intervention into the causes, spread, and treatment of the disease would have yielded significantly lower rates of both HIV and AIDS much earlier.

Figure 4: Anti-Stigma Campaigns

Source: AIDS Action Foundation, 1990
The Food Movement

Background

The food movement is the trend towards organic, local, or less-processed food. The market for organic food alone has increased from $5 billion in annual sales in 2010 up from $1.2 billion in 2000. According to a food group at the University of Michigan, “The primary demand driver for the increased consumption of organic food is health concerns” (Knudson, 2007). This happened first with a shift in what consumers were demanding thanks to a new found awareness of chemical inputs to food.

Since the Industrial revolution, technology has allowed the shelf life of food to increase through processing and preservatives. By the 1950s, corn-syrup products, a proxy for man-made flavor, were in 85 percent of American homes as homemakers were “hit with a wave of 1950s better-living-through chemistry propaganda telling women that traditional cooking was drudge work, and that processed food was a status symbol” (Dreher, 2006, 56). Agribusiness was growing steadily in the 1960s and by the 1970s, in response to losing market share to big agribusiness organized the origins of the organic food movement. In the 1980s and 1990s, small food co-ops and produce markets were prevalent in some US Cities.

The Law of the Few

The shift towards the desire for more natural food can be traced back to farmers’ groups in the 1970s who were losing out to large agribusiness. Recognizing the loss of a good way of eating triggered a grass roots efforts that came together dramatically in the early 2000s through the growth of grocery chains such as Whole Foods and Wildoats, and the involvement of mass-consumers such as Wal-Mart (Knudson, 2007).
Stickiness Factor

The real shift occurred in 1994 when after years of complaints about food ingredients, the FDA began requiring food labels on all grocery store foods resulting in “perhaps one of the most tumultuous changes the food industry has ever faced” (Weimer, 2007). Since that exact year, there has been a 250 percent increase in farmers markets. Consumers were again reminded of the truth of food labels when a 2004 documentary film producer, Morgan Spurlock, recorded his own health decline from eating McDonald’s for 30 days straight in *Supersize Me*. Public outcry forced McDonalds to cancel its Supersize options in just six weeks.

Fast food restaurants nationwide responded by adding healthier options to their menus. This has been followed by retailer such as Wal-Mart whom has pledged to “double sales of locally sourced produce”. In essence, if Wal-Mart has changed it’s policies, the movement has surely “stuck”.

Power of Context

The food movement comes at a time where Americans are not only interested in eating right for their own health, but in a time of increased awareness about their personal impact on the planet. Perhaps this is why despite healthier food being more expensive, it is also a growing market segment; counter to transit, the demand for a more expensive commodity yields more customers.
Application to Transit

The examples from the Anti-Smoking campaign, HIV/AIDS campaign, and the Food Movement have some strong parallels to potential change mechanisms for transportation. Each movement was related to public health but improvements relate to society. Driving does not directly harm one’s health *per se*. It is more analogous to second-hand smoke, ignoring the AIDS epidemic, and eating processed foods without thinking of the larger implications to small businesses: the negative externalities of driving are not *personal*. The below chart examines personal versus societal costs of each item.

The question for transit, then, is what expense are people willing to go to benefit both themselves and the greater good? There are themes of both sacrificing gratification to protect health and the other impetus is your pocket book. The problem with transit is that the benefit is more diffuse—how can the benefit to the individual be realized?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Movement</th>
<th>Cost Encourages Changes</th>
<th>Harm to Self</th>
<th>Harm to Others</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Smoking</td>
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<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>HIV/ AIDS</td>
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<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td>Food Movement</td>
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To answer this takes the application of some Gladwellian themes. Since we all travel, it is already personal. Perhaps not on a health level, but certainly on a lifestyle level. A real reduction in VMT will have to be justified at this level as well. Like the early advocates for the other movements, transit advocates have been trying for years to gain bigger public recognition of the severity of our auto-dependence. Therefore, to achieve a real tipping point, we must rely on our actors, stickiness, and context in new ways.
The Law of the Few

Beginning with the Law of the Few, we should develop a practical program that begins with a population segment that will impact the most change. For transit this is both a select group of policy makers and citizens. On the citizen end, Ampt (2003) argues change will come if: 1) the person has arrived at a point where the negative effects of driving reach a certain level of intolerance, 2) realizing it is possible to adopt an alternative mode, 3) hearing that others are making the change as well, 4) experiencing a change moment like a new job or new partner, 5) feeling that the change is appropriate because it is fashionable. Still, who will bring knowledge to a broader public?

As Gladwell defines it: these are the mavens, connectors, and salesman. At first glance, the “scientists” of the transit field are those researchers who “broker information” (Gladwell, 2000). This type exists in transit: it is the researchers, academics, and professionals often found at the annual Transportation Research Board meetings. The connectors are those transit professionals who spread the message beyond the field to other political realms. Deputy Mayor for Transportation in Philadelphia, Rina Cutler, is a great example of this. She is a transportation leader but also well-know in networks outside of her department. The salesman are politicians who bring others “on board”. A good example of this is Congressman Earl Blumenauer (D- OR) who rides his bike to work everyday and sells other politicians on perks of bike commuting.

The Stickiness Factor

Generally speaking, in order for the stickiness factor to apply, if a person drives less and they tell others of the benefits, a broader diffusion can be possible (Ampt, 2003). Tools like social media and media coverage will help spread this message.

Still, if only a few legislators begin to stand up for price disincentives for driving, like raising the gas tax, other legislators may see the benefits to the added revenue and the idea will diffuse. The diffusion or “stickiness” will take root when there is an immediate impact on VMT and surge of revenue to the depleted Highway Trust Fund.
Figure 6: Reminding Drivers of their “Second Hand Smoke”

![Image of a billboard with the message: YOU ARE NOT STUCK IN TRAFFIC. YOU ARE TRAFFIC. HD Traffic™. Break free!]

Source: TomTom

Figure 7: Reminding Drivers of the source of their fuel

![Image of a fuel pump with the message: Fuel Facts]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fuel Facts</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Serving Size: 1 gallon</td>
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<td>Amount Per Serving:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BTUs 560</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Total:</td>
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<td>Venezuela: 40%</td>
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<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethanol: 10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petrol: 90%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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* Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs.

Source: Author and SalemNews.com
For consumers, a needed change in behavior will “stick” only when fuel prices go up and drivers have no choice but to begin paying for the negative externalities of their choice. For some consumers, price fluctuations will not be enough. For these drivers, targeted messaging strategies borrowed from other campaigns might be effective (Figure 6 and 7).

**Power of Context**

Transit has been somewhat successful in the Law of the Few, could improve its efforts in “stickiness”, but the Power of Context is perhaps the best ally in prompting consumers to try other modes. During a time of budget cuts and shift in public awareness about the environment, previous efforts such as advertising and proposals to increase tax cuts might actually stick.

**Conclusion**

The time is ripe to make real reductions in VMT. By advancing the efforts of those actors who play the role of “the Law of the Few” who can offer the transportation field more answers, transportation planners can begin targeted “Stickiness” strategies. In the absence of a real way to fund transportation, a dedicated, campaign for change can take off like never before-- giving new meaning to The Power of Context in transportation.

The missing link in transportation that other campaigns have benefited from, regardless of price fluctuations or personal and public health implications, was the ability for “the Few” to push policy makers to the next level. In all three campaigns, policy changes made early efforts “stick”. To date, nothing similar to a Surgeon General’s warning, AIDS pamphlet, or Nutrition Label has been done. What transportation lacks is a real political measure to take decades of research to the next level. Our infrastructure is decades behind, our transportation funding close to absent; a real reduction in VMT can only happen if politicians make users pay for it. The Power of Context is working in our favor like never before. The time to act is now.
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