



FAST Planning Literature Review

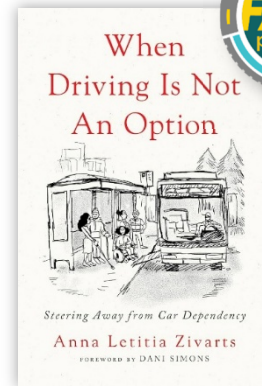
Date: January 30, 2025

To: **Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee**

Title: When Driving is Not an Option, by Anna Zivarts

Purpose: Review and discussion of materials that highlight key factors to consider in planning and project decisions.

Link: <https://islandpress.org/books/when-driving-not-option#desc>



Notable Notations; quotes from the text

1. (Introduction) Despite what you think, not everyone drives
 - a. Data is helpful, until it isn't...

demand. The Washington State Department of Transportation explains in its active transportation plan:

WSDOT and other transportation agencies have historically focused on actual counts for decision making. That method does not account for barriers or places where there is a lack of infrastructure; for example, the sidewalk ends and the only option is to walk in the travel lane so fewer people use that sidewalk. It also does not account for the level of traffic stress in a place that discourages people who would otherwise use active transportation. In other words, focusing on counts of people already moving through a place does not account for the people who would be there if adequate facilities were provided.²

But in a culture of car dependency, where our communities are almost always entirely built around vehicle mobility and speed, I think the binary of driver/nondriver is useful both in understanding access needs and in creating a cohesive political identity around which to mobilize for change. The fact that we have such insufficient knowledge of how people get around without driving, and how many of us and how frequently we travel or need to travel without driving ourselves, emphasizes how much this frame is needed.

If there's one thing that you take from this book, I hope that it is the importance of listening to the knowledge of those who day in and day out rely on our network of sidewalks, on buses and paratransit, on rolling or biking, or on asking and paying others for rides. It is critical to include involuntary nondrivers in transportation planning decisions. I outline steps organizations can take to include and promote leadership of those who are most impacted—and too often excluded—by transportation systems designed and run by people with driving privilege. And if you don't work for an organization in the transportation or land use space, I've included a checklist of actions you, as an individual living in a car-dependent society, can take in your own life to help all of us move beyond automobility.

2. (Chapter 1) **Nondrivers** are everywhere and ~25-35% of the population in the US. They include:
 - a. **Disabled**; temporary, permanently, vision, mobility, cognitive

If you ask someone from the United States what image comes to mind when they think about disability, it's probably a disabled parking spot sign. These signs with a stick figure in a wheelchair are probably the most, if not the only, visible manifestation of disability in many public spaces. But the reality is that many disabled people can't drive or can't afford cars. People with disabilities are four times less likely to drive than nondisabled people, and two to three times more likely to live in a zero-vehicle household. We use buses, subways, and commuter rail for a higher share of trips than people without disabilities.³

- b. **Low Income**; 40% of Nondrivers make less than \$25k per year

analyst for the Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental Disabilities and co-chair of the Wisconsin Non-Driver Advisory Committee, explains: “The reality is that you have a system where pre-poverty is a prerequisite.” A 2020 report on employment and disability from the National Council on Disability describes this “poverty trap,” explaining that many disabled people “agonize over the choice between maintaining the health care that they need to live and work, or a job that they are qualified for and desire, given the asset limitations imposed by means-tested programs that are attached to health care.”¹³

- c. **Black, Native American and Native Alaskan**; 48% of Native Alaskan Households lack access to a vehicle

I had a small window into the intersection of policing and mobility when, in 2016, I worked on a contract for the American Civil Liberties Union to investigate if courts in and around the Memphis area were acting as debtors' prisons: booking people in jail when they showed up for court dates if they couldn't pay fines or fees associated with court costs. I spent a week observing court proceedings in Memphis, where most of the cases involved minor traffic infractions, such as broken taillights, missing tags, tinted windows, or not using a seatbelt. Aside from the judges, pro-bono lawyers, and court staff, I was the only White person I saw in court.

- d. **Immigrants**; people without documentation cannot obtain a drivers license

Even for immigrants with documentation or the ability to get a driver's license, the cost of car ownership can be a burden. The National Equity Atlas notes that “immigrant households for all racial and ethnic groups, except Black households, are more likely to lack access to a vehicle compared to their US-born counterparts.”²⁸ Low-income immigrants have to make difficult choices between car ownership and affording other essentials. Because we have made driving a prerequisite for employment and full community participation in so many parts of our country, too often this doesn't feel like a choice.

- e. **Seniors**; most will spend the last 7-10 years of their lives unable to drive

And we know that our population is aging: the AARP Livable Communities initiative states that by 2034, for the first time, the United States' population will have more older adults than children.³³ In fact, the number of potential drivers over the age of 65 will increase 77 percent by 2045.³⁴ But instead of ensuring that seniors can transition to walkable, rollable, and transit-rich living situations, it is far more common to move them into assisted living facilities that may provide some group transportation options, but not a connected sidewalk network or easy access to public transit options that would make independent mobility possible.

For many, raised in our culture of ableism, there are deep fears about what it means to get older and to lose the ability to do things independently. But not being able to drive shouldn't have to limit the ability to participate in your community. It is important to normalize nondriving so that we can start building communities that work better for everyone, including the increasing number of seniors who cannot safely drive themselves.

- f. **Children and Youth**; in the US almost 20% of the population is 15 or younger, mobility burdens fall on caregivers

The needs of young nondrivers are not less important than, or fundamentally different than, the needs of adult nondrivers. Acting as if children's mobility needs are nonexistent or somehow fundamentally different only serves to erase the mobility needs of adults who can't drive. Counting youth, and fully valuing their need for communities where they can get where they need to go safely and accessibly, with or without a caregiver or companion, can help us build the kind of broad coalition we need to undo car dependency.

3. (Chapter 2) Nondrivers...

- a. Rely on Sidewalks

b. Need Safe and Accessible Street Crossings

Intersection spacing most often prioritizes the speedy movement of cars over the needs of people outside of vehicles. Jessie Singer, author of *There Are No Accidents: The Deadly Rise of Injury and Disaster—Who Profits and Who Pays the Price*,¹⁶ explains, “We’ve built our cities and our suburbs and the road systems in between for speed, and in doing so, we have disregarded the potential of a vehicle ever interacting with a human body. When traffic engineers and government officials talk about speed, what they are really talking about is efficiency. And when they talk about efficiency, we always need to be asking: Efficiency for whom? The unspoken answer is always: Efficiency for vehicles and vehicles alone.”

The federal standards that traffic engineers follow, published in the *Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices* (MUTCD), require that a minimum count of pedestrians be observed trying to cross an unsignalized intersection for a pedestrian signal to be installed.¹⁸ Undoubtedly, there are many unsignalized crossings where people want to be able to cross but because of unsafe or inaccessible conditions choose not to, keeping the counts below where signals can be installed.

c. Utilize Transit, Intercity Buses and Trains

d. Need Options to Bike Walk and Roll

e. Ask or Pay for rides; this means that someone is judging whether or not to assist you

f. Move to Access Services

These costs, and the hostility Silvernail encounters from drivers when navigating the city in his cargo bike with his kid, led him to question whether it’s worth staying. His wife has French citizenship, so they’ve made the decision to move to France in 2024 to live in a small city where they can walk and bike everywhere, and where all their neighbors can too. “There’s literally a grocery store below our apartment,” Silvernail told me with great anticipation. As his daughter grows up, he also wants her to have the freedom to walk and bike places safely, and he knows that in Seattle, and in the rest of the United States, he just can’t afford to live in a community where she could do that.

g. Stay Home

Because just about every trip takes longer, and may be costly, physically demanding, or dangerous, nondrivers tend to travel less. The 2023 study on the demographics of nondrivers commissioned by the Washington State legislature found that “at least once a week if not more often, 23 percent of nondrivers will skip going somewhere because of a problem with transportation, 22 percent will be late when not driving, 34 percent worry about being able to get somewhere, and 39 percent worry about inconveniencing friends and family.” The survey found that accessing medical appointments was found to be the most difficult for nondrivers, with 35 percent of respondents saying that this was somewhat difficult, very difficult, or not possible.⁴¹

h. Rely on Remote Access and Delivery Services

The acceptance of remote work, remote schooling, and the availability of online social activities accelerated during the pandemic, making it easier for nondrivers with internet access and some technological know-how to build connections. Remote work in particular benefits workers who are disabled, removing the burden of traveling to an office and having to navigate inaccessible office environments.⁴

But having meals or groceries delivered may mean that a non-driver is missing an opportunity to make critical social connections or learn about other needed services. For instance, when a nondriver travels into town or to a community center to pick up food, they may learn about health care or mental health programs and build relationships with staff and other people at the community center.

i. Need Local Connections

4. (Chapter 3) How do we address this:

a. Make Nondrivers Visible

Nondrivers are often seen as an insignificant part of the population: too young, too old, too disabled. Not driving is often viewed as a transitory state—once someone earns enough money to afford a car, resolves a license suspension, or turns sixteen—they will return to the ranks of people with valid mobility needs. These beliefs lead to an erasure of nondrivers. One of the first steps in valuing the needs of nondrivers is counting how many people are truly not served by automobility. Because that total, even if our calculation methods are imperfect, can correct the falsehood that nondrivers are too rare, too insignificant a percentage of the population to bother to prioritize our needs.

b. Create Safe Connected Spaces to Walk Roll and Ride

i. Slow the movement of vehicles and improve crossings

ii. Assess where gaps exist

iii. Take public ownership of sidewalk repair and maintenance

“When you see a city running multiple large plows on the streets and piling snow into the crosswalks and bus stops, there’s no more clear illustration of whose mobility matters—and whose doesn’t,” said Laura Saltzman, the transportation lead for Access Living. “Without usable sidewalks, any idea of an accessible transportation system collapses: accessible stations and buses don’t matter if you can’t get to the train or the bus in the first place.” In July 2023, the campaign was successful in getting an ordinance passed to develop a sidewalk-clearing pilot program.¹⁰

iv. Build pedestrian connectivity

c. Design bike infrastructure that works for everyone

d. Require vehicles that are safer for everyone

There are many changes that could be made to vehicles to make them safer for other street users, especially with heavier electric vehicles on the roads and the loss of sight lines on taller vehicles. Rating vehicles on the safety impacts on people outside of vehicles, like Europe does, would help, as would charging more for vehicle registrations based on vehicle mass.¹⁷ The loophole that exempts many large SUVs from fuel economy standards should also be closed.¹⁸

Bigger picture, we need to take a more systematic approach to safety and ask how we can design a system where the possibility of serious and fatal crashes is reduced. Relying on enforcement doesn't address the underlying risks of having heavy, large vehicles traveling at high speeds through the places we need to walk and roll. A "safe systems" approach asks how we can remove that risk by lowering speeds and creating physically separated places for vehicles and people walking/rolling/biking. At the same time, it's critical that we reduce the speed and distances people need to drive by making better land use and housing policies that allow more of us to live in places where we can meet our daily needs without having to get in a vehicle.

e. Make Transit as reliable as driving; accessible, reliable well funded,

When asked what would improve their access, nondrivers in Washington State asked for more bus routes and more reliable schedules, weekend service, and lower fares.²⁵ The challenge of how to increase service levels while at the same time decreasing the financial barrier of using transit is frequently debated in transit advocacy spaces, and the "right" answer may be different based on how much, and what percentage of an agency's operating budget comes from farebox recovery.

First, there's no question that for some low-income community members, even a few dollars' fare can be a significant barrier. A pilot program in which King County Metro fully subsidized transit fare for very low-income individuals found that people with this ability to travel free of charge more than doubled their trips.²⁶ Tamara Jackson, policy analyst and legislative liaison for the Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental Disabilities, notes that "building public transit capacity and funding the operation of transit has been historically devalued, and there is a perception that users should foot the bill. For many low-income workers, increasing fares puts even public transit out of reach."

f. Provide more Equipment Types, Storage and Charging for everyone who wants to bike, scooter, and roll

g. Embrace remote Access and Delivery

h. Approach Housing Transit and Services as an Ecosystem

For our towns and cities to work for nondrivers, we must reduce the distances people need to travel to go to the places they need and want to go. This means building housing with greater densities and making sure the zoning laws and parking requirements incentivize, rather than discourage, the location of retail, groceries, offices, health care and childcare facilities interspersed with housing rather than in separate areas that can be reached only by driving.

i. Reform parking

Car parking also creates barriers for nondrivers, not only when we have to cross large hostile parking lots to access businesses in suburban, strip mall-type developments, but also when planners choose to allocate limited public right-of-way space to car parking instead of wider sidewalks, bus priority lanes, or protected biking infrastructure.

j. Build Abundant Housing

We're gonna densify. There's going to be more people living here in the future, and we need you all to get ready. That includes more traffic in certain places, and you're going to have to get used to it. We're not going to widen our streets just because it's not as easy to drive anymore. We want it to be easy to walk. We want it to be easy to bike or get on a bus or cross the street to a bus stop. Nobody enjoys traffic congestion, myself included. But that's literally the trade-off for focusing on density and people-oriented infrastructure. You cannot continue to make it easy to drive or park a car if you're trying to plan for people.

5. (Chapter 4) Valuing the Expertise of Nondrivers

a. Nondrivers constitute a large portion of our community

And we need to mobilize a political base, because unfortunately, those in power are advocating for electrification alone as the way to decarbonize the transportation system. Rather than putting resources toward figuring out how we can lower emissions by reducing the distances and frequency we need to travel, or the size and weight of vehicles we travel in, or investing in mass transit, the electrification of our private automobile fleet offers a way for much of the status quo to be preserved. It's also a win-win for automakers, who benefit from generous electric vehicle subsidies that will drive more demand for new vehicles.

b. Help transportation professionals and politicians to see beyond the car, conduct walking/rolling audits

c. Agencies need to learn to share power

"It's shameful that we've got all these people with gray hair sitting at decision-making tables when we are talking about 2050 planning horizons," Dr. Scott insists. "The people that are making decisions for the most part will be dead by the time that any of it comes to fruition. And so, it is not a matter of altruism. It is not a matter of oh, I'll make two tables here, and you get to be at the little table, and we're gonna be at the big table. This is a matter of responsibility on the part of those who are being good leaders and stewards."

Despite all the rhetoric about equity and inclusion and listening to the next generation, when it comes down to changing who gets to provide input and how that input is valued, too often the people in decision-making roles still fundamentally believe they know what's best and are unwilling to value community input.

"When you're in a position, are you humble enough to know when the time is to use your positional power to make space for other people?" asks De'Sean Quinn, assistant general manager of partnerships and strategy at King County Metro.

And while I was excited to see our framework shape the future of the transit agency, it was this capacity building that had the most impact for me. Being in that room, being compensated to be there, and provided with childcare and meals and the large-print handouts I needed to see the content in the PowerPoints, made me feel for the first time that I actually had valuable knowledge about our transportation system. As a low-vision person, a parent, and someone who relies on the bus system, there were things I knew about how to make it work better, knowledge that no one else in that agency had, despite their degrees or credentials. While my decision to organize and support nondrivers to become transportation leaders has many origins, the King County Metro Equity Cabinet was an important influence.

d. Hire Nondrivers and support Nondrivers in Leadership roles

Imagine a highway department staffed entirely of people who do not drive. Maybe they ride as passengers in cars sometimes, or drive when out of town on vacation, in other countries where more people drive, where driving is easier, more comfortable, and more convenient. Our perspective of what a transportation system should look like would be heavily influenced by what people walking, rolling, and taking transit need. Would we be able to know what would work best for drivers at a highway interchange? Probably not, and yet the inverse of this is the reality for most of the people in charge of our transportation system, to the point where it's still revolutionary to suggest that engineers or planners get out of their cars and try walking or biking a road project to experience how it works for people outside of cars.

For some nondrivers, having reliable transit or paratransit is the difference between being able to live in community and being forced to move into an institution like a nursing home. For others, it means being able to get to places without having to call in favors, to have each wish to go somewhere judged and evaluated by someone else. This means that nondrivers tend to care deeply, passionately, about having transit work for us, to a degree that people who have more mobility options may never feel. And because transit, walking, and rolling usually take more time than driving, we have spent countless hours considering our transportation, land use, and housing decisions and what changes, big or small, we wish could be made to have it work better.

"There are people who are going around with a checklist of the ADA requirements, but you don't have people with different disabilities in the room when you're designing these things," disability advocate Erica Jones explains. "Part of that problem is the economic system we have requires full-time availability from people to have a job at all. And so, you find that if you can't work forty hours or you can't work thirty hours, you might as well be able to work zero hours. And so, a lot of the disabled people who should be in the room when you're designing these things are people who only have the energy for ten or fifteen hours a week of work, and so those people have zero chance of getting into the room."

6. (Conclusion);

a. "As transformative as car dependence has been, we have to remember that it wasn't always this way", a central point:

Before the rise of automobility, cities in the United States had the density to support public transit. As Nicholas Bloom points out in *The Great American Transit Disaster*, new zoning policies, often driven by the desire to prevent poor and Black people from moving into suburban communities, lowered housing densities to the point that transit could no longer function without heavy subsidies.² Bloom also points out that as public transit became integrated in the United States, car-dependent suburban communities and large investments in car infrastructure were funded so that White people could remain segregated. Automobility was driven by, and continues to enable, a refusal to share public space.

We start with this visibility, and we organize for more power.

Former Seattle mayor Mike McGinn reflects: "It took us decades to make us car dependent, and too many people think we now have no other choice. But this system was not brought down from the mountaintop by Moses. We built it, we can change it, and the best time to start is now."

Will it be possible to undo the harms of automobility, both the physical infrastructure and the cultural norms that have become our status quo over the last century? Being a parent of a child who will also not be able to drive, I have to believe it is possible. I also believe it is necessary.

As the sky turns orange, the storms get stronger, and the waves higher, we are reminded of the immediacy of the threat and the moral prerogative to disrupt failed mobility and land use systems that are locking us into decades of carbon emissions. We also need to be reminded of the immediate daily and cumulative public health and environmental harms from tire dust, noise pollution, and traffic violence/enforcement, harms that wealthier, Whiter, nondisabled people are largely able to avoid. But those of us who can't drive, because of disability, age, or income, see every day how automobility is failing us. And we also believe that it must be changed. With our guidance, and a recognition of this leadership, we can and will create a different future.

b.

7. (Epilogue) What you can do right now

MANY OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS in this book are actionable by people who work in the transportation sector or serve as elected leaders. But even if you feel powerless to influence decisions about land use, housing, and transportation, there are steps that you can take to move us toward a world that works better for nondrivers.

Shift Modes

- Reduce the number of trips you take by sharing trips, combining trips, and planning in advance.
- Switch some trips you would normally take by car to a different mode. Can you walk or roll instead of driving? Can you take the bus? Even though it will take longer, you can enjoy the time and read your kid a book!
- Remember the school drop-off paradox. When you choose to drive, you make it more dangerous and less comfortable for other kids to access school or activities without a car. Consider how parents and caregivers who can't drive get to the activities you take your child to. Is there a nearby transit stop? Is there a well-lit sidewalk? Is there bike parking?
- Mode shift may also mean changing the places you go. Instead of going to the park or the grocery store on the other side of town, what would it mean to stick to more local options?
- Get to know your immediate neighbors and find activities that you may be able to participate in locally.
- Take the Week Without Driving challenge and encourage your friends, colleagues, and elected officials to do so as well.

Treat the Sidewalk Like a Highway

- Keep the sidewalk in front of your house, apartment building, or business clear of snow and leaves and other clutter like signs, garbage cans, or shared bikes or scooters.
- If you use bikes or scooters and you need to park on the sidewalk, make sure not to block curb ramps and that your parking job is not making the sidewalk too narrow for someone in a large powerchair to get through. Some blind people who use white canes will use the edge of the sidewalk and the adjacent building wall as guidance, so it's much better to park in the parking strip between the street and the sidewalk than along a building wall.
- If you're a property owner in a city where it's your responsibility to repair the sidewalk adjacent to your property, make necessary repairs. If it is not financially or logistically possible to make repairs, coordinate with your city and your neighbors for help.
- Many people who are blind rely on hearing to navigate urban spaces. Quieter vehicles, including bikes and scooters, can be much harder to detect. This puts an extra onus on bike and scooter users to always yield to pedestrians. You may not know if someone sees or hears you coming. Just as you as a scooter or bike rider may feel vulnerable to large cars or SUVs, consider how the speed or closeness at which you encounter other users can feel threatening, even if you feel totally in control.

Plan for the Future

- If you're a parent or caregiver, use transit! Maybe you live somewhere where you can incorporate public transit trips into your daily or weekly schedule, or maybe it's only feasible on special trips to bigger cities. Either way, it's important to teach kids to use transit and to navigate places walking or rolling.
- If you're planning to move, when looking for a home, take into consideration how accessible a potential new apartment or house is to transit or if it is possible to walk, bike, or roll to the places you might need to go. Consider prioritizing freedom from car dependence over other factors, for yourself and for other people in your household.
- Plan for aging out of driving safely, and if you have parents or other elders in your life, help them plan. Consider how basic needs will be met without driving. It may involve a family support network, learning how to ride the bus, getting an e-trike or e-bike, and/or getting connected with social services that provide rides. If it is an option, consider moving to an area with more essentials within walking, rolling, or transit distance.
- Vote for levies or other tax measures to increase funding for sidewalks and transit. Vote for elected leaders who will support these investments.

Step Back to Make Space for Other Voices

- Ask yourself how you can step back and create space for people who don't usually get the chance to be in the room or to be heard. Examine what perspectives and what access to resources you bring to the table. Question who is not in the room or who isn't being taken seriously in a decision-making process. Even when you may feel relatively powerless as a junior staffer or as a volunteer advocate, it's important to examine who will be impacted by the work you're doing and if the people most impacted by these decisions are having meaningful input. **Noticing who isn't in the room is the first step. Next you can ask, What would it take to change this?**

Ongoing discussion: Additional materials from the text

1. [The Great American Transit Disaster](#)
2. [Road to Nowhere: What Silicon Valley Gets Wrong about the Future of Transportation](#)
3. [WALK: Slow Down, Wake Up, and Connect at 1-3 Miles per Hour](#)
4. [Getting to the Curb](#) and [Guidelines for Accessible Building Blocks for Bicycle Facilities](#)
5. [PROWAG](#)
6. [Fighting Traffic: The Dawn of the Motor Age in the American City](#)