



Environmental Work in the Transportation Sector

CAREER PROFILE

NAME: Lori Zeller

TITLE: Transportation Planner

DEGREE: City and Regional Planning, Transportation

COMPANY: Foursquare (ITP)

Foursquare Integrated Transportation Planning is, “data-driven and informed by meaningful public and stakeholder engagement. (Foursquare ITP has) a team of over 40 transit and transportation planners, GIS and data analysts, and urban designers, with nationally renowned expertise in areas such as transit service planning, transit operations, regional planning, corridor planning, transportation demand management, and bike share. Foursquare ITP views transportation as a tool to create better communities, and pride ourselves in seeing our plans become a reality.”

Source: www.foursquareitp.com

Q. What is your current role in the organization?

A. I’ve been with Foursquare Integrated Transportation Planning for about six months now. I am a transportation planner. Foursquare ITP is a private consulting firm that works on wide-ranging transportation planning projects. We work in the D.C. area but also across the whole country.

The projects that I have been working on in my role so far have been a mix of analysis and outreach. Right now we are working on a few projects to help transit agencies re-think their bus systems. This type of work involves working with communities to help them determine how bus service could better serve the people living in the regions or cities with which we work. We have various kinds of analyses that we look at to see how well current bus service serves the community. I’ve been a part of running scenario analysis where we look at theoretical examples of re-structuring the bus network in different ways -- how would those theoretical changes impact ridership, how would that impact where bus service is available and to whom?

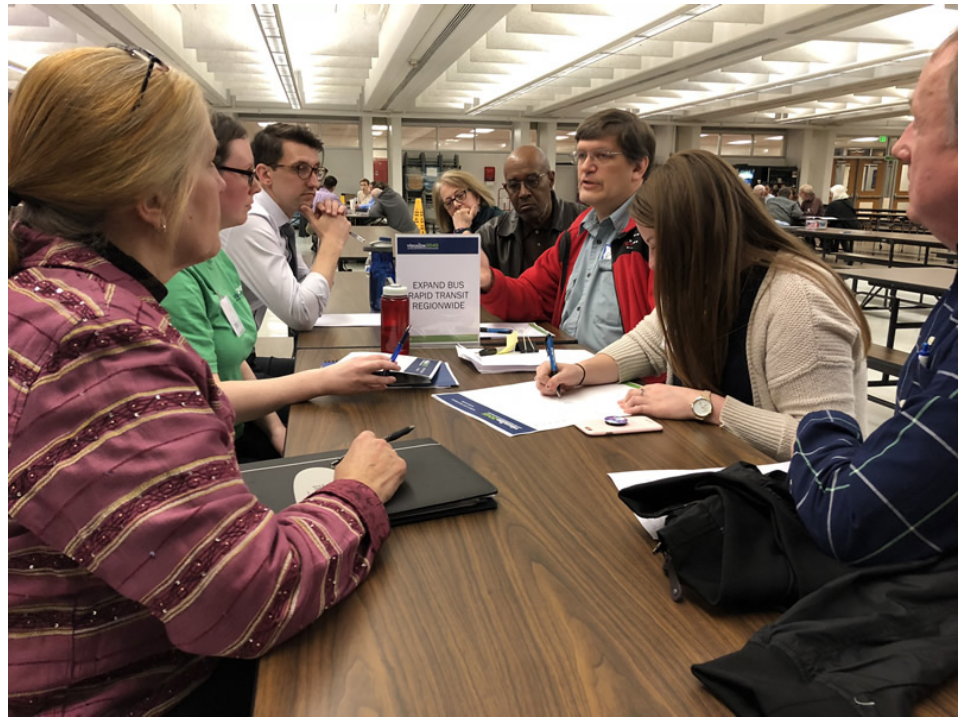
As a part of those same projects, in addition to working on analysis I have also done outreach. I really enjoy doing both because, depending on the project, it can be hard to do one

without the other. It’s helpful for the analyst to get to know the stakeholders and what’s important to them and what they care about. On the flip side it can be hard to communicate with stakeholders and the public if you don’t know what is going on with the technical side of things. I enjoy working on both aspects. Stakeholder outreach involves working with staff members of various agencies, jurisdictions, elected officials—reaching out to them, sharing project information and getting their input about where they would like to see the project go. I’ve been involved with different types of public outreach, which has included public meetings, surveys, focus groups, and other means to get public input—I’ve done a lot of writing for synthesizing the findings from these activities.

Q. How did you get to this point in your career? Any key points along that pathway?

A. I think that my interest in transportation really

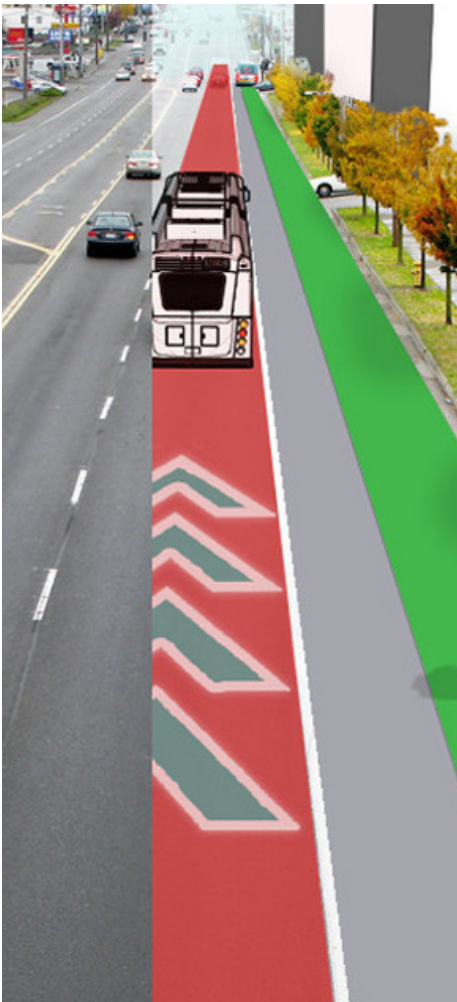
started in college but didn't really start to form into a career path until I was getting ready to go to grad school-- I chose a grad school where I could study transportation. I went to Rutgers University and I just was always interested in transportation and the inter-play between transportation, land-use and the built environment--and I wanted to be able to work in jobs that gave me the opportunity to do work in transportation because I found it to be really interesting work. I wanted the impact of my work to benefit communities in terms of people being able to have a higher quality of life and improving environmental health. After grad school, I worked as a research fellow at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Sustainable Communities. This office is where transportation, land-use and the environment came together in that agency. That was really meaningful work to me because a lot of the projects that office worked on were technical assistance programs which involved going into communities and helping local planners and elected officials direct their policies and programs to be more smart growth oriented. At EPA I was also able to work on creating some interesting datasets. I really liked the work there. I left that position ultimately because it wasn't a full-time employment position, it was a fellowship--so I knew that I wanted to move on. From



there I went to the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG), where I was a transportation planner for the DC area's metropolitan planning organization (MPO), called the National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board. In that position I was more directly involved with transportation, working on regional transportation planning, whereas at the EPA it was more of a multidisciplinary planning position. Working at COG, I learned a lot about the transportation planning process and I learned very useful skills for working with elected officials and other stakeholders, and I also learned a whole lot more about the region. I was there for about two years before I left for the job that I have now.

The thought process that I went through in moving on from COG

was that I wanted to be doing something that was going to allow me to learn new things and grow my analytical skills. I had never worked in the private sector before my current job. When I was considering looking for another job, I learned that the private sector provides opportunities to work on projects in different regions, and with different people, which was appealing to me. I was also drawn to my current position because I was really excited to work more specifically in public transit, which is something that Foursquare ITP specializes in. I felt that Foursquare ITP would provide me the opportunity to learn more, be challenged, and continue to grow. So, that was a lot of what motivated me to find a new position and I definitely found that at this firm.



Q. Were there any experiences that helped to best prepare you for the work that you do?

A. I think one of the most important things for a successful planner in general and maybe the private sector, is being able to think about things from multiple perspectives, to see multiple perspectives, and to listen to people for what they are saying, understand underneath what they are saying, and maybe understand what they are not saying—and what this all means. These are skills that can be in any profession, but

when you are working to fulfill a project need—especially with a client—you need to be able to understand what they want (whether they are saying it or not) and make that happen. It requires perceptions and good communication skills, creative thinking and problem-solving skills, and I think I've built that skill-set over time. Especially working with elected officials—a lot of the time they are not experts in the fields that we are working in, not experts in transportation and the environment. They are local politicians and they need to be responsive to their constituents and they need to know a little about a lot of things. And, being able to work with them was just a formative thing for me—being able to communicate well with people.

Q. What does a day in the life of your position look like?

A. Every week, depending on individual project schedules, I know which projects I will be needed on and what work is expected of me. One type of work I might do is to prepare for a presentation for a client to get their input on if we are going in the right direction or not. Or, I might be doing analysis to prepare for a presentation. I might be doing GIS or Excel analysis to look at some kind of data need that we are working on. I might be analyzing survey results or preparing a new survey. Or, I might be planning

out a calendar of when we are going to do all of the public outreach for the next three months. Sometimes there is travel, and, sometimes we will be staffing events to get public input. There's definitely a mix of solo work and collaborative work and I really think that it depends on the day. In the private sector—at least for my firm—for each project we work with a different mix of people in the company.

Q. What skills have you gained in the work? Are these unique or transferable to other disciplines?

A. I think definitely, communication and being able to understand people and get them what they need. That's probably transferable to all kinds of consulting and many other kinds of work. I think that another aspect of that is being able to take technical information that we are working with and making it understandable to various different audiences. You need to know your audience and communicate on the most appropriate level so that they can interact, give feedback, and ask questions. I think that's transferable to other fields and is a role that I played in my past role and that I play in my current role: someone who can straddle the technical and outreach side of things. I think that not everyone needs to do that, but it is a skill that I've developed. On the more technical side, for

transportation planners, being familiar with GIS and Excel are very useful skills. I'm not an expert on either, but I know the ins and out really well. Writing is another—definitely writing technically, as much as possible, and for the public, and for officials—writing for different audiences. I think also time management and being able to know what you can do within a certain amount of time. It is important to be honest with yourself and honest with others. Being an assertive communicator is also important.

Q. What do you enjoy most about your job?

A. I think that what I enjoy most is when we have a technical need or question and I am provided an opportunity to figure out the methodology for how we are going to address it. I think that's a really fun and challenging way to think and stretch your brain.

Q. What are some of the challenges you have faced in the work? How did you overcome them?

A. Sometimes in the planning field it can feel like some things you work on may sit on a shelf and not be implemented. I have experienced this feeling and it has been a challenge in the sense that it impacted my motivation. As I've gained more experience, I've gained more perspective on this, and find myself feeling better on this subject. I have learned

more about the transportation planning process and its many aspects, which range from regulatory requirements to grassroots community advocacy, each playing their own role. I have learned to use all of my work experiences as learning opportunities – even if I am not sure what will come out of a certain project or task, I appreciate the learning and growth that I have experienced.

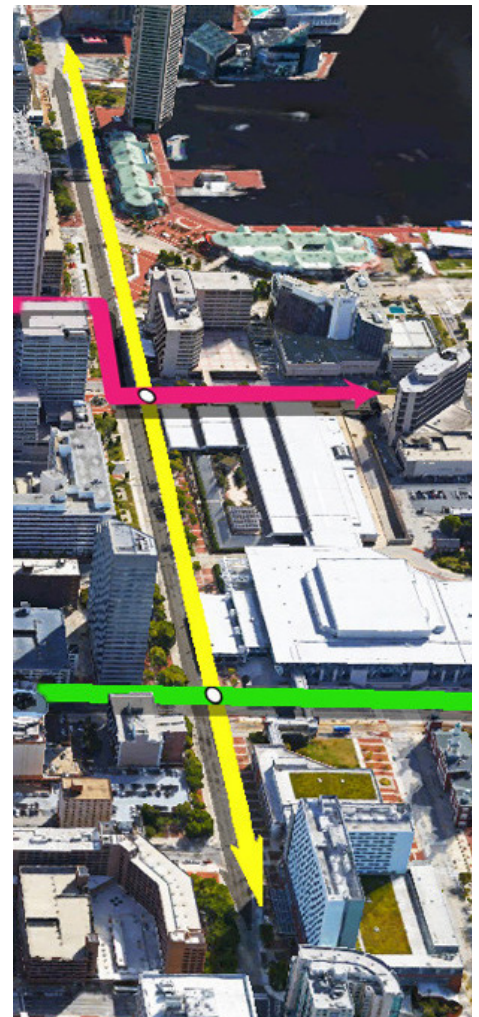
Q. What are some of your own personal characteristics and values that make you a good fit for this type of work?

A. I genuinely care about the work that I am doing and I am in this work because I care about making people's lives better and about making a more sustainable future for our environment. With that, I am motivated even if I am having a tough day and something is not going well work-wise—I know that I am working towards something that will make a difference as well as, something that I really deeply care about. In this job, that's been really true because we are working directly with communities. It's direct and I really like that. I think I am generally an empathetic person and I care about listening to someone and trying to understand what they are saying about project needs. I am a good listener and I will be able to hear what someone wants—even though I do have strong opinions and strong

convictions—it is a balance of having opinions and being a good listener. With those two combined I am able to address problems head on to come up with the best solutions.

Q. What is something that you want people to know about the work that you do?

A. I'd say, that as a transportation planner in a small firm you really get to grow and do new things on a regular basis. If variety interests someone, and always learning something new, and getting new and different exposure interests you, then this is for you. ↪



Overview of Position as it Relates to Transportation

The role of a transportation planner is best described as “the planner of the transportation system of tomorrow.” This requires work in the public and private sectors and/or engaging with government policy and the final details before the beginning of the building phase. This includes designing research methods and survey techniques for proposed transportation projects; assessing the impact of recent building developments on transportation systems; modeling traffic flows; recommending improvements for transportation systems; collaborating with engineers; and analyzing information related to transportation such as policy, impact reports, or long-term planning needs.

Source: www.environmentalscience.org/career/transportation-planner

Transportation Planner

In the public sector, transportation planners typically provide services for government bodies and contractors, examining current traffic and population trends and determining the effectiveness of proposed and constructed roads. Transportation planners also plan new roads based on future predicted population growth.

Alongside transport engineers, developers, and environmental planners, transportation planners work to ensure that estates, commercial, and industrial zones have the correct transport infrastructure and that they adhere to environmental legislation.

In the private sector, transportation planners work

for public transport companies typically examining effectiveness of timings and schedules, as well as volume of transport services to ensure that these systems are working optimally. Transportation planners will also be involved in the decision-making process to compose new routes when transportation service providers are not functioning optimally.

Lori Zeller, AICP is a transportation planner with experience in regional transportation planning and active transportation data and tool development. Prior to joining Foursquare ITP, Lori managed a long-range metropolitan transportation plan update and organized regional policy formation efforts. She has also researched, developed datasets and tools, and crafted policy recommendations regarding: community walkability, improving pedestrian access to public transit, and siting workplaces in transportation-efficient locations. Lori has also developed and analyzed high-volume public transportation-focused surveys. Currently, Lori’s duties include data analysis and public outreach.

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Transportation Planning

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—Lori Zeller

About Foursquare ITP

Foursquare ITP is a multi-modal transportation planning firm focused on providing innovative transportation solutions that are practical, focused, and implementable. Core values guide the organization’s pursuits in sustainable and equitable transportation project work, as well as their commitment to advancing the field of transportation planning through leadership, volunteerism, research, and education.

Source: www.foursquareitp.com/about/

Overview of General Skills and Requirements

Urban and regional planners are required to have the skills to analyze information and data regarding market research, censuses, and environmental impact studies. This is necessary for the purposes of decision-making around planning options and choosing an appropriate action plans regarding community development projects. Urban and regional planners must also have clear and effective communication skills as they interact with colleagues, stakeholders, and investors, as well as prepare and present reports to a wide variety of audiences. Finally, planners must be able to manage projects, oversee tasks, and plan assignments for themselves and others.

Urban or regional planners require certain credentials. Most require a Master's degree from an accredited urban or regional planning program. People who hold a Bachelor's degree in Urban and Regional Planning can qualify for a small number of jobs as assistants or junior planners. Additionally, some entry-level positions require 1 to 2 years of work experience in a related field (i.e., architecture, public policy, or economic development). Acceptable experience can also be attained through internships related to urban and regional planning either while enrolled in school or post-graduation

Looking into the future, urban planners will be needed to develop revitalization projects and

Type of Planning Projects Carried Out at Foursquare ITP

VISUALIZE 2045

This project produced a [long-range transportation plan](#). The plan includes details on freight planning, airport systems planning, intercity buses, travel and tourism, emergency preparedness, evolving technology, land-use coordination, equity emphasis, bike and pedestrian planning, resiliency and reliability, coordinated human service transportation plan, and more.

addressed issues regarding population growth, environmental degradation, movement, and resource scarcity. Common challenges are predicted to be: population change, affordable housing needs, and transportation systems; all of which can address high- and low-density populations. As communities emerge and grow they will require development and improved infrastructure regarding housing, roads, sewer systems, parks and schools. As a result, the employment of urban and regional planners is projected to grow 13 percent from 2016-2026. This employment growth is driven by demographic, transportation, and environmental changes.

Sources: Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, Occupational Outlook Handbook, Urban and Regional Planners. U.S. Department of Labor CareerOneStop: Transportation Planners Occupation Profile.

GLOSSARY

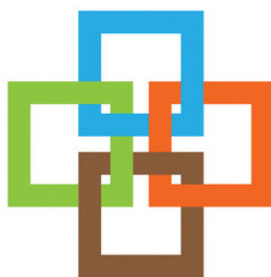
- ▶ **Smart Growth** – an urban planning and transportation theory that concentrates growth and development in compact, walkable urban centers to avoid sprawl.
- ▶ **GIS** – geographic information system, software designed to capture, store, manipulate, analyze, manage, and present spatial or geographic data.
- ▶ **Multimodal** – utilizing two or more modes of movement of goods or people (e.g. vehicle, rail, bicycle).
- ▶ **Grassroots** – advocacy approach for something that starts at the ground level where ordinary people or the community are regarded as the main body of an organization's membership.
- ▶ **AICP** – American Institute of Certified Planners. Certification requires a combination of relevant education and professional experience.

Key Skills

- ▶ **Reading Comprehension** – Reading work-related information.
- ▶ **Complex Problem Solving** – Noticing a problem and figuring out the best way to solve it.
- ▶ **Critical Thinking** – Thinking about the pros and cons of different ways to solve a problem.
- ▶ **Active Listening** – Listening to others, not interrupting, and asking good questions.
- ▶ **Judgment and Decision Making** – Thinking about the pros and cons of different options and picking the best one.
- ▶ **Coordination** – Changing what is done based on other people’s actions.
- ▶ **Active Learning** – Figuring out how to use new ideas or things.
- ▶ **Systems Evaluation** – Measuring how well a system is working and how to improve it.
- ▶ **Systems Analysis** – Figuring out how a system should work and how changes in the future will affect it.
- ▶ **Time Management** – Managing your time and the time of other people.
- ▶ **Monitoring** – Keeping track of how well people and/or groups are doing in order to make improvements.

Abilities Needed for Success

- ▶ **Written Comprehension** – Reading and understanding what is written.
- ▶ **Oral Expression** – Effective spoken communication.
- ▶ **Written Expression** – Effective communication in written form.
- ▶ **Deductive Reasoning** – Using rules to solve problems.
- ▶ **Inductive Reasoning** – Making general rules or coming up with answers from lots of detailed information.
- ▶ **Oral Comprehension** – Listening and understanding what people say.
- ▶ **Problem Sensitivity** – Noticing when problems happen.
- ▶ **Fluency of Ideas** – Coming up with lots of ideas.
- ▶ **Near Vision** – Seeing details up close.
- ▶ **Originality** – Creating new and original ideas.
- ▶ **Information Ordering** – Ordering or arranging things.
- ▶ **Visualization** – Imagining how something will look after it is moved around or changed.



FOURSQUARE INTEGRATED TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

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