

Deep Stories about Transportation



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The problems are large and urgent.



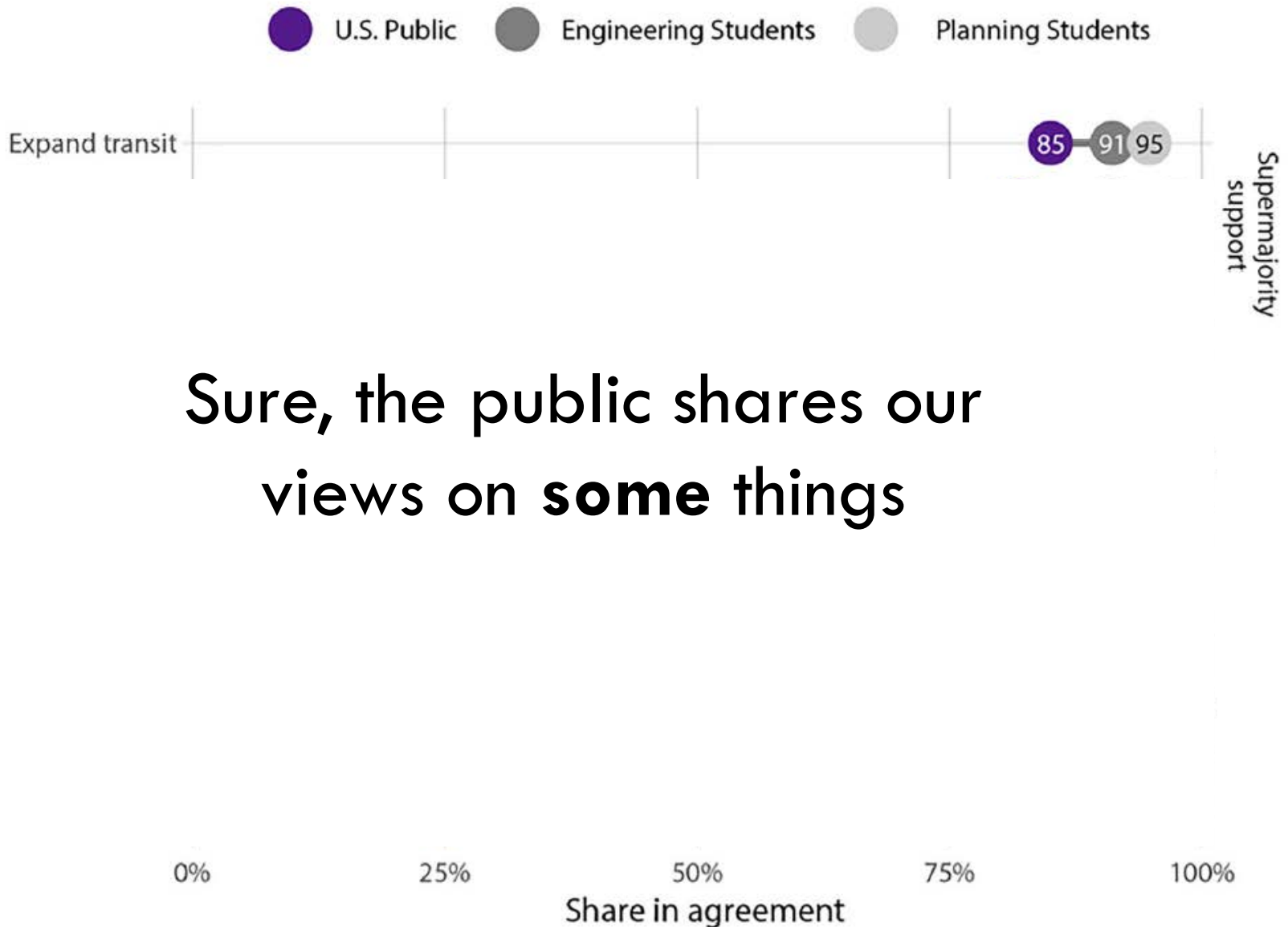
Taking the **red pill**
can be lonely indeed.



Do the public and engineers support planning ideas?

@kmralph 

Support for transportation policies.



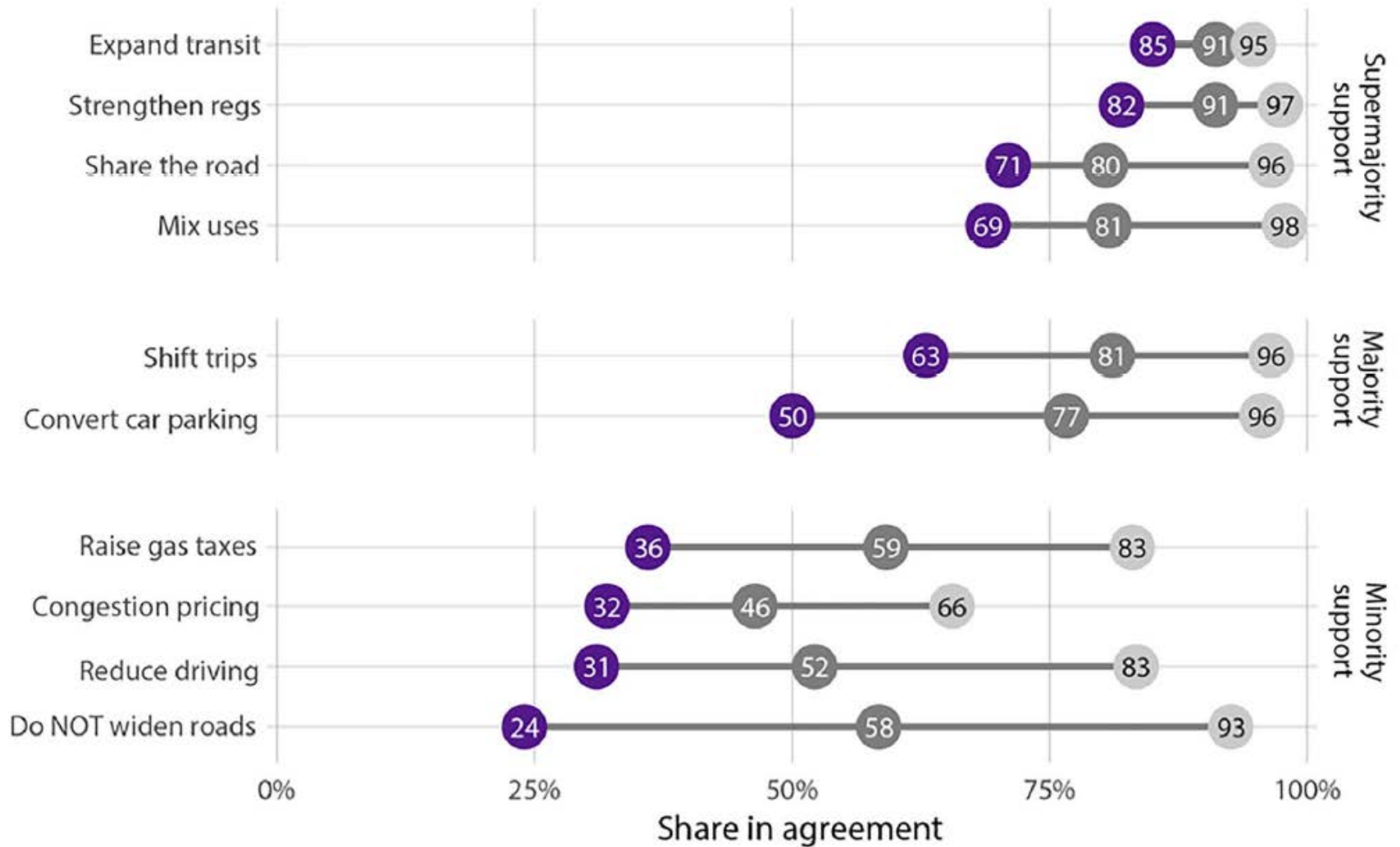
Sure, the public shares our views on **some** things

Do the public and engineers support planning ideas?

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Support for transportation policies.

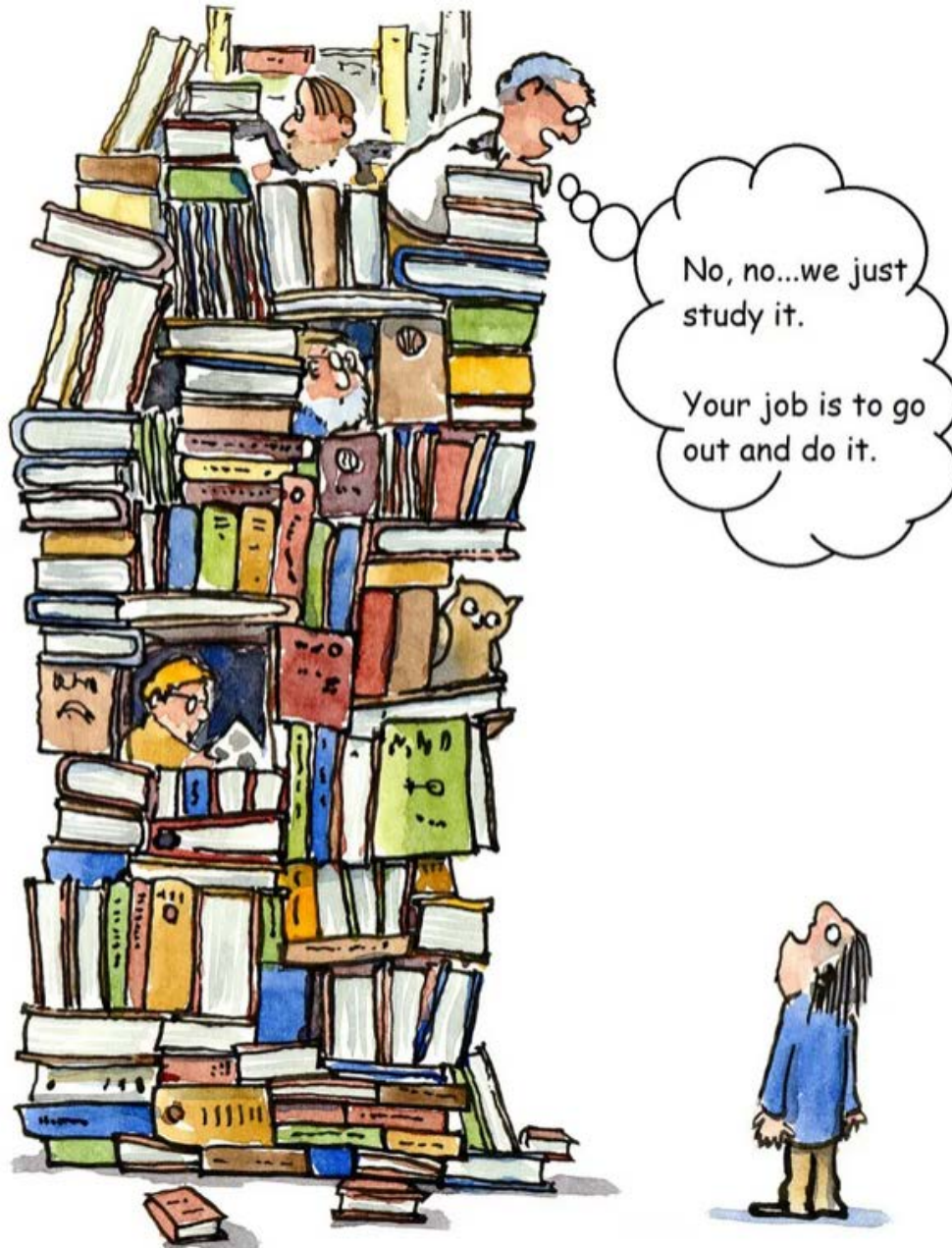
● U.S. Public ● Engineering Students ● Planning Students



Underlying these preferences
are very different
deep stories about transportation.

Your job
really **hard.**





I want to invite you into
the **ivory tower** to reflect on
your own deep stories.



Deep Stories 101:

Distracted Pedestrians

Pedestrian deaths have
soared since 2009.

In your view, how central is
distracted walking to that story?

There are three ways to study this.

**Observe
pedestrians**



**Conduct an
experiment**

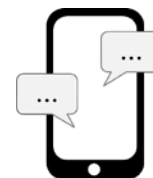


**Analyze
crash data**



Many people walk distracted,

Many people walk distracted,
but distraction does **not** change
behavior all that much



Stay in crosswalk?

Look both ways?

Recognize gaps?

Cross more slowly?



Stay in crosswalk?	X		
Look both ways?	X		
Recognize gaps?	X		
Cross more slowly?	X		



Stay in crosswalk?	X	😊	😊
Look both ways?	X		
Recognize gaps?	X		
Cross more slowly?	X		



Stay in crosswalk?	X	☺	☺
Look both ways?	X	- (ツ) -	
Recognize gaps?	X	- (ツ) -	
Cross more slowly?	X		



Stay in crosswalk?	X	☺	☺
Look both ways?	X	- (ツ) -	- (ツ) -
Recognize gaps?	X	- (ツ) -	- (ツ) -
Cross more slowly?	X	Yes	Yes

Many people walk distracted,
but distraction does **not** change
behavior all that much

Many people walk distracted,
but distraction does **not** change
behavior all that much
and there is **very little** evidence it is
particularly unsafe.

Just **one** observational study on
safety while distracted
(Nasar et al. 2008)

It is the **most cited**
distracted walking paper and was
widely covered in the media.

48%

of people on a phone
crossed unsafely
(Nasar et al. 2008)

But the sample was **tiny** and the
results are **dubious**.

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results are **dubious**.

Only observed 25 people
on a phone.

Only 11 had a
car approaching.

Only 9 stepped off the curb.

Yet somehow 12 people
were “at risk” of getting hit???

Only observed 25 people
on a phone.

Only 11 had a
car approaching.

Only 9 stepped off the curb.

**Conduct an
experiment.**



Hit or nearly hit?

**Conduct an
experiment.**



Hit or nearly hit?

17 studies: Mixed results

**Conduct an
experiment.**



Hit or nearly hit?

17 studies: Mixed results

Key difference: Could they speed up?

Also, no real risk

More people. More driving. ↗



Distracted driving. 



Americans moved to riskier places

What does this have to do with
deep stories?

What does this have to do with
deep stories?

I surveyed transport practitioners
about their level of concern and
their preferred solutions.

In your view, is distracted walking:

...a large problem?

...a small problem?

...not a problem?

Estimate the share of pedestrian deaths
due to distracted walking.

(0 – 100)

1 / 3

of transport practitioners
believe distracted walking is a

LARGE PROBLEM,

responsible for

40%

of pedestrian deaths.

1 in 6
>50%

1 in 10
>75%

How we **frame** problems shapes
how we go about **solving** them.

Educate pedestrians

Educate drivers

Provide ped infrastructure

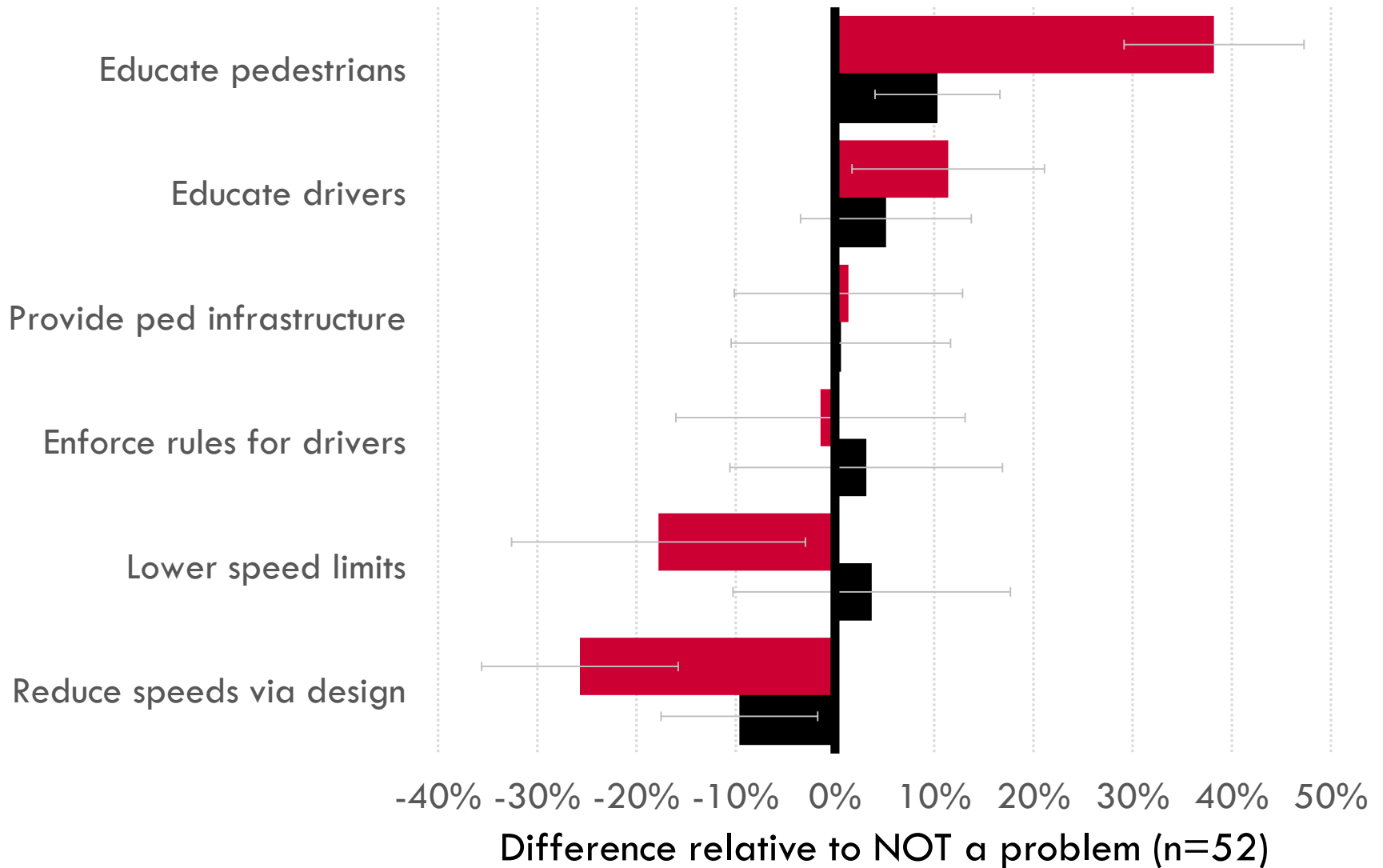
Enforce rules for drivers

Lower speed limits

Reduce speeds via design

-40% -30% -20% -10% 0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50%

Difference relative to NOT a problem (n=52)

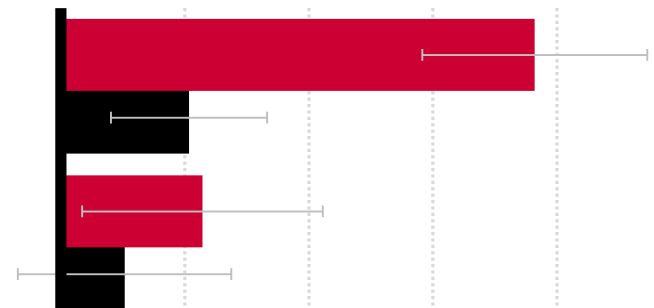


■ Believe distracted walking is a LARGE problem (n=104)

■ Believe distracted walking is a SMALL problem (n=142)

Educate pedestrians

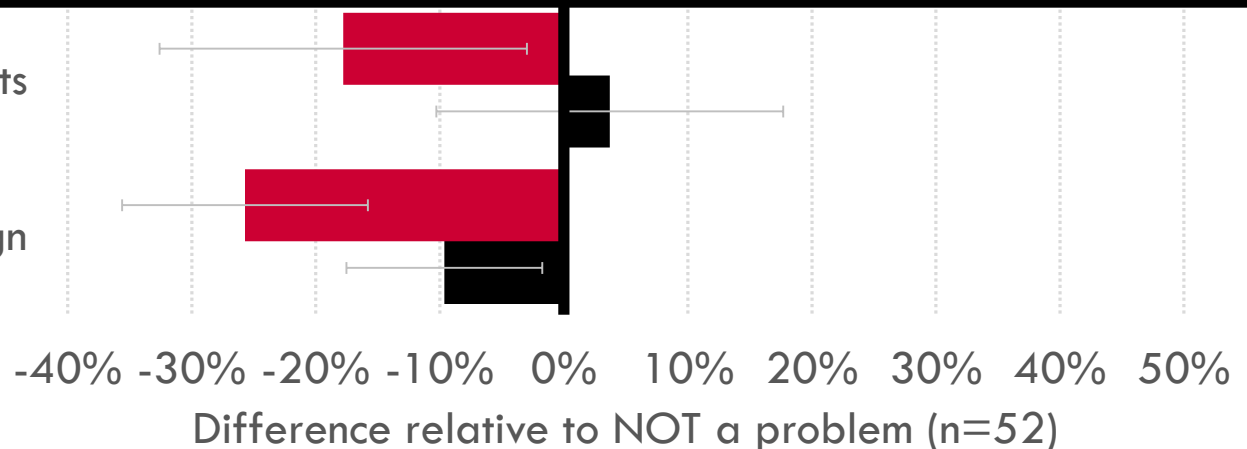
Educate drivers



The “distracted walking” frame increases support for education and reduces support for lowering speeds.

Lower speed limits

Reduce speeds via design



■ Believe distracted walking is a LARGE problem (n=104)

■ Believe distracted walking is a SMALL problem (n=142)

Educate pedestrians

Educate drivers

This is a problem because
those solutions are
less effective.

Lower speed limits

Reduce speeds via design

-40% -30% -20% -10% 0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50%

Difference relative to NOT a problem (n=52)

■ Believe distracted walking is a LARGE problem (n=104)

■ Believe distracted walking is a SMALL problem (n=142)

It **detracts** from bigger issues.

Distracted walking: **5-10%**

It **detracts** from bigger issues.

Distracted walking: **5-10%**

Speeding

26%

NHTSA

Alcohol/Drugs

47%

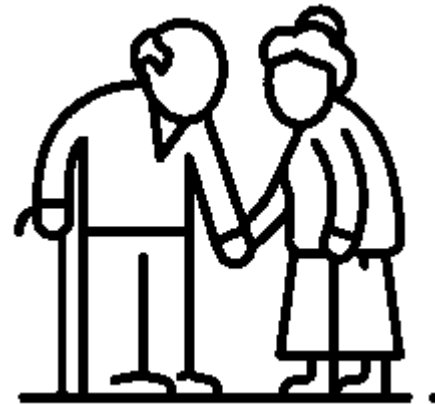
NHTSA

Driver inattention*

57%

NYC DOT

The “distracted walking” frame
is **inconsistent** with
Vision Zero or Complete Streets.



**My advice: Think about systems,
not individuals.**

My advice:
Think about **systems**,
not individuals.



284

Pedestrians hit

My advice:
Think about **systems**,
not individuals.

284

Pedestrians hit

Drivers hit

49,000

objects

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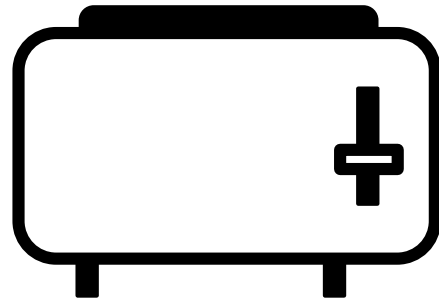
Drivers hit

5,500

stationary

objects

Like selling faulty toasters
and after a fire



White? Wheat? Sourdough?

Deep Stories 101:

Distracted Pedestrians

Deep Stories 201: Beliefs about change

1 / 3

Americans believe it is
“nearly impossible”
to change our transportation system.

1 / 3

doubt that

dramatic investments

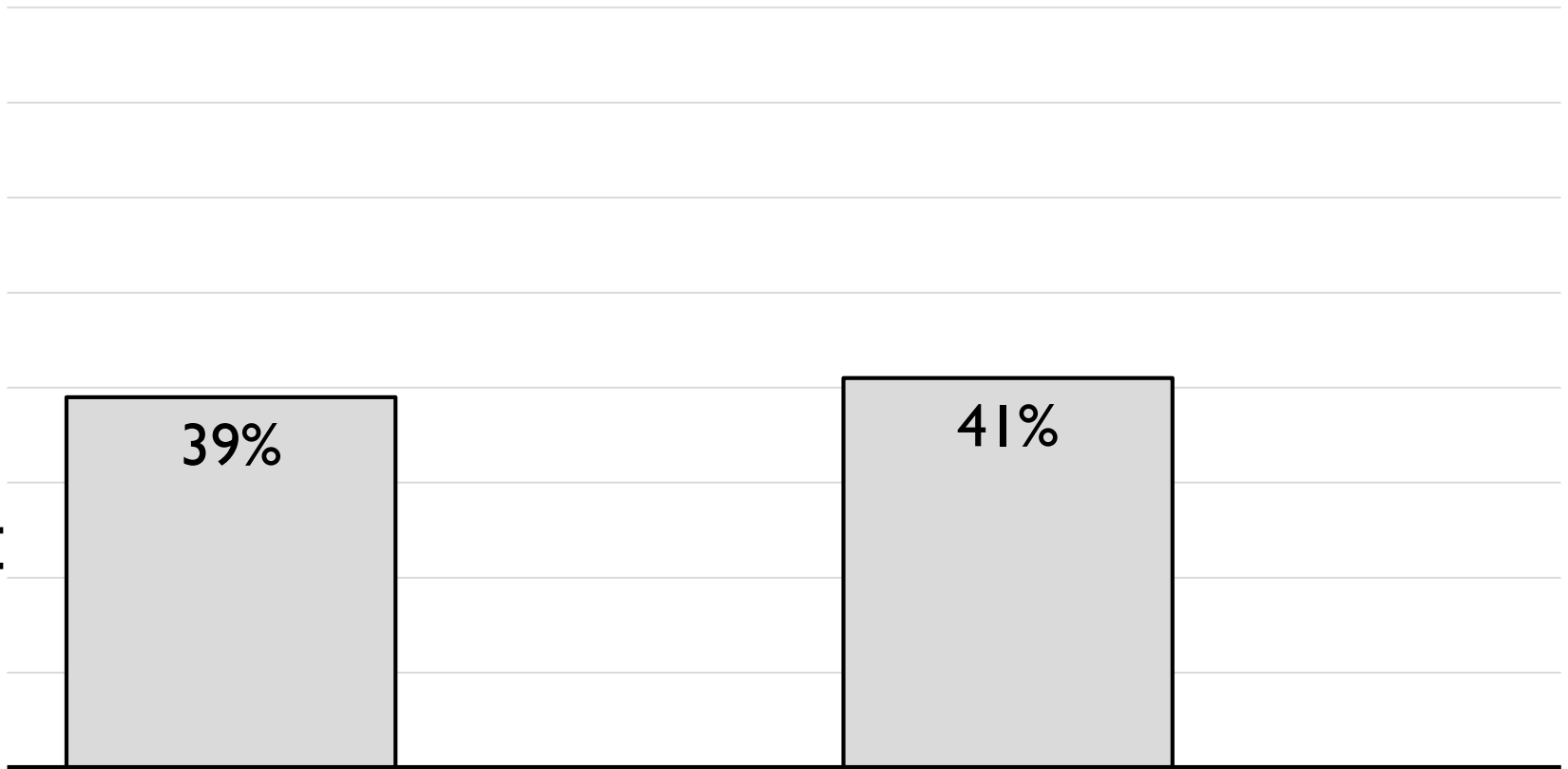
could change travel patterns
in the US.

This skepticism limits support for
transportation reform.

Support for transportation reform among those who believe change is impossible

□ Skeptical

% Support for reform



Possible to change the system?

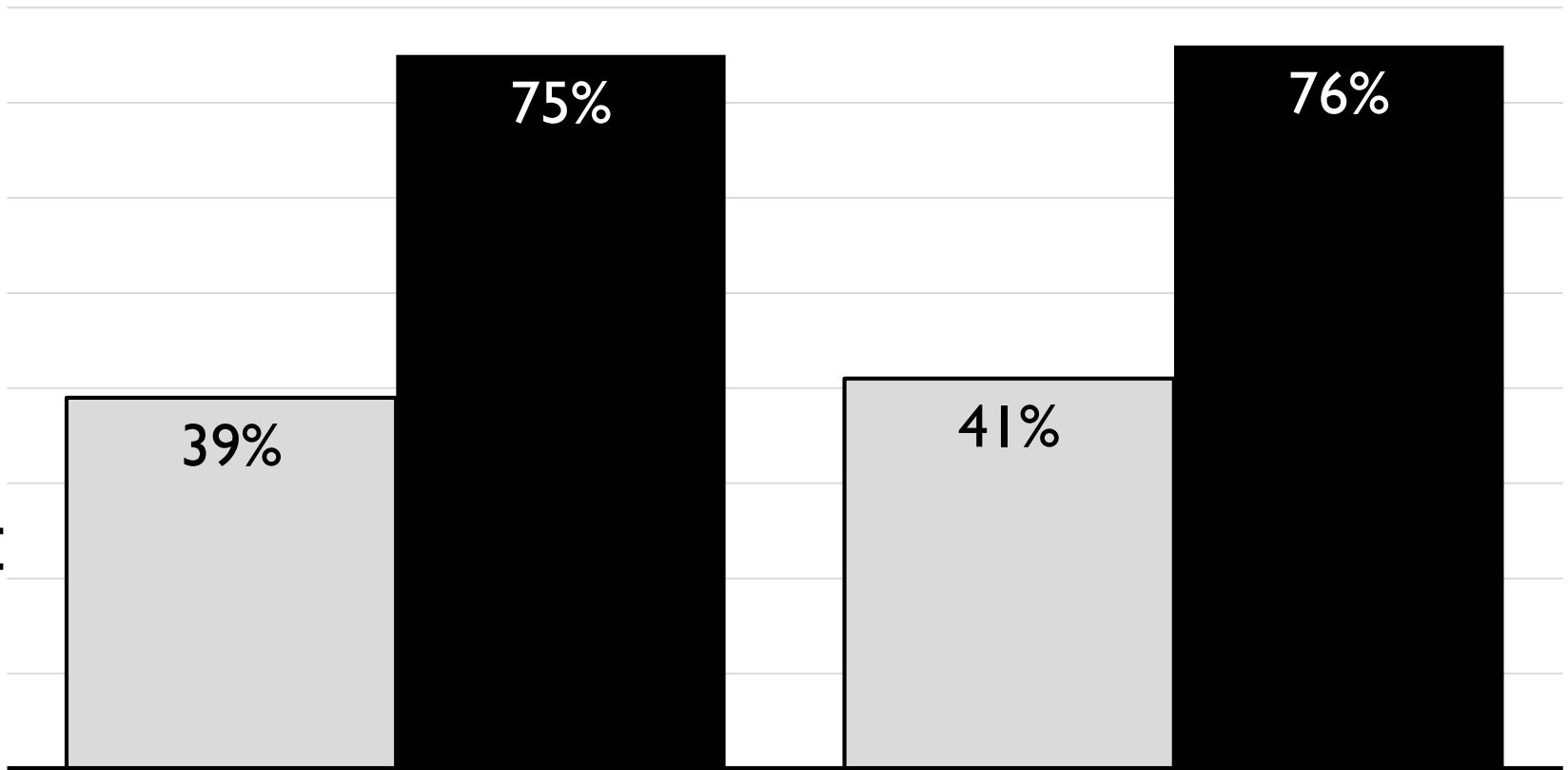
New system could Δ behavior?

Support for transportation reform is higher among those who believe change is possible

□ Skeptical

■ Sanguine about change

% Support for reform



Possible to change the system?

New system could Δ behavior?

Do **you** believe that we can
change the transportation system
+
that behavior would change?

Deep Stories 301:

Agency agency

Many people within agencies feel like they do not have agency.

This limits the scale of our ambitions.

LADOT **LADOT** @LADOTofficial · Mar 7

Yesterday we joined @CD5LosAngeles in unveiling a memorial sign at Olympic and Overland to honor Monique Muñoz, whose life was taken too soon by an act of speeding on our streets. This sign serves as a reminder to drivers to slow down and practice safe driving behavior.



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Jessie Singer

@JessieSingerNYC

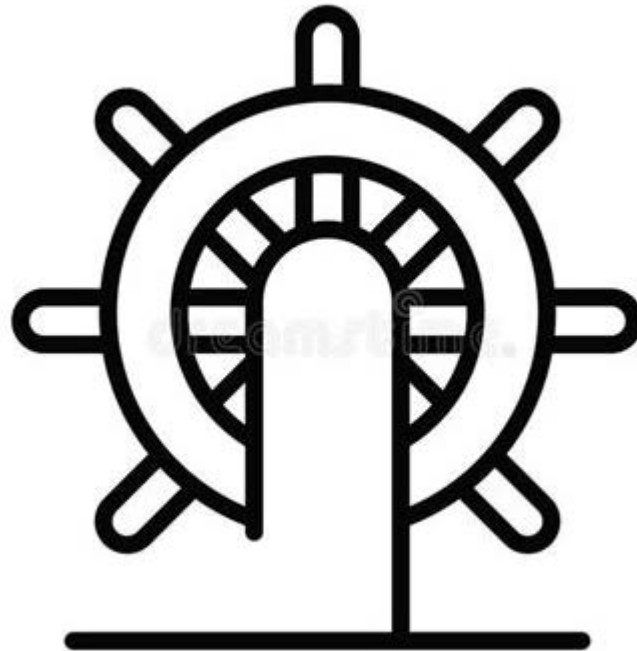
If only there were a city agency with the power to design streets to reduce acts of speeding! Ah, well, we only have the Department of Transportation Signs; I guess we will just have to put up a sign.



We made the rules.
We can change them.



You are at the helm.



What could we do if we were all
rowing in the same direction?





Thank you.

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Distracted by “distracted pedestrians”?

Kelcie Ralph  , Ian Girardeau 

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.trip.2020.100118>

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Highlights

- A third of transportation practitioners say distracted walking is a big problem
- Half say it is a small problem and 17% say it is not a problem
- Concern is highest among drivers and those who spend little time in pedestrian areas
- Concern is higher among engineers and public health practitioners than planners
- Concern affects policy solutions, raising support for education over speed reduction