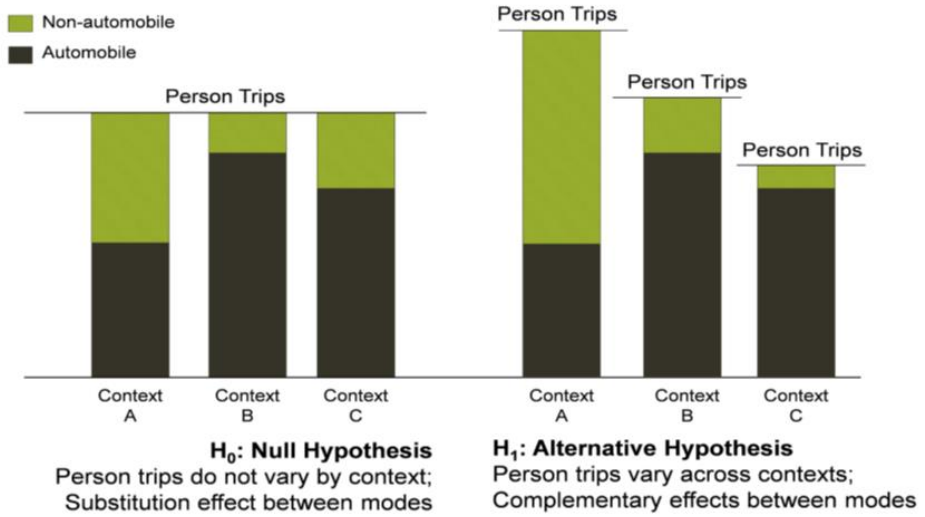
Communicating Research Through Comics: A Case Study in Transportation & Land Use Planning

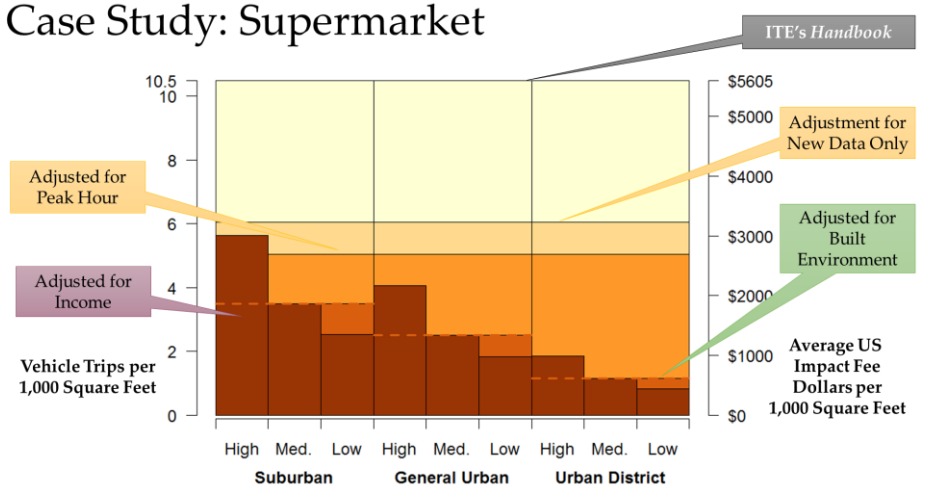
Kelly J. Clifton

Transportation & Land Development Research

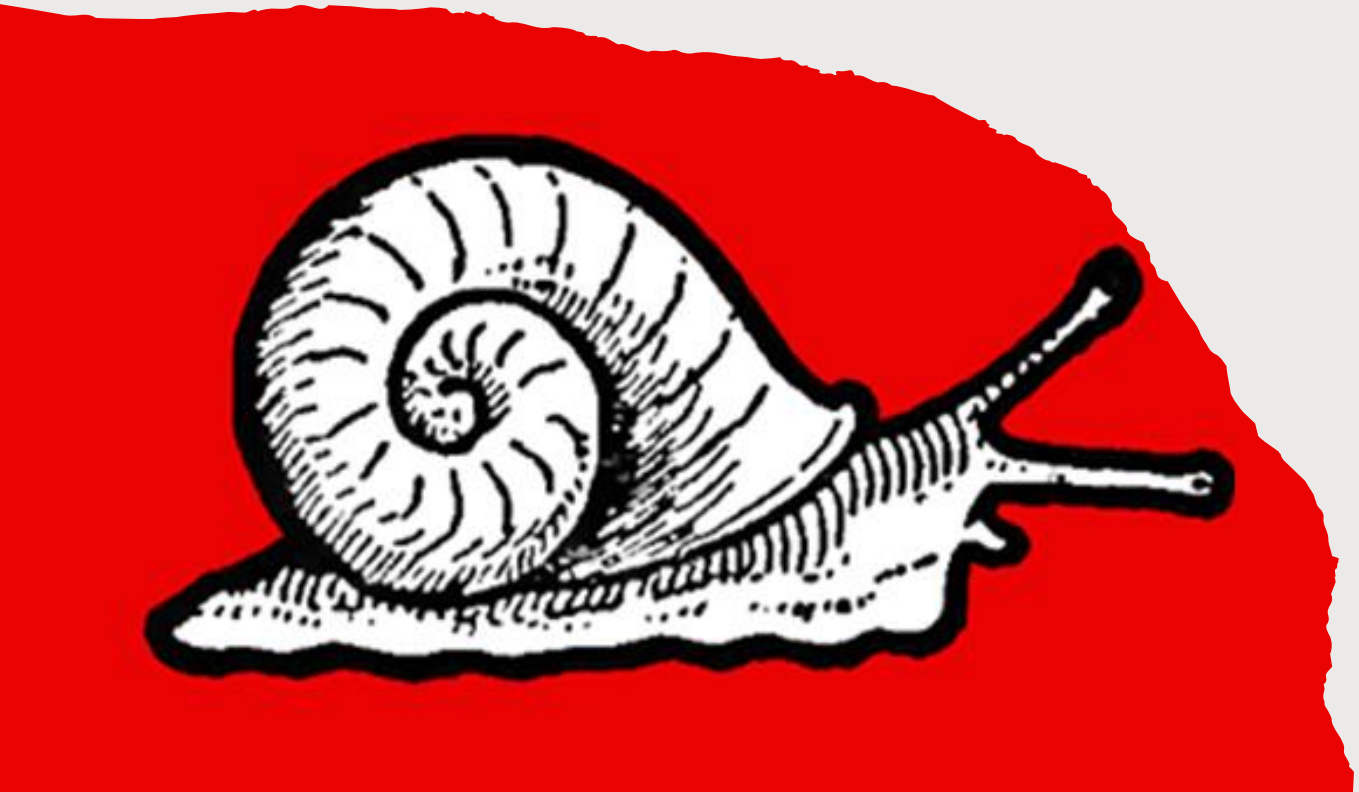
- Critique of ITE Trip Generation & Transportation Impact Studies
- Importance of social and environmental context
- Showed that non-auto users are important to businesses
- Examined trip generation, parking, & VMT
- Developed a Person Trip Approach



Clifton, Kelly J.; Currans, Kristina M.; Muhs, Christopher D. (2015). Adjusting ITE's Trip Generation Handbook for urban context. *Journal of Transport and Land Use*. Volume 8, No. 1, pp 5-29.



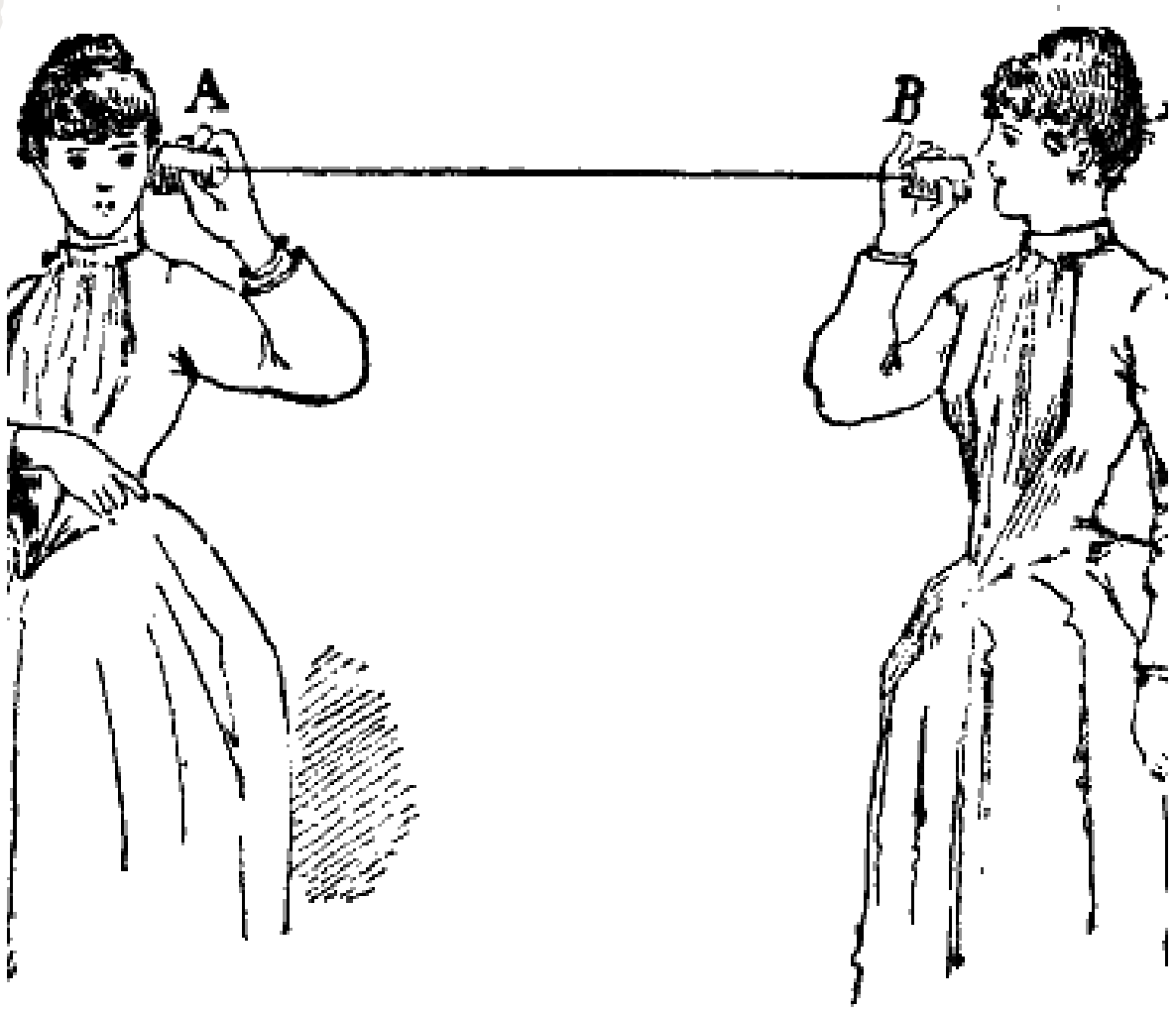
Practice has been slow to change



- Many still use the traditional development review processes that use these data and methods to privilege the automobile.
- NIMBYs (not-in-my-backyards) have blocked development of multifamily and affordable housing, citing increased traffic congestion.
- These claims are often erroneously supported by these antiquated, automobile centric approaches
- The findings from our research and others need to be more widely communicated to broaden understanding of the problem and policy solutions.

Communicating Research

- Current challenges require urgent (and drastic) changes in behavior
- Public is losing faith in universities and experts
- Researchers often only communicate to each other
- Better outcomes require an informed public to participate
- Comics can help!

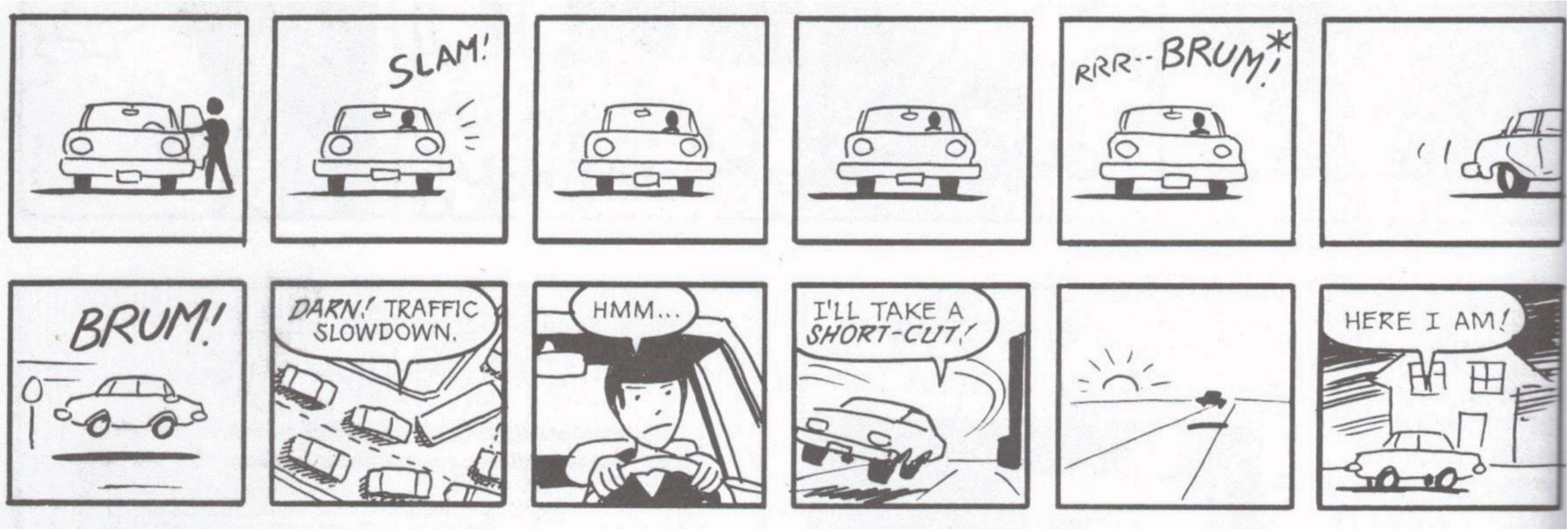


BUT KELLY…
WHY COMICS?

FOR SO MANY REASONS!!! LET ME TELL YOU…..

Images Can Help Explain Complex Ideas

Sequencing Promotes Understanding



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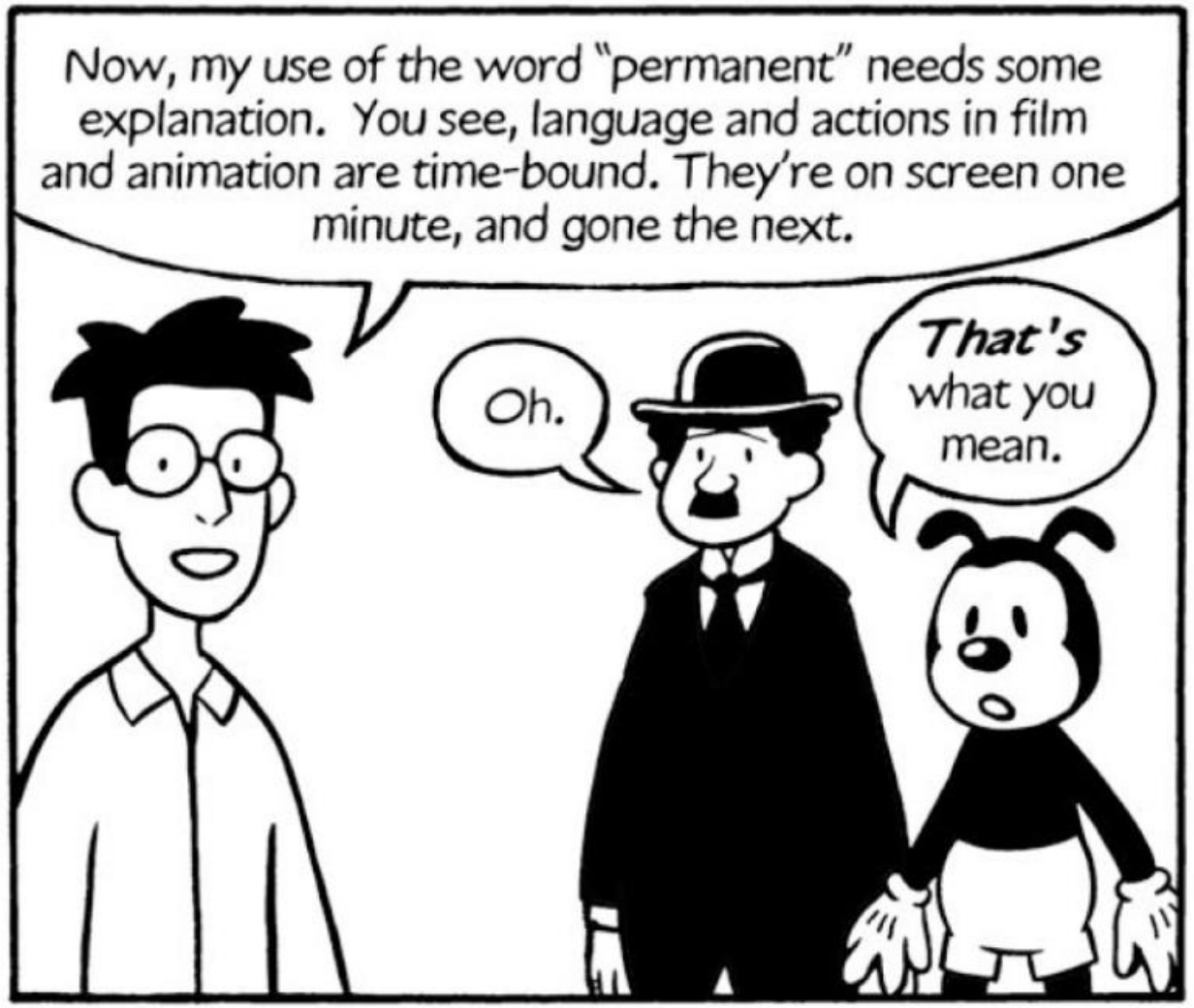


From: Gene Yang. 2008. Graphic Novels in the Classroom, an Essay in Panels. *Language Arts,* Jan 2008; 185-192.

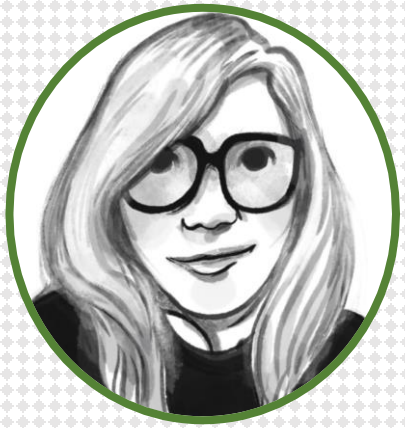
Comics are Permanent

- The pace of information transfer is determined by the reader
- Unlike classroom lectures or film, where the medium dictates the speed of viewing
- Books are also permanent (but without the visual)

A Mechanism for Promoting Diversity & Inclusion

- Can have better representation of people
- Demonstrate people engaging in activities or using various modes of transportation
- Visualize different environments or contexts
- More easily translate to other languages

"MetroCommon 2050 Comic: Inclusive Growth and Mobility" by Anne Christine



Kelly Clifton, Prof.
Civil & Env. Engineer.
Portland State U.

Kristina Currans, Assist. Prof.
Planning
U. of Arizona

We've been researching transportation and land use for a *long* time. We've got a lot to say, but where do we start?

Here to help! I have collaborated with lots of researchers to help communicate their work with nonfiction comics.

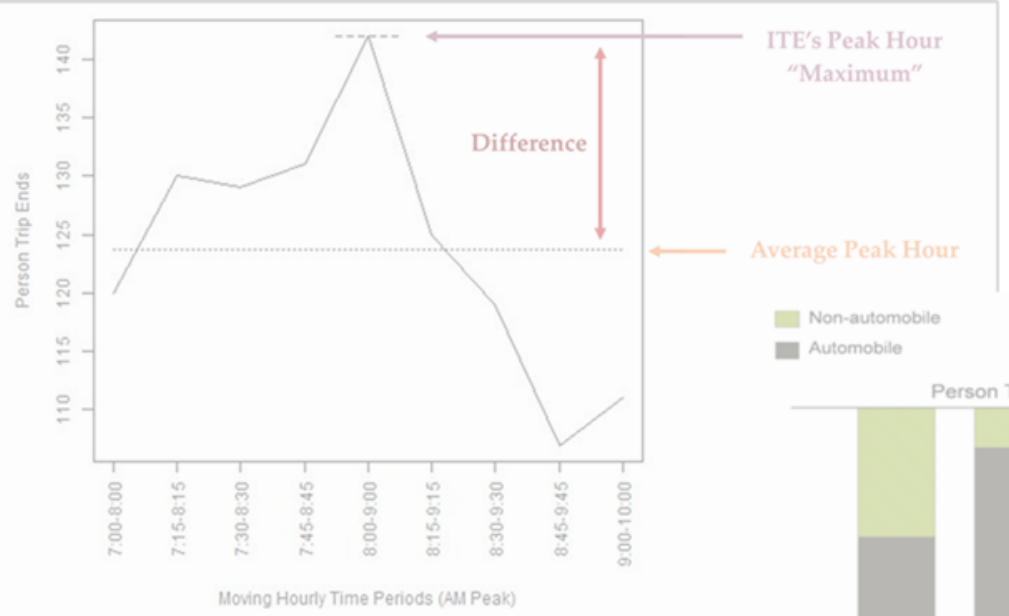
As a storyteller, I'm all about the narrative. How can we make this compelling and understandable to a wide audience?

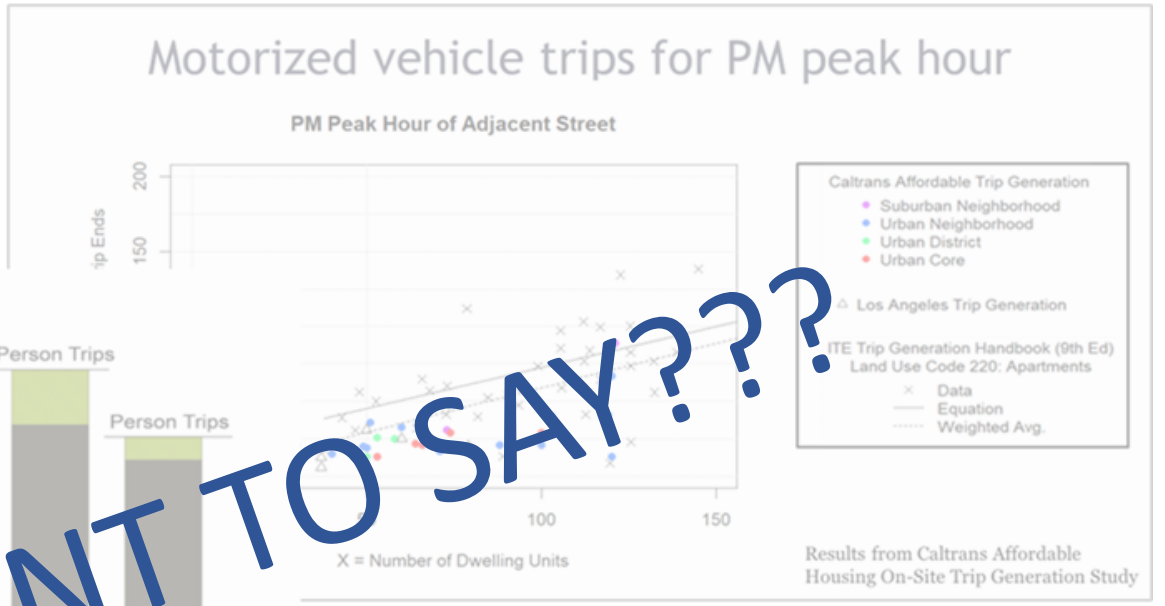
Susan Kirtley, Prof.
Dir. Of Comic Studies
Portland State U.

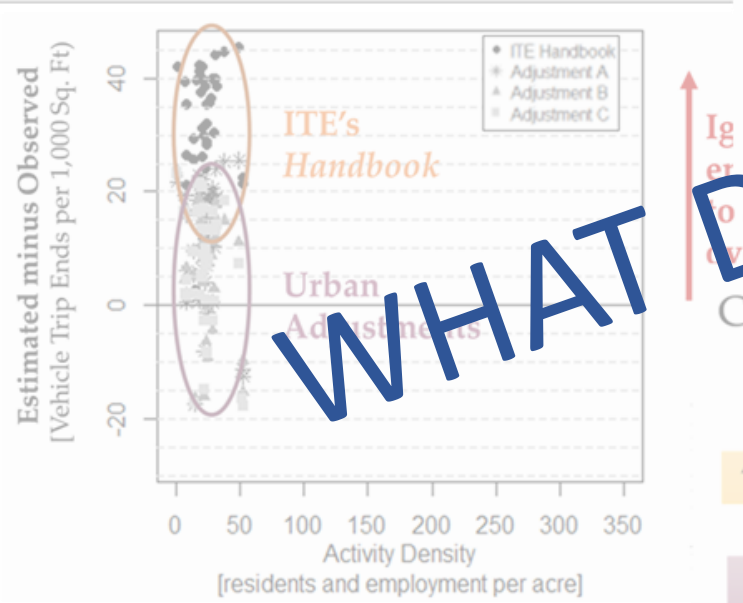
Ryan Alexander-Tanner, Comic Artist/Illustrator
https://www.ohyesverynice.com/

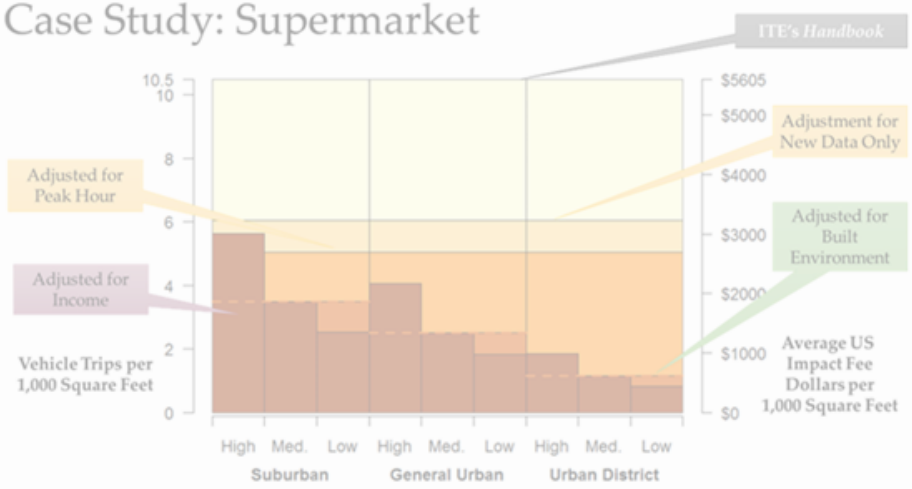
Hi, I'm going to bring these ideas to life with great illustrations!

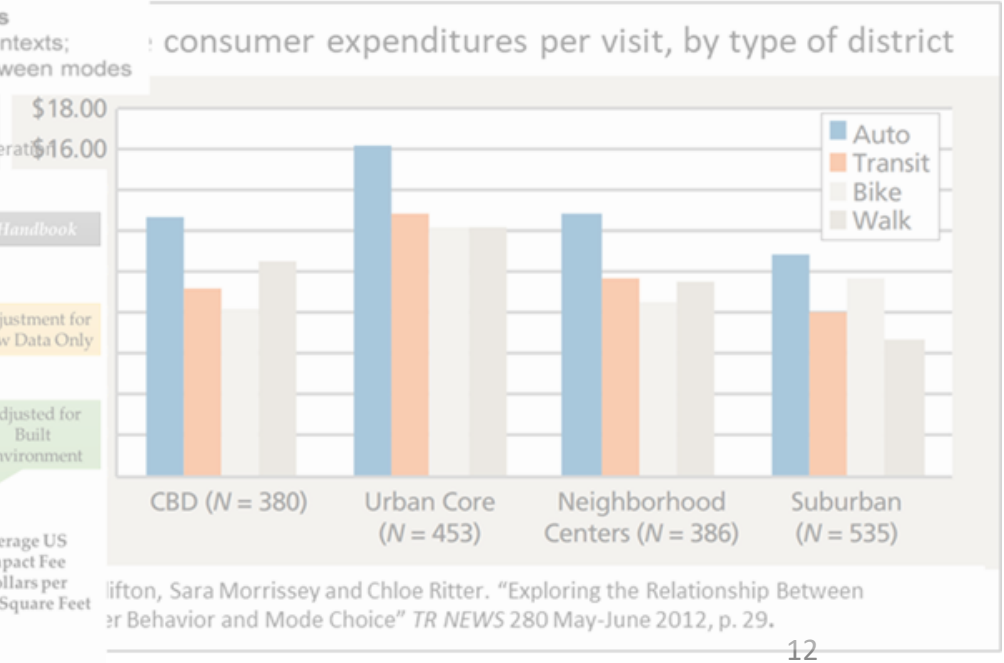
Joaquin Golez, Grad. Student
Art
Portland State U.





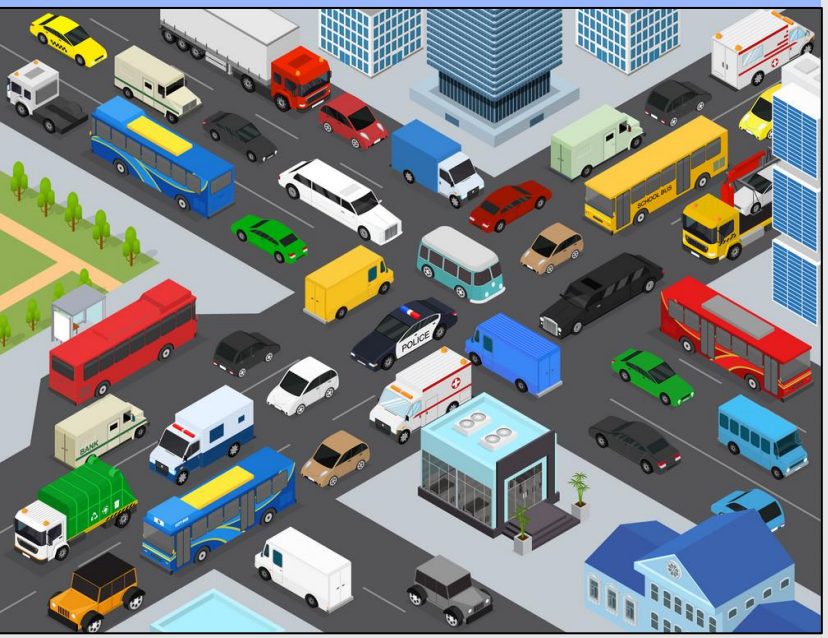


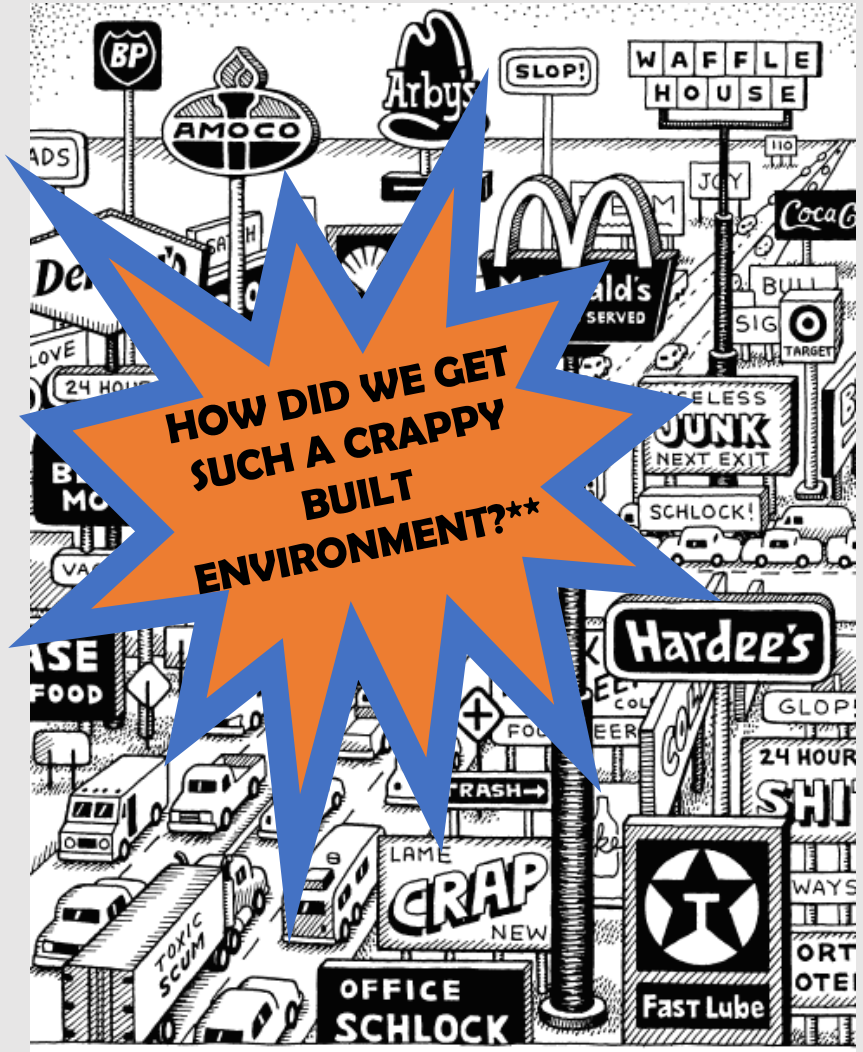




WHAT DO WE WANT TO SAY???

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE CAR
A HISTORY





**Title subject to change

HOW DO WE GET THERE FROM HERE?

TRANSPORTATION STORIES

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE CAR

p1: Invention of the car, establish what the landscape looks like at that time

p2: Roughly 1900-WWII era, how car impacts land development

p3: Methods to plan for automobility developed, including ITE's Trip Generation and TIAs

p4: Site planning with tools

p5: Expose the flaws in this process. What isn't working and why?

p6: What can we do to fix this?

HOW DID WE GET SUCH A CRAPPY BUILT ENVIRONMENT?

p1: At the site level, many aspects are not amenable to walking, cycling, or taking transit

p2: Critique of automobile-oriented development

P3-4: Discuss the planning processes (TIAs), requirements/polices, and methods/data (Trip Gen, LOS) that contribute to this

P5-6: Present alternative ways of thinking that focus on people first

HOW DO WE GET THERE FROM HERE?

p1: Introduce 4 perspectives on a new multifamily housing building

p2: Present various features of this building that are attempts to address automobile dependency, equity, and environment

P3-4: The 4 people talk about what they like and what works, but where it still falls short of meeting its goals

p5: Changes are a move in the right direction but will take time. What to do in the meantime?

p6: How can people become more involve in the process, advocating for what they want but also opening to other points of view?

Panel by Panel Narrative and Dialogue

How do we tell this story? What is the point of each panel?

Page 1, Panel 1

Question—Who is speaking? Is this from Kelly or Kristi's point of view or an unnamed narrator? Who is this I? Or do we go with third person? It feels a bit weird to me to have an "I" that isn't a character we identify. If we maintain final sequence on page 7 as a conversation between Kelly and Kristi, I think we need to introduce them somehow.

Possible narrative text:
I've been stranded at this intersection for what feels like forever with no safe or easy way to cross. Cars honk and move in all directions, a constant stream of dangerous chaos. I wait, lost and invisible, wondering…What happened to **people**? Why is it **all about cars**?

(This could easily be rewritten in third person, such as "The lone pedestrian waits, stranded at the intersection…" or even "Kelly waits, stranded…"

Page 1, Panel 2

Narrative text: Cars, invented in 1886, were initially playthings for the rich. In 1900, there were only 8,000 operating in the entire US.

Page 2, Panel 3

Narrative text: Launched in 1908, the Model T made cars more affordable for the average American.

Page 2, Panel 4

Narrative text: Cars quickly skyrocketed in popularity and by 1920 there were 8 million cars on the roads. Traffic overwhelmed the streets.

Thumbnail Sketches with Dialogue & Narrative

Testing and Validation: Technical Advisory Committee

Faculty and Practitioners

Compensated with a print comic

Questions:

- Are we technically accurate?
- Are we communicating the essentials?
- Is it clear and easy to understand?
- Did they enjoy it?

Testing and Validation: Community Advisory Committee

Portland, OR and Tucson, AZ

Compensated for their time

Questions:

- Does it make sense?
- Is the language (English & Spanish) free of jargon & easy to understand?
- Do they see themselves in the story?
- Did they enjoy it?

Workshop and Course

In Fall 2022, we will host a one-day workshop

- Involve students and faculty
- Comics as a communication & engagement tool
- “Changing the Narrative Around Student Homelessness through Collaborative Comics”, Kacy McKinney

Undergraduate and graduate course

- Interdisciplinary
- Comic studies + Urban studies & Planning

Photo by Christina Tan

Some Things I Have Learned

We academics communicate with nuance, complexity, caveats, and…..confusion!

I know what you are thinking…"you are just learning this now???"

Distilling our research into a few points is hard.

But, storytelling makes our work more compelling.

And, images and dialogue are a way to have nuance, complexity, caveats.

Some Things I Have Learned

Interdisciplinary work is challenging….

…..but rewarding

This couldn't be completed if any member of the team was not included.

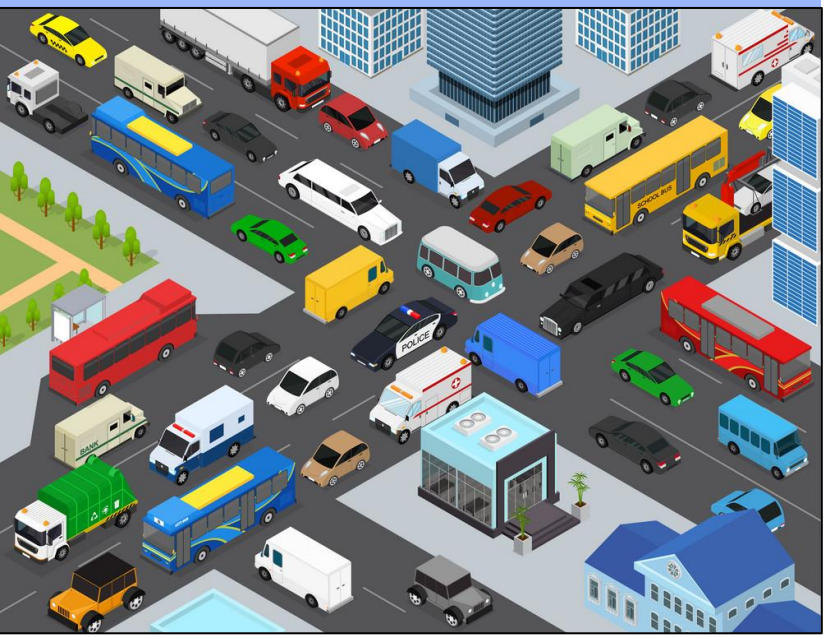
Some Things I Have Learned

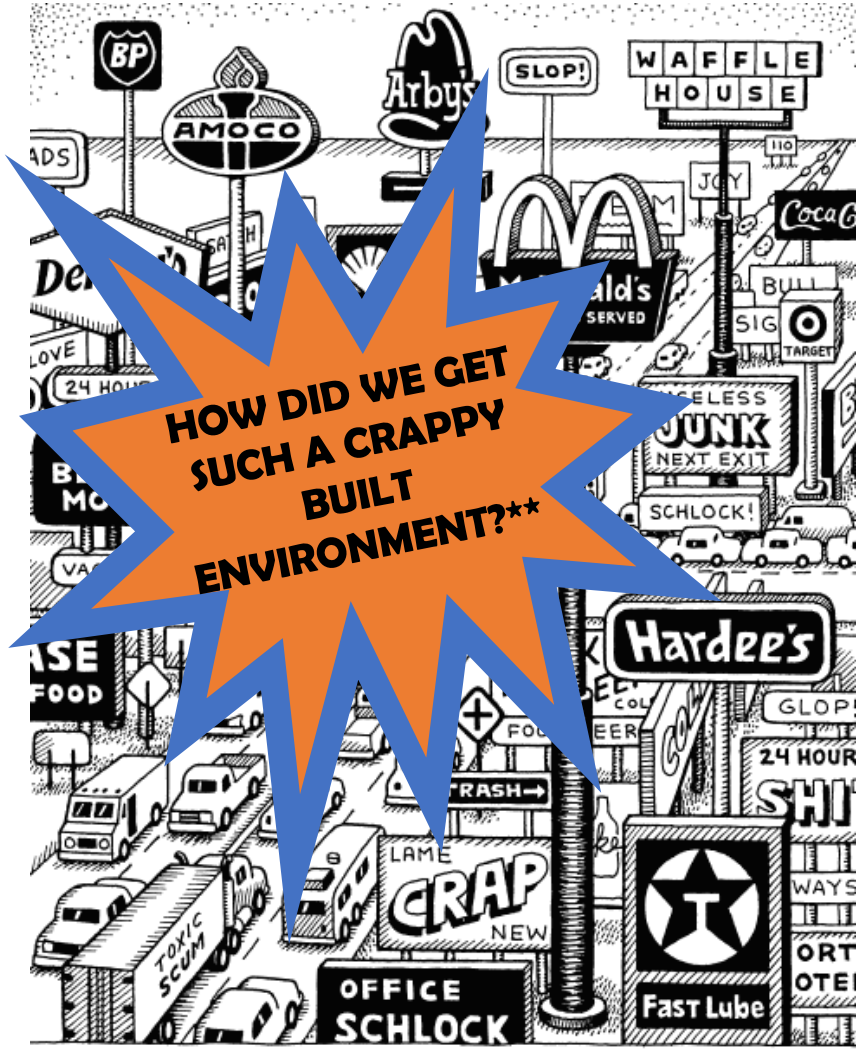
I'm hooked!

Let's Collaborate!

COMING FALL 2022

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE CAR
A HISTORY





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