

Curb Enthusiasm Episode 1 Transcript

00;00;00;00 - 00;00;09;27

Emily Weidenhof

Welcome to Curb Enthusiasm, a podcast by the New York City Department of Transportation. My name is Emily Weidenhof, assistant commissioner of Public Realm,

00;00;10;00 - 00;00;14;29

Natasha Bartley

and my name is Natasha Bartley, director of administration for the Office of Livable Streets.

00;00;15;02 - 00;00;28;02

Emily Weidenhof

This podcast is focused on urban planning and transportation issues at the local, national and international level. We feature guests who discuss the most consequential work happening in transportation across the globe.

00;00;28;05 - 00;00;33;26

Natasha Bartley

Our first guest is Polly Trottenberg, U.S. D.O.T. Deputy Secretary of Transportation.

00;00;33;28 - 00;00;45;20

Emily Weidenhof

Today, Polly reflects on her career as New York City D.O.T. commissioner, shares insight about her work at the federal level, and gives advice to future transportation professionals.

00;00;45;22 - 00;00;56;00

Emily Weidenhof

So we are super excited today to welcome U.S. D.O.T. Deputy Secretary of Transportation Polly Trottenberg. Welcome back to 55 Water!

00;00;56;03 - 00;00;56;16

Polly Trottenberg

Thank you.

00;00;56;17 - 00;01;09;21

Emily Weidenhof

I have to say, every time you're here, it always trickles down. You know, there's always this, like, buzz and excitement. Definitely a lot of love and appreciation for you across the agency. And we're excited. Really excited when you're here.

00;01;09;27 - 00;01;12;16

Polly Trottenberg

Thanks. Thanks, Emily and Natasha. Great to see you guys again.

00;01;12;16 - 00;01;13;16

Natasha Bartley

Oh, thank you. Thank you.

00;01;13;16 - 00;01;15;09

Polly Trottenberg

We've all spent some time together in the trenches.

00;01;15;10 - 00;01;16;15

Natasha Bartley

Yes, yes.

00;01;16;18 - 00;01;33;28

Emily Weidenhof

Want to talk a little bit about the climate crisis. The Biden administration has really focused on the climate crisis, especially what the transportation sector can do. So really curious about your perspective in terms of solutions to what is a very complex set of issues.

00;01;34;02 - 00;02;03;27

Polly Trottenberg

Yeah. As we as we endure yet another one of the hottest record-breaking summers and wildfires and floods and all the rest of it. Climate change is real. And, you know, it's interesting, one thing, you know, Secretary Buttigieg likes to say is, you know, transportation, at least in the United States, is the biggest source of carbon emissions. Biggest source of the problem, so to speak, but therefore can potentially be the biggest source of the solution, which I think is a very inspirational way to look at it.

00;02;03;28 - 00;02;37;14

Polly Trottenberg

And again, this administration is really committed to tackling climate change. That is not always easy, particularly at the national level, there is a lot of lively debate and dissension about what we do. But we are focused, I think, on a bunch of things in the transportation sector that make a huge difference. First of all, record breaking investments in transit and rail and providing people with options, record breaking investments in roadway safety projects and walking and biking projects, we are building out a national EV charging network.

00;02;37;16 - 00;02;57;16

Polly Trottenberg

It's going in fits and starts, but you know the work, the work has actually progressed better sometimes I think than you would know from reading the headlines. We have already doubled the number of publicly available chargers that are out there since the president came to office. We're on track to keep building those out. It's another piece of the puzzle, every single one of these builds together.

00;02;57;18 - 00;03;18;19

Polly Trottenberg

But one thing that I have also realized is that transportation is not going to solve climate alone. And one thing our agency did working with HUD, Housing and Urban Development and EPA is put together more of a holistic transportation decarbonization plan, which is particularly looking at the piece that we also know we need to focus on, which is land use and housing.

00;03;18;21 - 00;03;44;10

Polly Trottenberg

You have to do that together with transportation. And look, New York is a place obviously, where you have a lot of density and a great mass transit network for big parts of the city. In other parts of the country, that's a much bigger challenge. A lot of other parts of the country, you know, put together much more auto centric configurations, and sort of come back and try and find ways to put in transit to increase density can be a heavy lift, but that is also got to be in the long term, part of the solution.

00;03;44;11 - 00;03;57;03

Emily Weidenhof

Yeah, absolutely. And I think we see that a lot in our work with city planning that the more we work together with land use and transportation, the stronger the outcomes we can actually leverage.

00;03;57;06 - 00;04;24;19

Polly Trottenberg

Yeah, I mean, one thing that's more challenging at the federal level, you know, each agency like Department of Transportation or HUD or EPA or Department of Energy has very separate congressional authorizations and mandates and funding streams, and it can be very stovepiped. But one thing we've gotten to do is create a joint Office of Energy and Transportation. You know, in previous years, Department of Transportation, Department of Energy didn't actually work as closely together as you might think.

00;04;24;19 - 00;04;44;13

Polly Trottenberg

But now, you know, in an era where we're trying to decarbonize the transportation sector, we are joined hand-in-glove. We work together every day, you know, to implement the EV charging network, but just in a whole bunch of other ways, too. And it's been an incredible partnership. So going forward, I think when people ask "what do you think you'd want to go back and talk to Congress about?"

00;04;44;14 - 00;04;59;24

Polly Trottenberg

I think continuing to encourage closer relationships between D.O.T. and Energy, between D.O.T. and HUD. Letting us combine some of our dollars in some of our programs and really work more closely together. I mean, that's, I think, the long term path for really decarbonizing.

00;04;59;27 - 00;05;06;27

Natasha Bartley

So spill the beans on U.S. D.O.T's top priorities and your proudest accomplishments.

00;05;06;29 - 00;05;19;03

Polly Trottenberg

All right. Well, obviously was just here in New York with the governor and Senator Schumer and a whole group of folks celebrating putting all the federal funding together to do the Hudson River tunnel.

00;05;19;05 - 00;05;19;15

Natasha Bartley

Oh!

00;05;19;15 - 00;05;37;15

Polly Trottenberg

That is a huge, exciting project, one that will, I think, benefit us, our kids and our grandkids. probably one of our most exciting projects, one that I have been on and off had some hand in for like almost a couple decades now, so really amazing to see it come to fruition.

00;05;37;15 - 00;06;07;10

Polly Trottenberg

But in addition to that, as you guys know, we have the privilege of implementing the largest transportation bill probably ever in American history and having the chance to fund all kinds of amazing projects all over the country, including a bunch here in New York City, some right here with New York City D.O.T., you know, particularly one program that I think has captured everybody's imagination is reconnecting communities, which is going back and looking at those legacy highways from the interstate era.

00;06;07;10 - 00;06;31;11

Polly Trottenberg

There are a couple big ones here in New York City. BQE, one that I know well, Cross Bronx, you know, obviously highways that rip communities apart. and it's interesting, right? New York, you're not alone. Like I can see from the national perspective, there's almost not a city in the United States of any size that didn't have a highway that was sort of put through the middle of some neighborhoods, often low-income neighborhoods, neighborhoods of color.

00;06;31;13 - 00;06;54;13

Polly Trottenberg

There's now an estimation that as many as 1.5 million people were displaced in the interstate era. And now we have a program to try and start to figure out how we knit those communities back together again, undo that legacy. and it's very challenging, as I know from my time here in New York, once you build these big highways, it's easier said than done to just figure out what comes next.

00;06;54;13 - 00;07;05;27

Polly Trottenberg

But it's incredibly exciting work that we're doing all over the country, and we're doing it really in a very grassroots way. Getting ideas from local communities. And it's just been amazing.

00;07;05;29 - 00;07;25;07

Emily Weidenhof

That's fantastic. I feel like it's also exciting because we have so many more tools to talk about when we're reconnecting communities. You know, it used to be just, oh, let's put a big park there, put a park there, put a park there. Now we have EV charging and micro hubs and kind of all these other exciting things that can help communities.

00;07;25;07 - 00;07;31;14

Emily Weidenhof

And maybe from a land use perspective, you know, might be a little bit of a better fit, at least during this transition period.

00;07;31;14 - 00;07;54;20

Polly Trottenberg

No, for sure. I mean, I think the state of the art in thinking about how we re-envision reconnecting communities, there are just so many amazing ideas on the table. But, you know, there's also some challenges, some communities, you know, there's a famous one, Tulsa, Oklahoma, the famous Greenwood neighborhood, which is notorious as a place where terrible massacre happened over 100 years ago.

00;07;54;23 - 00;08;14;13

Polly Trottenberg

The race massacre and then tragically, after destroying what was known as black, then Black Wall Street, they came in and sort of ran an interstate through the middle of it to finish the job. And now we're helping to work with the local community to envision what next. But, you know, there's not necessarily a shared vision, and there's an understandable concern in a lot of communities.

00;08;14;15 - 00;08;32;07

Polly Trottenberg

We don't want to, let's say, tear the highway down and then the neighborhood just gentrifies. And the people who've been here for generations can't afford to live there. So, you really got to get not only the transportation pieces, right, but the planning, the housing, the economic development. You've got to really have holistic approaches now. And as you say, Emily, with new transportation modes on the table, too.

00;08;32;09 - 00;08;47;25

Natasha Bartley

How do we get the people in those lower income communities recognizing that there is something that is being done to fix some of these things? Because I know sometimes it doesn't trickle down to those communities that have been impacted.

00;08;47;28 - 00;09;10;16

Polly Trottenberg

Yeah, I mean, I have to say I learned a lot of great lessons about that here in New York City. You know, what this agency did with street ambassadors, with finding people who could speak a lot of local languages, who, you know, went to bus stops in places where you could get working people who weren't going to have the time necessarily to come to a town hall meeting or get on Zoom, you know, a lot of that is really meeting people where they are.

00;09;10;19 - 00;09;27;22

Polly Trottenberg

You know, we're trying to encourage that kind of public participation nationally, and we've actually put out a lot of standards, are really trying to hold communities' feet to the fire to do a better job on that. You know, if we're designing these projects and we don't have local voices at the table, then we have not succeeded in our work.

00;09;27;25 - 00;09;50;03

Emily Weidenhof

So curious, drawing again from your experience at New York City D.O.T., roadway safety is fundamental. So very curious how you kind of took some experience and lessons learned and translated it as you went back to the federal level and also started the Safe Streets and Roads for All program.

00;09;50;03 - 00;10;11;14

Polly Trottenberg

Yeah. I mean, obviously having been here when we started Vision Zero in this city, I learned so much from the experience. And, you know, the approach in New York, that very holistic approach: design, education, enforcement (done, I think in a smart, strategic and data driven way), working with, you know, here locally, the City Council and the state legislature.

00;10;11;14 - 00;10;35;08

Polly Trottenberg

Now you just got Sammy's law. Speed limits, speed cameras, you name it, just sort of tackling the problem from every dimension. We've really tried to now do that. I've tried to infuse that in what we do at the federal level. We have a national roadway safety strategy, which tries to pick at every single piece, and things that we particularly can do at the federal level, one of those being vehicle design, which is also a huge piece of safety.

00;10;35;08 - 00;10;59;28

Polly Trottenberg

You know, back in the 70s when we started really mandating seatbelts and started putting in airbags, we saw a tremendous drop in roadway fatalities. We haven't had anything come along

since that has quite given that same impact. And you know, as you all know, for a while we were starting to sort of see nationally roadway fatalities somewhat trend down, not as much as they needed to.

00;11;00;02 - 00;11;23;21

Polly Trottenberg

COVID, they went back up again. And we at the national level were around 43,000 fatalities a year. And you guys, you've heard me say it. I mean, obviously those aren't just numbers, right? It's our family, our friends, our neighbors, our coworkers, our fellow Americans. I am happy to say we are now seeing nationally, at least we've had seven quarters where the fatality numbers have trended down.

00;11;23;21 - 00;11;39;11

Polly Trottenberg

And look, I've learned in this field, you never want to take a victory lap. There's always more work to do. But I do think some of the work that communities are doing all around the country is really making a difference. And Safe Streets for All is a perfect example of that.

00;11;39;14 - 00;12;00;09

Polly Trottenberg

We felt strongly it should be a program, where the dollars are only available to localities, they don't go through the states, and we tried very much to make the program (as much as it can be in the federal context) nimble. Like you didn't have to do a 100-page application. We wanted to really encourage experimentation, you know, really taking the playbook from here in New York, like just get out there with some paint and some delineators and try some things.

00;12;00;09 - 00;12;16;21

Polly Trottenberg

And we've really, it's been great because part of that has really been now there's a whole group of communities all around the country that are doing the planning of this work, and they've sort of formed their own community of practice. Some are very sophisticated, you know, some are doing New York style stuff, some this is brand new work for them.

00;12;16;23 - 00;12;39;04

Polly Trottenberg

And even just for them to start doing some of that data gathering to figure out what's the most dangerous road in my community. Even just starting that process, I think, is really going to be transformative in terms of roadway safety. So, you know, thanks to my time here in New York and obviously working with a lot of other cities, I think they're just, you know, there is a lot of fantastic expertise about how we make our streets safer.

00;12;39;07 - 00;12;41;06

Polly Trottenberg

But a lot of work still to do.

00;12;41;09 - 00;12;43;29

Natasha Bartley

What sparked your fascination with transportation?

00;12;44;04 - 00;13;00;11

Polly Trottenberg

Well, I mean, I've said this before. I mean, it's funny, I went to college here in New York. I went to Barnard, you know, at Columbia University, back in the 80s, which is, you know, very different time in the city's history when the city was really struggling, very high crime. And the subway system was kind of at its low ebb.

00;13;00;11 - 00;13;21;11

Polly Trottenberg

But work was starting to reinvest and renew it. And over the years, it was transformative. It was the start of the city's renaissance. It was quite extraordinary. You know, at that time, like everyone in New York, I read *The Power Broker*, you know, which was a book, I think, for me and many, many other people that just made a huge impression.

00;13;21;17 - 00;13;45;20

Polly Trottenberg

I mean, speaking of reconnecting communities, just to read about, you know, the deep history of what happened here in New York, you know, what did happen with the BQE and the Cross Bronx, the neighborhoods that were, you know, basically destroyed in the process, the disinvestment in mass transit and just realizing that history and again, it didn't just play out in New York there versions of that in cities all over the country, you know, and how do we turn that around?

00;13;45;20 - 00;14;10;13

Polly Trottenberg

And, you know, it is fun now to be part of an administration that is really affirmative, fully committed to turning that around, is affirmatively committed to equity and transportation and is looking to tackle climate change. That is, you know, that is an administration that's working closely with a lot of cities, but also with rural communities and tribal communities really trying to get, I think, the dollars and the expertise down on the ground.

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Polly Trottenberg

So that was sort of for me, what got me interested in it. And I've lucky, I mean, I've had a wonderful career. I got to work on Capitol Hill for many years. I was with one of my old bosses just recently, Senator Schumer again, for the gateway announcement. And I worked also for Senator Moynihan, did a lot of transportation for them, and then was at U.S. D.O.T. during the Obama administration.

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Polly Trottenberg

And then obviously, I got the dream job of all dream jobs, to come here and be commissioner for seven years, which was an amazing, incredible, life changing experience. I mean, I will say this, you all know this because here you are. You know, obviously the fun of being at the local level is you see your work every day and you are so close to the people it impacts like for better or for worse, you know, sometimes they love you and sometimes not so much.

00;14;53;13 - 00;15;12;24

Polly Trottenberg

But you know, there's nothing like that. but then obviously work for Secretary Buttigieg, who's a wonderful secretary and work for a president who- he really loves infrastructure. I mean, it's a joke, they call him Amtrak Joe, but he really is. he loves it and gets it in a way that I think is pretty uncommon.

00;15;12;24 - 00;15;35;16

Polly Trottenberg

And, you know, in D.O.T., in the Obama years, we were an important agency. But now, particularly given all the resources of the bipartisan infrastructure law, we are really very front and center in this administration. and, you know, getting to help fund projects in every corner of the country. And that's pretty magical. I'll mention just one other really wonderful career thing I got to do.

00;15;35;19 - 00;16;00;23

Polly Trottenberg

Unexpected but incredible. Last year I had the chance. We had the administrator of, the F.A.A. left somewhat quickly, and I had the opportunity to fill in as acting administrator. It was an incredible experience. People often don't realize that the F.A.A., you don't always think that much of, you sort of take it for granted, like you do for a lot of things that happen at the city level.

00;16;00;25 - 00;16;23;16

Polly Trottenberg

The F.A.A. runs the largest complex, 24/7 safety critical operation in the federal government, which means maybe in the world. you know, if you think about the breadth and the scope of all the towers and tracons and radars and facilities that run the air traffic control system around the whole country, and, by the way, connect with air traffic control systems all around the world.

00;16;23;18 - 00;16;44;10

Polly Trottenberg

It's an incredible system. And it was funny coming from city government. I think it gave me a kind of an outsider's perspective, part of the outsider's perspective being we have this massive, massive set of capital assets and we're not investing as we should. You know, the F.A.A. doesn't have a 10-year capital plan, like New York City D.O.T. did.

00;16;44;10 - 00;17;03;25

Polly Trottenberg

So I've become a big advocate of making sure that that agency has the resources and the financial certainty, which is more challenging at the federal level, to maintain and modernize this incredible aviation system, which is, you know, responsible for a decent chunk of our country's GDP and, you know, millions of jobs.

00;17;03;27 - 00;17;09;18

Natasha Bartley

Could you share your experiences navigating through what is traditionally seen as a male dominated field?

00;17;09;19 - 00;17;35;16

Polly Trottenberg

Yes. Well, you guys may have your own thoughts on that question. you know, it's an interesting thing. I think this agency, to me is an interesting example of how the field has changed over the years. You know for many, many, many decades, transportation leaders were often engineers. And, you know, for many, many decades, women weren't really particularly encouraged to be engineers, by the way, particularly women of color, at least of all.

00;17;35;16 - 00;18;02;20

Polly Trottenberg

Yeah. You know, at a certain point, it started really with Iris Weinshall and then Janette Sadik-Khan and then me, sort of their became a new model of what a transportation leader could look like. Could be someone who maybe had a broader sort of set of different types of skills political skills, planning skills, budgetary knowledge, you know, and I think that coincided with sort of transportation becoming less about just an engineering discipline and more, again, about the things we're talking about.

00;18;02;27 - 00;18;32;28

Polly Trottenberg

How do you bring the community in? How a new generation wants to have a multimodal experience, how technology started to become important, and how inherently political this discipline is. So, I think it has become a field that's definitely changing and transforming. And I think opening more doors and more women are going into traditional disciplines like engineering, etc. My theory on it is come in and be that role model and particularly, you know, help women reach their potential.

00;18;33;00 - 00;18;48;17

Polly Trottenberg

I can even think of a couple of them here and maybe in some of my other roles where an important job opened up and the woman who's clearly the right person for the job would be hesitating. I'm not sure I have all the qualifications, you know.

00;18;48;17 - 00;18;49;11

Natasha Bartley

Yes, we do that a lot.

00;18;49;11 - 00;18;57;25

Polly Trottenberg

We do. And I feel like it's sort of upon us personally to be like, you can do it, apply for the job, you're going to be great.

00;18;57;25 - 00;19;00;12

Polly Trottenberg

And by the way, every time I've done that, they're always great.

00;19;00;19 - 00;19;01;01

Natasha Bartley

Okay.

00;19;01;01 - 00;19;02;10

Polly Trottenberg

You know, it's interesting.

00;19;02;11 - 00;19;03;10

Natasha Bartley

Good advice, good advice.

00;19;03;12 - 00;19;26;16

Polly Trottenberg

It's good advice. And by the way, I haven't even always taken it myself. So, it's easy advice to dish out, right? We don't always take it ourselves. But just here's an interesting analogy. You know, there are much fewer women in office than men. Fewer women run than men. But when they run, they're more likely to win. So it's getting over that hurdle.

00;19;26;18 - 00;19;40;23

Polly Trottenberg

You know, and that's not just true in transportation. I mean, that's true in general, but in transportation, it's getting over those hurdles. And, look, I don't know, I'm sitting across the table from two very talented women who I'm sure can tell a few stories themselves about making it in this field.

00;19;40;23 - 00;19;43;15

Natasha Bartley

It's good to have a role model to emulate as well.

00;19;43;20 - 00;20;01;19

Polly Trottenberg

I think, you know, and I'll say something about that too. It's funny, I get asked that question, Natasha, like, tell us about your mentors. And I have had some, interestingly enough, the main

mentors in my life have all been men. but for me, I think part of what has really helped me in my career has been my peers.

00;20;01;22 - 00;20;09;07

Polly Trottenberg

It's really been my colleagues, you know, particularly in some cases, my, my women peers. But, you know, when I was a commissioner here, I love spending time with my fellow commissioners.

00;20;09;15 - 00;20;09;25

Natasha Bartley

Okay.

00;20;09;25 - 00;20;23;26

Polly Trottenberg

Now that I'm deputy secretary, I love spending time with my fellow deputies. In some ways, it's people that are kind of going through the same things that you are who can really be, in some ways, your greatest sounding boards and your greatest champions, and sometimes your greatest reality checkers, too.

00;20;23;27 - 00;20;25;28

Natasha Bartley

Okay. Oh good advice.

00;20;25;28 - 00;20;53;21

Emily Weidenhof

Yeah, absolutely. So, I'm going to go back to a little bit what you were explaining about your experience of being at the city and kind of having that local, seeing your change every day scale. You've held really important roles kind of at all different levels of government. And so just curious, your thoughts on the different scale, the different perspective that you got, at kind of each of those levels of government.

00;20;53;21 - 00;21;06;18

Emily Weidenhof

And if there are some kind of additional lessons learned or, you know, what is the context perspective that that has given you that really kind of shapes your, your, your value and your work?

00;21;06;20 - 00;21;28;26

Polly Trottenberg

Yeah, I mean, I think for me, it has been just fantastically useful to have had a bunch of diverse experience: time on Capitol Hill, the honor of running New York City D.O.T., of being on the MTA board, of having been at U.S. D.O.T as assistant secretary and undersecretary and now as deputy secretary. All those different roles can help kind of infuse your thinking.

00;21;28;26 - 00;21;46;28

Polly Trottenberg

I mean, it was funny when I- you may remember this, when I first came here from Washington, you know, there were some urban myths kicking around this place about how things worked in Washington and how you got money or what the M.U.T.C.D required you to do or not do. And it was just feels for me to say, well, wait a minute, it doesn't quite work that way.

00;21;47;00 - 00;22;14;28

Polly Trottenberg

And if we want to get federal dollars, here's some tips on how we might succeed. Likewise, particularly now in this role, I can speak with real authority, having run a big operational agency, you know, I'm thinking, looking over at the Staten Island Ferry to obviously the big, you know, the big inventory of roads and bridges to things like Vision Zero, the work we did during COVID, just, you know, having had that operational experience, because a lot of people in Washington don't have that necessarily.

00;22;14;28 - 00;22;33;12

Polly Trottenberg

And so it's just absolutely invaluable. And again, it sort of provides that, well, here's this thing we're going to tell every state or city to do. And you're like, can I just tell you that's like incredibly difficult, burdensome, complicated thing. Let's think through whether we really want to make folks do that or not.

00;22;33;14 - 00;22;35;00

Emily Weidenhof

Great.

00;22;35;03 - 00;22;54;00

Natasha Bartley

Many of our listeners are engaged in the transportation or urban planning field, and know how difficult it is to take an idea and bring it to fruition. What advice do you have for advocates, or those who work in government to build stakeholder support and marshal the resources needed to take an idea and make it a reality?

00;22;54;02 - 00;23;15;19

Polly Trottenberg

Well, I think you two probably know how to do that as well as I do. I think it's like we've been talking about it's incredibly important to get local voices at the table. And, you know, one thing we always used to talk about, you know, I know when I was here is even when you have your challenging moments in front of community boards and maybe the crowd was not on your side.

00;23;15;19 - 00;23;37;22

Polly Trottenberg

I think in every case, hearing those local voices, those local thoughts always made the projects better. And, you know, again, I think one thing I really learned from my time here and I have tried to bring it to the federal government, is that sense of nimbleness, of experimentation, of

piloting. I mean, that's an incredible way, right? That you can sort of start to get projects in the ground.

00;23;37;22 - 00;23;53;17

Polly Trottenberg

And again, we really thought about that for Safe Roads for All, you know, you don't have to do a massive redesign of every single street. Let's just let's try a couple and let people see what it's like. Yes. Now that said, there are also the big, as we like to call them, the big cathedral projects.

00;23;53;20 - 00;24;14;10

Polly Trottenberg

Gateway is one. I mean, there are all around the country. We're doing high speed rail, we're doing major bridges, we're doing a whole bunch of work on the Northeast Corridor. I mean, there are some big complex projects and they take time to deliver, right? But, you know, their sheer doggedness is always a good ingredient. you know, a talented team that keeps at it.

00;24;14;10 - 00;24;39;28

Polly Trottenberg

And gateway is a great example. It's had a lot of near-death experiences back from when then new Jersey Governor Chris Christie back in 2010 pulled the plug on the project. But people kind of kept at it. And the moment came where you had an administration and a president who are committed to a renaissance in passenger rail. You had an amazing majority leader, Chuck Schumer, two governors, Governor Hochul and Murphy, who have, I think, a wonderful partnership.

00;24;39;28 - 00;24;49;29

Polly Trottenberg

You had dollars on the table because of the bipartisan infrastructure law and because people have been planning and keeping the work going. We were able to meet the moment and make it happen.

00;24;50;01 - 00;24;52;21

Natasha Bartley

I have that actually very serious question. New York centric, related.

00;24;52;21 - 00;24;54;06

Natasha Bartley

Of course.

00;24;54;09 - 00;24;55;04

Natasha Bartley

What is the most annoying breach of subway etiquette that you could tell us?

00;24;59;20 - 00;25;24;26

Polly Trottenberg

That's a that's a dicey question. So when I was here, you all may remember this. There was it's a perennial debate about whether people should eat in the subway. And it's funny, by the way, in D.C., people don't eat in the subways. That said, I remember actually, at that time, Mayor de Blasio, I think, made a forceful case that, you know, for people who live in, let's say, sort of far flung corners of the city, working people have to commute in, they have to grab breakfast on the train.

00;25;24;26 - 00;25;40;13

Polly Trottenberg

And I felt like that was that was a that was a fair point to make. So I think subway etiquette, though, and the joke is like, if you have to eat a sandwich or something on the subway, that's fine. But like if you're bringing like a sprawling Indian meal that flies to every corner of the train, as I have seen many times, that is definitely a breach of subway etiquette.

00;25;40;15 - 00;25;41;13

Natasha Bartley

That was one of mine.

00;25;41;20 - 00;25;43;28

Natasha Bartley

If you're going to eat on the train, you got to keep it contained.

00;25;43;28 - 00;25;45;08

Natasha Bartley

Yes, yes.

00;25;45;11 - 00;25;57;04

Emily Weidenhof

All right. And finally, one question that we ask every guest, in thinking about the future of transportation, what is something that you are most enthusiastic about?

00;25;57;06 - 00;26;22;21

Polly Trottenberg

Yeah. The younger generation. I mean, I think the thing that I love about this field is you can really see generationally how much it's changed, you know, from, you know, my generation more kind of auto centric and, you know, maybe not necessarily that embracing of new technologies to generations who, you know, they view transportation as a service. They're ready to hop on a bike, a scooter, you know, that they don't.

00;26;22;29 - 00;26;44;27

Polly Trottenberg

They have a whole different relationship to how transportation is in their life. They're also more climate conscious and more tech savvy. And that, I think, is just changing the field in really exciting, amazing way. So it's fun. I am a big believer in the workplace. It is great to have the different generations, and all of them bring like incredible strengths and perspectives.

00;26;44;27 - 00;26;58;01

Polly Trottenberg

But the younger generation and transportation is really amazing. I think you guys are going to transform the field. But I would just say in general, I mean, one thing I also just like about transportation, it's a cliché to say, but it's a team sport.

00;26;58;09 - 00;26;59;02

Emily Weidenhof

Yeah.

00;26;59;05 - 00;27;14;20

Polly Trottenberg

You know, it's a field where you need to draw on the talents of a lot of different people. And the fun thing, actually fun thing about here at New York City D.O.T., it's true at the federal level, too. And big agencies, you just have an amazing diversity of people with an amazing diversity of skills and talents and experiences.

00;27;14;20 - 00;27;18;18

Polly Trottenberg

And that's the most fun. And that's where I think, you know, you make the magic happen.

00;27;18;20 - 00;27;20;09

Natasha Bartley

Thank you. Thank you so much.

00;27;20;11 - 00;27;26;10

Emily Weidenhof

Absolutely. Great. Well, thank you so much for your time and your leadership. really appreciate it.

00;27;26;10 - 00;27;30;29

Polly Trottenberg

All right. Well, Emily, Natasha, thank you guys. Good interview and thanks for all you're doing for New York City.

00;27;31;02 - 00;27;34;02

Natasha Bartley

Thanks!

00;27;34;04 - 00;28;02;17

Ydanis Rodriguez

Hi. My name is Ydanis Rodriguez, commissioner of the New York City Department of Transportation. Thank you for listening to Curb Enthusiasm by New York City D.O.T. This episode was produced by Michael Santos with video support from Sigurjon Gudjonsson, Juan Vega, and

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Ydanis Rodriguez

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