

John M. Lieswyn, PTP

This month's featured ITE member, John M. Lieswyn, PTP, shares his unique perspective as a transportation professional who is also a former American professional road bicycle racer. John, currently a senior transportation planner at ViaStrada Ltd. in New Zealand, has worked on two continents to improve roads for all users, with broad experience in public transport and pedestrian and bicycle planning and design.

ITE JOURNAL: What led you to pursue a career in transportation?

JOHN M. LIESWYN: As the son of a Dutch globe-trotting civil engineer, I grew up in varied locales from Caracas, Venezuela to Jakarta, Indonesia. Expatriate kids didn't ride bikes. On one trip to visit extended family in Utrecht, Netherlands, I was allowed to go on a solo ride, and the feeling of freedom sparked my interest in cycling. I won two U.S. national time trial titles (1991 and 2004) during an international racing career spanning two decades. I blogged on *CyclingNews* about the life of a racer, weaving in my observations of land use and transportation. I was especially intrigued by the influence of road design on behavior. For example, intermediate width lanes encourage motorists to attempt unsafe overtaking of people cycling. In 2005, my wife and I moved to New Zealand, where I took a short-term transportation planning role with the Palmerston North City Council. I authored the city's first bus stop guideline and inventoried more than 500 bus stops—in the process discovering a passion for improving our built environment for all road users. To strengthen my knowledge, I obtained my masters of engineering in transportation from the University of Canterbury.

ITEJ: What experience from New Zealand did you bring to the United States, and vice versa?

JL: In New Zealand I learned to appreciate the difficulties that mobility-impaired pedestrians face every day. Working among young and able-bodied planners and engineers in California, USA, I tried to constantly improve awareness of accessibility, from the font size used in our

documents to traffic signal call buttons and path surface crossfall. In the United States, I learned about the Complete Streets philosophy. Rather than a competition over space between modes, Complete Streets reframes change with ideas like providing choice, improving livability, and providing economically vibrant spaces for social exchange. I'm keen to bring this back to New Zealand. If there was only one thing I could import to New Zealand from the United States, it would be the priority that pedestrians are accorded in crossing at unsignalized intersections. We desperately need a legislative and cultural shift to support our aspirations towards a more pedestrian-friendly country.

In both countries I could see the impact of focusing active transportation investment at a level that helps achieve critical mass, such as the Coachella Valley's \$77M USD CV Link pathway in Southern California or New Zealand's \$333M NZD Urban Cycleways Programme. These inspirational commitments help create the conditions for paradigm shifts in urban mobility. Most people intuitively grasp the rationale for road building for cars, but we have to create and maintain a "social license to operate" if we want to reallocate space while at the same time avoiding "bike-lash."

ITEJ: How did you become involved in ITE?

JL: Professional engineers and certified urban planners have a reasonably clear cut educational and career path to follow, but when I completed my studies, I was unsure of the next steps. ITE's website directed me to the Professional Transportation Planner (PTP) certification available through the Transportation Professional Certification



Board Inc. Studying for the PTP exam broadened my understanding of where transportation planners fit within a holistic approach to the built environment. I have also found ITE's continuing professional development resources to be invaluable.

ITEJ: How can the Institution of Professional Engineers New Zealand (IPENZ) and ITE work together for more international collaboration?

JL: We have much to learn from one another. New Zealand is a leader in many areas including the business case approach to transport investment, economic evaluation methods, road safety initiatives such as the Crash Analysis System, and asset management practices and technology.

The United States has organizations such as National Complete Streets Coalition, PeopleForBikes (and the Green Lane Project), National Center for Safe Routes to School, and many more doing incredible work.

Although we drive on the opposite sides of the road and use different terminology and spelling, we have a lot more in common than one would think. At least in terms of European influence, both countries are relatively young and have largely developed around automobility. As members of the professional bodies for our field in each country, we can do more to share successful tools and techniques. As an affiliate member of the IPENZ Transportation Group and a member of ITE who has worked in the field in both countries, I'm looking forward to helping cross-pollinate! **ITEJ**