

Law, Engineering, and the
American Right-of-Way

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Imagining a More Just Street

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PREFACE

This book is a road map of sorts. It traces evolving ideas about a fundamental element in our everyday lives: the street. And it provides a guide to exploring the roadway, not merely as a route to other places, but as a place unto itself. As the city has a geography, so too does the public street.

Like many good journeys, this book is motivated by curiosity and questions. These are highly personal for me, but shared by many. The geographically minded can't help ask: Why do places look and function the way they do? The street is a social scientific question. Pedestrians and cyclists struggle to comprehend: What ought to be our fair share of the road? The street is a question of rights. As community leaders and planners—seeking efficiency, equity, and sustainability—we ask: What would make a better street? This is a question of fairness. The roadway is a central thread which literally and figuratively connects these critical inquiries.

But the street, and dominant thinking surrounding it, have not always been very welcoming places for such questions. When I first came to geography, transportation was almost exclusively the domain of quantitative modelers. And when I first became involved in planning, the street was the (mostly) uncontested space of cars and civil engineers. Two decades later, things are changing. Fortunately, the street is increasingly safe for more diverse forms of thought and mobility. I'm so happy now to be part of both.

There are few greater satisfactions than collaboratively engaging these conceptual and practical challenges. I am grateful to have explored these with diverse mentors, colleagues, and students in geography and planning. It has been an honor to share the street with fellow pedestrians and cyclists,

and advocate for our rightful place. There is hardly any greater honor than working with fellow citizens and community leaders, and making tangible progress one crosswalk or bike lane at a time. And, finally, I cannot overestimate my gratitude to Kathleen, Eleanor, and Vivian for cheering me on.

The everyday roadway is a mundane space, but the questions it begs are among the most important we face as individuals and society. This book is a modest yet integrated attempt to address them, helping diverse readers reimagine the American street in theory and practice. And I hope it serves as something of a handbook for not only questioning the assumptions and policies that produce everyday roadways, but also planning better alternatives for the future. It's time for us to rethink *and* remake the street.

Oxford, OH

David Prytherch

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