



Our roadways of the future: Let's focus on "people instead of steel"

July 31, 2012

By [Kirk Heinze](#)

[Scott Clein](#) is a future-looking civil engineer with a sophisticated taste for history and poetry.

Clein, president and partner of southeast Michigan-based [Giffels-Webster Engineers](#), recently presented a paper, [The Road Less Travelled: America's Roadways in the 21st Century](#), at a national conference in Oregon. Drawing on Robert Frost's central theme, Clein believes the development of U.S. roadways is at a critical point of divergence.

We can continue to create streets and highways that are designed to enhance vehicular mobility or we can make a greater societal commitment to access: to roadways that put pedestrian and cyclist interests ahead of cars and trucks, i.e., that "focus on people instead of steel."

Because we have not yet made that commitment, Clein further contends, "we have missed out on huge opportunities to improve the economic vitality of our communities while simultaneously improving overall quality of life." In short, we are missing an opportunity to make our communities more sustainable.

His paper is a compelling read because Clein masterfully blends his technical observations with a keen sense of American history and culture, tracing our fixation on mobility from Frederick Jackson Turner's *The Significance of the Frontier in American History* to Jack Kerouac to the Woodward Avenue "Dream Cruise." Now, it is time to change that paradigm, Clein asserts, and to begin thinking in terms of green spaces, bike paths, pedestrian walkways and other dimensions of the "[Complete Streets](#)" ethos.

"Transportation engineers and officials could say no to the idea of Complete Streets by clinging to the paradigms of the 19th and 20th centuries. However, much of the public we are intending to serve would be ignored and major opportunities missed. To [the engineers and officials] I plead that this is a singular opportunity to dismantle outdated paradigms and demonstrate how proper engineering can protect public safety and improve overall quality of life. It is what engineers are supposed to do, and [it] is the promise of Complete Streets."

Please click on the arrow below to hear my [Greening of the Great Lakes](#) conversation with Clein.

Link to audio clip:

http://www.mlive.com/environment/index.ssf/2012/07/our_roadways_of_the_future_let.html

Please join me for [Greening of the Great Lakes](#) every Sunday at 7 p.m. on [News/Talk 760 WJR](#) and follow the show on [Twitter](#).