**Future of Infrastructure**

**EP TBD MJ Maynard**

**Future of Infrastructure with Jeremy Goldberg**

**Jeremy Goldberg (Host), MJ Maynard (guest)**

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**JEREMY GOLDBERG:** Welcome to the Future of Infrastructure, a series of Public Sector Future episodes featuring the people and projects driving the next generation of infrastructure across the globe. We are pulling back the curtain to show you not just what the most important infrastructure projects are, but more importantly, how public sector leaders are getting them done.

I’m Jeremy Goldberg, Worldwide Director of Critical Infrastructure at Microsoft, and I’m your host for the Future of Infrastructure. I’m so excited to bring you this series of important conversations that puts people back at the center of the discussion during this important moment for global infrastructure.

**JEREMY GOLDBERG:** Today, my guest is MJ Maynard, CEO at the Regional Transportation Commission of Southern Nevada. MJ, welcome to the Future of Infrastructure.

**MJ MAYNARD:** Thanks, Jeremy. Glad to be here.

**JEREMY GOLDBERG:** So first, please briefly introduce yourself to this audience and our global audience.

**MJ MAYNARD:** So, as you mentioned, I’m the chief executive officer here in Las Vegas for the Regional Transportation Commission of Southern Nevada. rA little bit about myself, let’s see. How about this: mom, wife, serious dog lover? I actually grew up in Seattle, Washington –

**JEREMY GOLDBERG:** What kind of dog do you have? What kind of dog?

**MJ MAYNARD:** I have three and a grand-dog.

**MJ MAYNARD:** I’ve got two shelter, sort of mixed breeds. I have a lab and a pit bull. So I’m surrounded by a pack of love. I love it. I love the –I’m not supposed to say out loud that I love dogs more than people, but sometimes I think I do.

I grew up in Seattle and I moved to Las Vegas many years ago to attend college, the hospitality program at UNLV. It was a great program then. Still is.

And, you know, if you’d asked me 16 years ago if I would consider leaving the hotel gaming, the private sector to join the public sector, I think I would have – I would have thought maybe you’d had one too many specialty beverages at a local Las Vegas casino. It wasn’t even something I would even consider.

But really, my path from the – from the private sector to the public sector really happened because of a chance encounter or maybe a chance conversation, timing, and really a deep curiosity that I’ve always had.

And so, that chance encounter took place on early morning gym route. I used to 5 a.m. spin class. I got to know a gentleman by the name of Jacob Snow. He was the general manager for the RTC at the time. Just sometimes you don’t know who you’re talking to as you develop relationships.

When it comes to timing, he was aware that I was probably thinking about changing careers. I worked at the Hard Rock Hotel Casino here in Las Vegas. I’d opened the property, was there for about 12 years. The owner, a single owner, Peter Moore, had decided to sell the property. As an executive, I was really reevaluating, sort of assessing my next steps.

And so, Jacob offered me a job in his organization and this is where the being curious and actually being sort of fearless because at that stage of my career, to change, to think about doing something different was – was a little – it was a little off-putting.

I think as professionals, sometimes we put ourselves in a box, right? I’m an accountant. That’s what I do. That’s what I know. That’s my boundaries. For me, I was a hospitality person. That’s what I know. I’m good at it. That’s what I do and that’s all I can do. And I think that’s where my mindset was. So I was very curious to understand where Jacob saw me in his organization.

**JEREMY GOLDBERG:** You know, Las Vegas, right, is world famous for many things. And people, you know, might know the city really as a tourist attraction, right, but they probably know less about the way the city operates.

So tell us what it’s like to kind of live and work there, because you’ve worked on the – you mentioned you opened the Hard Rock, you know, Hotel and Casino before making this move into public service. So you – you’ve had that trisector athlete in Vegas.

So I’m really interested to know, kind of connect the dots for the audience on that Las Vegas experience and then that move into public service, sort of what the – the general desire was, besides that, a chance connection that has been classic.

**MJ MAYNARD:** And that’s a great question. I think if you ask, you know, Las Vegas, southern Nevada really is a melting pot of people that have moved from somewhere else, and many of us that come to Las Vegas, it’s just supposed to be this sort of moment in time. I was going to get my degree and move on. And, you know, it just sort of sucked me in.

But I also really loved sort of the pick yourselves up from your bootstraps kind of philosophy that I found here in Las Vegas all those years ago. Really, if, you know, what you see on movies and on TV, some of that’s true.

But again, Las Vegas is a now 2.4 million residents. So it was much smaller when I moved here. But it’s grown into a big city. It still, I think, has that wild, wild West mentality, but it is –

And I think for me that, you know, especially the RTC. I don’t remember seeing busses traveling, moving about here in the community. I think it was, you know, I’ll kind of go through, it was very young. We really didn’t become the public transit provider until the early ‘90s.

But what I found, what I loved really about taking the chance to come, to transfer or, you know, from the private sector to the public sector, I was that I came from a family, we didn’t have a lot of money and we couldn’t afford a car, generally speaking. And so, I was one of those young folks that really didn’t have a lot of mobility options.

And I thought, it felt sort of like coming full circle for me that I had a chance to work in this mobility field, really multimodal approach, but with a deep empathy for the folks that – that need other options, if you’ve never been there, if you don’t know what it’s like to – to have to travel longer, farther, in a more difficult manner than folks who have a car, some of those jobs that you may – that others have access to, it’s a little more difficult.

**JEREMY GOLDBERG:** I mean, and what you’ve already touched on, I appreciate you sharing, you know, your personal story here, right, around mobility and transportation. And what you’re talking about is the needs of people, right, your customers, the people here that live in southern Nevada.

And so, I know today you want to talk a bit about this partnership you have with Rekor and it’s really kind of getting into, you know, taking a deep dive into some of this work you’ve done. And this touches on data and AI and a lot of different technology, but this is really about how do we make, you know, I believe, right, roads safer, how do we make things work better for people?

So this is a problem with lots of governments, right, around the world are trying to tackle right now and it’s not easy. So tell us a little bit about this partnership, the overall project and really how it came to be.

**MJ MAYNARD:** So let me provide a little context before we get into that, into the project.

You know, at the RTC, we are not only a public transit provider, we’re also the metropolitan planning organization. We are the roadway funding agency. We are the traffic manager for the region. And we’re also the implementer of the bike share program in downtown Las Vegas. We are really unique. We’re the only agency in the U.S. that houses all those functions under one roof.

So the project that I’m going to talk to you about today, really I’m putting on our traffic manager hat. You know, as I mentioned, I don’t know if I said, you know, 40 – here in Las Vegas, there’s 40-plus million visitors that travel here every year, 2.4 million residents that call southern Nevada home. And for those millions of tourists that travel to Las Vegas, many of them drive here, particularly if they live in Southern California, Arizona and Utah.

And a major freeway is the I-15 corridor that connects Southern California to Las Vegas. And so, this freeway not only brings millions of tourists, but with that, it brings millions, millions of revenue dollars. This freeway corridor is also a major thoroughfare for the transport of commercial goods.

And if you drive the I-15 at any point, day or night, I think you will, you can’t help but notice the extraordinary number of large trucks driving to and from California and actually through our state. So it really is another – this corridor is really another economic vein to the region.

And so, in that particular area of the I-15 that’s near the strip, 300,000 cars travel there daily. So a crash on that, on the I-15 there can not only slower or halt traffic for hours; that’d cause there’s a monetary impact in terms of the way that commerce is moved. Those major delays really impact both the residents in terms of travel that way.

So as a traffic manager, we partner with the Nevada Department of Transportation or NDOT, with the Nevada State Police, formerly known as the – the Highway Patrol. And we all work together to manage traffic and incidents on our freeway system.

So here’s that’s the context. The project, and Rekor absolutely is the company today, but back in the day it was Waycare. So Rekor bought Waycare recently. So you’re going to hear we talk a lot about Waycare, but they are one of the same.

So it’s really interesting, Waycare came to us back in the day, a small startup from Israel, and they said, “Hey, hey, RTC, you have a problem and we think we have a solution.”

And they were correct, we had a problem in terms of safety and congestion and how it was impacting our region, both as a hospitality economic engine, but safety for folks that were just living here.

And so, what they were bringing to the table was technology. Managing traffic today in many regions is still sort of done manually. And they were bringing this platform that uses artificial intelligence, predictive analytics, historical data, and for the first time, real-time, crowdsourced information, and all of that, you know, put that in the secret sauce, shake it up, all of that really have the ability to enhance safety and reduce congestion.

But what we found so interesting was the software, again, all of that combined proactively identifies where – where an incident may occur, which enabled the state police to enhance their presence.

And so, when you drive on the freeway and you see a patrol car, a police car, what do you do? You slow down. And when you slow down, you create a more predictable traffic pattern. So less speeding means less accidents. It means less congestion from those accidents. So certainly that technology had, you know, checked the box. We had a way to potentially ease congestion.

**JEREMY GOLDBERG:** Why do you think or what have you done, right, in terms of like trust building to ensure with the public, right, that, you know, your data is secure, it’s private, it’s being used to help them? Like are there any kind of two or three things that you believe would be useful for people to understand in terms of how you form that trusted partnership with the public, right, who is expecting you to keep them safe, right, and keep things running?

**MJ MAYNARD:** That is a really good question and I think some of that speaks to some of the obstacles that we faced with implementing that platform. You know, data is still that not only buzzword, but it’s a real deal, right? Who owns the data? Who shares the data? Who has access to the data?

But I think what Waycare did really well, they brought a known commodity to the table. So Waze was already a traffic app that was used quite heavily, especially in California. And I actually was not aware of it until they brought it here. But because we weren’t – we public sector work created our own app, hat, you know, maybe from the outside looking in would say, “Hey, government, what do you know about creating a technology piece?”

It was partnering with the private sector who already had the credibility. Waycare brought a lot of credibility. And because we were not introducing this ad holistic, homemade, trust us, we’ll take care of you, I think that that’s one of the reasons that Waze already had a brand and people were used to it.

**JEREMY GOLDBERG:** I’m thinking back and reflecting on my own experience in public service, the cross-agency and cross-jurisdiction in this case, collaboration and partnership that’s required, right? And I mean, this is a perennial challenge for governments.

So I’m interested to hear more, you know, about how this initiative helped that. What’s an example? You touched on it already a little bit with like the state of Nevada and the – and the Highway Patrol of what’s happened in putting this on a practice to improve cross-agency coordination.

**MJ MAYNARD:** In terms of Waycare, Waycare really, at least today and it is part of a – it’s a part of our traffic management center. It really focuses on safety and congestion measures on the freeway system.

And, so we certainly had to, we had to partner with NDOT. We manage their ITS devices. So we manage their, you know, their dynamic message signs, the ramp meters. So we really – and we had to make sure that we absolutely were in, you know, shoulder to shoulder with the Nevada State Police because we co-locate with the Highway Patrol.

You know, back in the day when someone would call 9-1-1, it was almost like shouting across the room to RTC, “Hey, there’s been an accident” and we’d sort of manually go to work. And now we’re expecting the Highway Patrol to give up some of their data, right? We needed access to the 9-1-1 system. I think there was a little pushback at first.

But I will tell you that not only is – you know, as a regional agency, we can’t move the ball unless we collaborate. We don’t have necessarily the sole authority just to do something without collaborating, and I think that really makes us more effective that we are not just at the table alone, that we do partner with, you know, NDOT we do partner with the state police. And yet we manage all the arterials here in southern Nevada. We work on behalf and manage the devices for the county and all the cities here.

So we – really it’s in our DNA. We have to collaborate. And I think, Jeremy, as you said, if you’ve worked in the public sector, it can be really difficult to move any initiative forward unless you have that regional buy-in. And because we are a regional authority, I think that is its key to our success.

**JEREMY GOLDBERG:** Excellent insight and tips here. So when you think about, you know, how should our listeners, people who are implementing similar types of projects approach overcoming some of those issues, like what are some of those challenges and what do you – what would you recommend or highlight for them? What are some – some best practices?

**MJ MAYNARD:** And that’s what I love about the public sector. We share everything.

I mean, really, I think the challenges arose what we both expected and did not expect. And I think we expected there would be some pushback with the staff, right? You have to have buy-in within your own organization.

You know, this was the system that the process that we had in place, many that’s homegrown. You had staff had spent years putting together a program that they were very proud of. And here we’re coming to saying, “Hey, let’s put that process aside and let’s try this new thing, this new technology.” And there was some pushback.

We also had pushback from the private sector. You know, a second, another obstacle that was really apparent. When you have this new technology that is introduced into a world of legacy systems, the public sector is known for, especially in transportation, we’ve got proprietary legacy systems that have not kept pace with the evolution of technology.

And you’re sort of handcuffed, right? You have it’s an expensive system. Your whole, entire process is dependent upon this legacy system.

So we had partners that were actually, I think, somewhat threatened by our introducing, hey, this new kid at the table. And that’s okay. There should be little – they should – you know, if you’re not keeping up, if your business is not evolving, and it makes you little – a little nervous, well, that, maybe that’s probably a good thing.

And so we, I guess I’ll tell you, it has to start with this, the culture within you – within your own organization. And in talking to the CEO of Waycare at the time, one of the reasons they came to the RTC was they knew we had an open door. They knew that we, as a regional agency, we were committed to not only party with the private sector. It’s part of our model. That’s what we do. We have for years now partnered with the private sector. But we were not afraid of not – not a FOMO kind of thing, not a fear of missing out, let’s get that shiny object, but we were really interested in a technology that could improve our operational efficiencies and/or enhance the customer experience. And so they knocked on our door. We answered.

I think the unexpected challenge again was around data and the fact that we needed access to the 9-1-1 system. And I would say that, ask the right questions. There was this, an assumption that they needed access to all the data. Well, that just wasn’t true. They didn’t mean unrestricted access, but they need access. So, again, it’s that staff buy-in. It’s certainly, you know, sometimes you’re going to push people outside their comfort level. That’s okay.

**JEREMY GOLDBERG:** You talk about having an open door, being open to kind of the growth mindset, creative thinking, right, and testing and trying new things out, which, you know, we know, especially at this time and what we’re seeing with infrastructure investment and technology, there’s going to be more and more of that, right? Because we have to make sure that the – the work that we’re doing is future proofed. We got to get this right.

I guess finally, you know, related to this project, I’d really like to hear about, you know, the outcomes and how you approached and your team’s approached measuring the results, you know, of the work and what kinds of positive outcomes, you know, whether you want to talk about the qualitative or kind of data-oriented side of it. What did you actually see from this – from this partnership?

**MJ MAYNARD:** You know, I’m glad that you asked that, because our mantra here at the RTC is, you know, without facts and data, you’re just another person with an opinion. You know, you have to have, especially in a business that doesn’t make money, we still have to have benchmarks. How are we are succeeding?

And for this particular project, we really looked at, were we going to move the needle on our year-over-year metrics or our month-over-month data? Certainly was there an impact or a decrease in the number of crashes occurring? That’s improving congestion, right? That’s part of what we do as a traffic manager.

And then two, did the accident response time improve? And I’ll tell you, the pilot data was impressive. The data showed that the Waycare technology reduced the number of primary crashes by 17% on a portion of the I-15. Additionally, 91% of speeding drivers reduced their speed to below 65 miles per hour, again in that area where that – where we had that – those preventive means, the measures in place, where you saw Highway Patrol.

So since – just so you know, since 2017, we’ve seen an average nine minute faster response time. It’s the response time. Again significant. We – we have tracked since 2017, 35,000 unique incidents.

So prior to Waycare, we relied solely on 9-1-1 calls for the information, captured about 300 crashes every month. Now with the help again of that-real time information, we captured 900 crashes monthly. And this is what’s great about this, same number of staff that we had prior to the implementation.

And then finally, because we had a yearlong pilot, we were able to quantify the results of that pilot. We applied for a federal grant, the Road to Zero, again, with the – with the NDOT, with the state police, and with Waycare. And we were able to deploy what we’re calling strategic traffic management sites. We actually, on the freeway system, built the platforms in visible locations, in conjunction with the coordinated messages on the dynamic signs, you know, “slow your speed, accident head.”

And in that area, because we were able to expand it, we saw an 18% decline in traffic – traffic crashes and a 43% reduction in drivers going above the posted speed limit. So –

**JEREMY GOLDBERG:** Really incredible results.

**MJ MAYNARD:** And one last thing I do want to, you know, include in this is that it’s okay to fail. So when you introduce technology, you have to assume that everything is not going to work out as intended. You certainly have to put together those – those, you know, the – the scopes of work, who’s responsible for what, who’s going to pay for what, it’s got to be very transparent. And who’s responsible for what? That’s a big one.

But if the outcome could include that you fail and you have to let staff know that’s okay, right? It didn’t do what we thought it was going to do, at least in this area, but that’s also part of the success for going forward, because you know what not to do next time around.

**JEREMY GOLDBERG:** One final question that I have, what is one thing that you’ve read or watched or listened to lately that has had an impact on how you think about, you know, this moment in infrastructure and technology and this sort of, you know, this COVID era that we’re building back from?

**MJ MAYNARD:** You know, I think I’m looking at it from – really from my public sector hat that I wear now. This past Christmas, I bought my son a book called *Atomic Habits* by James Clear for a whole ‘nother reason, but I found the concept really intriguing.

I am a big believer in this saying by Confucius, “The man who moves a mountain begins by carrying away small stones.” And I think this book sort of speaks to that, the importance of small habits personally, or in the case of business and the public sector, that the small processes are part of a larger system that eventually becomes building blocks or what he calls, Mr. Clear calls, remarkable results.

It’s really sort of a go slow to go fast approach. So think about it. Technology, it’s easy to become impatient. You know, you experience that fear of missing out and you want to jump right into something new without that sometimes internal ownership of buy-in.

And I think this book suggests or introduces those small, incremental, daily processes within your organization that helps commit to change the culture that, again, will improve your opportunity to continue to invest in technology, which happens to be moving at the speed of light, too, right? It’s still evolving.

So I love his concept that sometimes it is that go slow. It’s those small things that you do consistently every day that provide some of the greatest benefits in the long run.

**JEREMY GOLDBERG:** Well, thank you so much, MJ, really enjoyed our discussion today, really enjoyed learning so much more about Las Vegas, your story, your work. And I know that our audience will as well.

And of course, thank you to our audience. And until next time, this is the Future of Infrastructure. Thank you.

**MJ MAYNARD:** Thanks, Jeremy.

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