



# How to “Get Sh\*t Done” In the Face of Transportation Bureaucracy

By Chris Hamilton - October 14, 2015

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Thank goodness this book is out.

*Start-Up City – Inspiring Private & Public Entrepreneurship, Getting Projects Done, and Having Fun* is sorely needed right now.

Cities are at the forefront of taking on addressing issues at the intersection of demographics, technology, transport, climate, housing, equity, and health, but are largely ill equipped to respond.

Entrepreneur, bureaucracy-shaker, futurist, and now author [Gabe Klein](#) shows us how to make rapid change that will transform cities for the better.

I met Klein back in 2004 when he led the then-fledgling Zipcar operation in Washington, D.C. He was different from others in the transportation space: he had a ponytail, he was passionate, he was unafraid. He didn't take no for an answer. I loved that!

We struck a partnership between Arlington County, Virginia and his company to put carshare vehicles in the public right-of-way, as Klein writes about in *Lesson #6: Bridge the Public-Private Divide*. The easy way he teamed with his company's rival, Flexcar, and coordinated with local government officials made me a fan.

As I watched his career move from Zipcar, to organic food in electric trucks, to leading the departments of transportation in both D.C. and Chicago, I always marveled at the seeming ease with which Klein got shit done (I'm using his term). He innovated and accomplished more in a few years at each place than his predecessors and successors combined could ever hope for. He inspired bureaucracy to action. I always wanted to know: how did he do this?

In his new book, he generously reveals the secrets to his success, much of which is rooted in his start-up private-sector upbringing. Klein engagingly walks us through eight lessons in how to get stuff done:

Lesson #1: Don't Be Afraid to Screw Up and Learn

The desire to avoid failure often leads agencies to repeat well-trodden strategies.

## OPTION OPPORTUNITY

Transportation experts and officials are living through a highly disruptive time. They need to shake things up if they want to be relevant.

Trying new things often yields failure, but with that a teachable moment.

#### Lesson #2: Manage S.M.A.R.T

To Klein, S.M.A.R.T. stands for “Specific, Measurable, Agreed Upon, Realistic, Time-based,” a series of management principles that help establish clear objectives for one’s team.

#### Lesson #3: Where There’s a Will, There’s a Way

Creative, large-scale thinking, a focus on the end goal, and an imagination past doubts and obstacles can yield rapid success for big projects that would otherwise take years.

#### Lesson #4: Sell Your City

Don’t be afraid to market what the city does, including its major accomplishments, and to make otherwise mundane civic commitments fun and engaging for the public (see: [Potholepalooza](#)).

#### Lesson #5: Fund Creatively

Make the team familiar with your budget so everyone bears responsibility, encourage programs to find ways to self-fund their initiatives so that they’re more flexible, and focus more on returns on investment rather than “abstract” costs.

#### Lesson #6: Bridge the Public-Private Divide

Forge solid public-private partnerships by aligning everyone’s incentives, such as profitability and the better service quality that it drives. Klein cites the launch of D.C.’s Capital Bikeshare system as a high point of public-private cooperation.

#### Lesson #7: Prepare for Disruption

Cities should get out ahead of companies disrupting existing business models, and seek to adapt to these new paradigms. Don’t overreact and attempt to control new disruptors, but rather find ways that you can work with them.

## Lesson #8: Drive Change

Autonomous cars could bring a range of benefits to cities in the coming decades, so planners and businesses should think ahead in how to best integrate them into complex metropolitan systems.

Anyone who wants to innovate and create better cities will find these lessons useful.

If you're in the private sector, you'll learn valuable lessons on how to think creatively and align your product or program with the public for success. If you're in the public sector, you'll learn how to cut through red tape, be creative, and use start-up values to move things forward quickly.

Check it out: I guarantee this book will inspire you to get up, go to work and get shit done.

*Start-Up City: Inspiring Private and Public Entrepreneurship, Getting Projects Done, and Having Fun*, by Gabe Klein, is [available through Island Press](#).

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## Authors & Contributions



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**Bill Sell**

October 18th, 2015

The first three lessons: mistakes teach, smart moves, and vision governs – these three like the legs on a stool will support the weight but not without risk of toppling. Each of the three is in tension with the other two. Our fears are too often governed by the short-term. In Milwaukee once the mayor talked up the larger vision, rather than the nuts and bolts of streetcars, the opposition was disarmed.

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Mobility Lab is a research-and-development initiative for "transportation demand management - moving people instead of cars." Based in Arlington, Virginia - which has one of the largest transportation-demand-management programs in the U.S. and removes 45,000 car trips from the county's roads each work day - Mobility Lab seeks solutions, stories, and partnerships from all over the world.

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Arlington County Commuter Services (ACCS) is funded in part by grants from the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) and the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT).

### ACCS Family of Sites

- CommuterPage.com
- CommuterDirect.com
- Arlington Transit – ART
- WalkArlington

- BikeArlington
- Arlington Transportation Partners
- The Commuter Store
- Arlington’s Car-Free Diet
- Mobility Lab
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