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November 19, 2010

SMART: Global Urban Mobility Solutions

In the spring of 2010, Sue Zielinski jumped on an open-air, three-wheeled auto-rickshaw at an intersection in Chennai, India. Squeezed tightly next to two other people, Zielinski clutched her purse and the side bar as the vehicle snaked slowly through the intersection. The light was green, but traffic was not moving. Coughing fiercely from the fumes of a thousand vehicles, a lower-income mother with a baby on her back treaded between the cars, trying to cross the street. The light turned red. A space opened.

With a sickening lurch, the rickshaw accelerated through the intersection at the highest speed possible. After two near-misses with a pedestrian and a stray dog, the rickshaw crossed the intersection and zoomed to Zielinski's destination, only a few blocks away from where she had boarded. Zielinski rummaged in her purse, peering at each note in the darkness, before finally passing a 20 rupee bill to the driver. She stepped out right in front of a cyclist, who swerved to avoid her and let out a yell. She took a quick few steps to safety and let out a sigh. Her throat hurt, her eyes watered, and her mind was swimming with the deafening noise. She would have just walked if there had been a sidewalk.

Two weeks later, in Los Angeles, California, Zielinski honked her horn on the seven-lane highway. As far she could see ahead, behind, and on either side of her, there were automobiles. A wispy gray smog covered the green mountains far ahead. Knowing she still had a two-hour commute ahead of her before arriving at her downtown meeting with city planning officials, Zielinski poked at the radio. Then, she tried to calculate how many cars were stacked on the four-layered cement overpass just ahead of her. Finally, she threw the car gear into *Park*, feeling utterly powerless.

Back in Ann Arbor, Michigan, Zielinski restlessly shuffled the papers on her desk and gazed out her window at the stretch of trees reaching the horizon. It felt good to be home. She had calmly driven to the University of Michigan North Campus, parked in the parking structure just next to her building, and then walking leisurely to the office. Since she lived about five miles away in the downtown area, there were few other ways to get to work, unless she was willing to walk one mile to the public bus stop every morning or have phone meetings instead of face-to-face meetings.

This worried her. Ann Arbor was the quintessential college town, full of greenery, a hip downtown, and a population of only about 100,000 people, but Zielinski imagined what would happen as the city kept growing and the number of cars on the road increased. She thought of her friends still living in the chaos of Chennai and Los Angeles, and shuddered.