

EQUITY

in Transportation Planning

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About this Report

This report is the result of a year-long collaboration between the Healthy Transportation Coalition, guided by the Community Leaders Steering Group (Sally Thomas, Justine Nkurunziza, Marcelo Saavedra-Vargas, Christine Santele, John Woodhouse), and Dr. Orly Linovski (University of Manitoba). Thanks to Trevor Haché and Maria Basualdo for their integral role in this project.

The findings in this report are based on a community-wide survey undertaken in Spring 2019. Over 500 people responded, answering questions about their priorities in transportation investments, how to assess transportation equity, and improve community engagement. As part of this work, we also conducted focus groups with councilors, planners, and other staff.

This report draws on research supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

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Assessing Equity in Transportation Planning

Best Practices for Measures and Metrics

There are many different ways to measure transportation equity. The types of measures used depend on agency goals and resources.

Most equity measures rely on a combination of: data collected by other agencies (such as census or cellphone data); information about the transportation system (such as existing bus routes, frequencies, and travel time by mode); and spatial data.

Information is also often collected from community members directly, such as through surveys, open houses and community feedback.

What We Heard

There are many factors that influence how measures are selected. There are tradeoffs between data availability, reliability, and depth of information. To better understand how community priorities could be integrated into selecting equity measures, we asked:

“What measures should be used to make investment decisions?”

Survey Responses

Do transportation issues prevent participating in activities?

76%

Can people get to the places they want to go?

73%

Do equity-seeking groups face more barriers in getting to where they want to go?

62%

What communities benefit from investment?

49%

Did previous investments achieve their goals?

42%

What measures should be used to make investment decisions?

Survey Responses

Common accessibility measures can identify communities where people are more likely to face barriers and which areas will benefit from transportation investments, but may miss barriers that are less quantifiable.

It is usually more difficult to understand if transportation issues *prevent* people from participating in activities, but this was identified as the most important in our

survey (“**Do transportation issues prevent people from participating in activities?**” – 76% of respondents).

The second most selected option (“**Can people get to where they want to go?**” – 73% of respondents) could be addressed with frequently used accessibility measures and identifying areas of concern.

VALUES

In Measures and Metrics

It’s important to be aware that measures reflect priorities and values. Our survey respondents often had differing views on what equity is, and this influenced what they prioritized:

“There should be a triage system whereby the most affected groups are the first addressed.”

“Prioritize transportation investments based on what is good for all people.”

These quotes reflect divergent views on what equity means, and make it clear that choosing equity measures is not only a technical issue but reflects *values*.

Lessons from Other Cities

Adding Transparency to Technical Processes

In updating Portland, Oregon’s 2035 Transportation System Plan¹, the Bureau of Transportation identified several issues with how projects were prioritized, and concerns with transparency, inclusivity and equity. To address this, staff first identified key outcomes from local and regional plans, and used these to develop criteria for prioritizing transportation projects and evaluating programs.

In addition to issues like safety, economic benefit, cost effectiveness, and climate, equity was one of the 11 measures used to rank projects. Projects that had the potential to impact vulnerable communities positively were given higher rankings. While the tool could be refined to include outcome-based criteria, it provides transparency and clarity in how projects are ranked and selected.

Evaluating Common Equity Measures

Type	Strengths	Weaknesses
<i>Accessibility to Destinations</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data usually readily available • Can show underserved areas and differences by mode 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strength varies based on how destinations and accessibility defined
<i>Distribution Equity</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data usually readily available • Highlights areas of the city that may be underserved 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based on geographical location • Does not address barriers in more diverse communities
<i>Identity-based</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic demographic data readily available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differing views what on groups should be considered • Limitations with using census data
<i>Social Exclusion</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addresses barriers not covered by other methods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data usually not available from other sources • Data collection can be time-intensive
<i>Previous Outcomes</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commonly used and understood • Appeals to broad audience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not explicitly focused on equity • Long timescale to measure success

Moving Forward

Engage in discussions about how measures reflect different values

Decisions on what equity measures to include are value-based. While some of this may come from existing city policies or plans, it is necessary to have a shared vision of what equity gains need to be made in the transportation system.

Chose equity measures that reflect goals and desired outcomes

While there are tradeoffs between different equity metrics, they should be selected based on the values and goals established in collaboration with decision-makers, staff, and community members, with a particular focus on equity-seeking groups. Measures should be designed to incorporate both secondary and primary data collection, and be cognizant of barriers that are difficult to measure, such as bias and discrimination.

Funding decisions should be linked to desired outcomes

Decisions made through the capital planning and budget process should reflect the same goals and outcomes, including equity considerations.

Integrate equity measures in project prioritization criteria

The criteria used to evaluate proposed projects and programs should be transparent and include measures related to equity. These can be used not only to determine the viability of projects, but also their prioritization and timing.

Develop benchmarks for progress towards goals

Given the long-time scale for transportation plans, it is important to develop benchmarks for progress. These should be measurable and simple enough to be assessed before a major plan review. Examples of these may include targets for identified vulnerable areas, service improvements for vulnerable communities or affordability targets.

Working with Communities to Improve Equity

Strategies for Participation and Engagement

Most planning processes legally require some degree of public involvement, and municipalities engage with communities in many diverse ways. Digital technologies have reduced some barriers to participation for certain groups, and can make participation processes faster. Despite this, achieving meaningful engagement is

often more elusive, especially in transportation planning processes that can be seen as highly technical. To increase equity in outcomes, participation processes must also be equitable and inclusive, and based on principles of transparency, trust and collaboration.

What We Heard

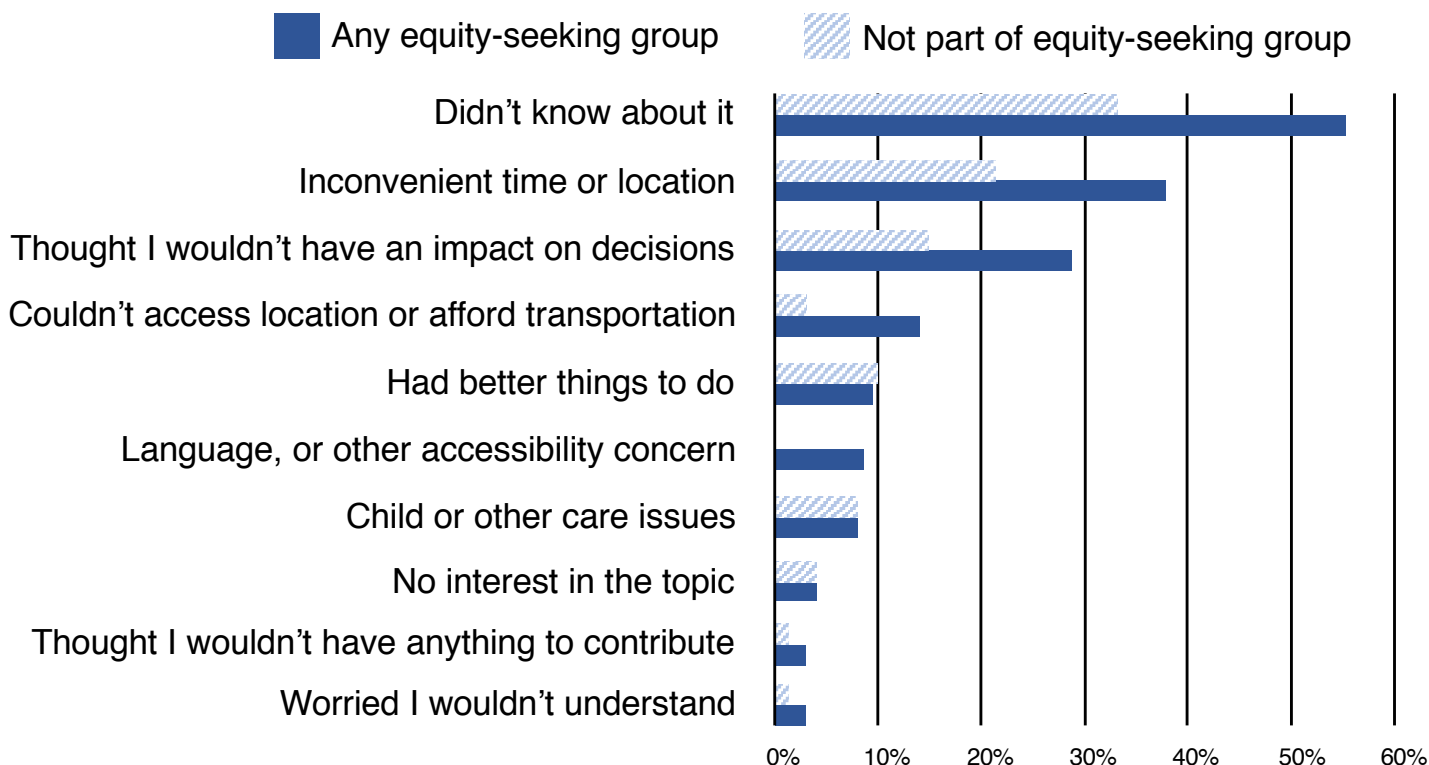
To better understand community perceptions on transportation planning engagement, we asked several questions related to public consultation. We asked:

“Are there reasons why you have not attended a consultation event about transportation?”

The most common answers were: “**I didn’t know about it**” (55% of respondents); “**Inconvenient time or location**” (38%); and “**Thought I wouldn’t have an impact on decisions**” (28%).

There were differences for equity-seeking groups in the reasons why they haven’t attended a consultation event. For example, those identifying as being in an equity-seeking group were more likely to say they were impacted by many of these issues, in some cases 20% more.

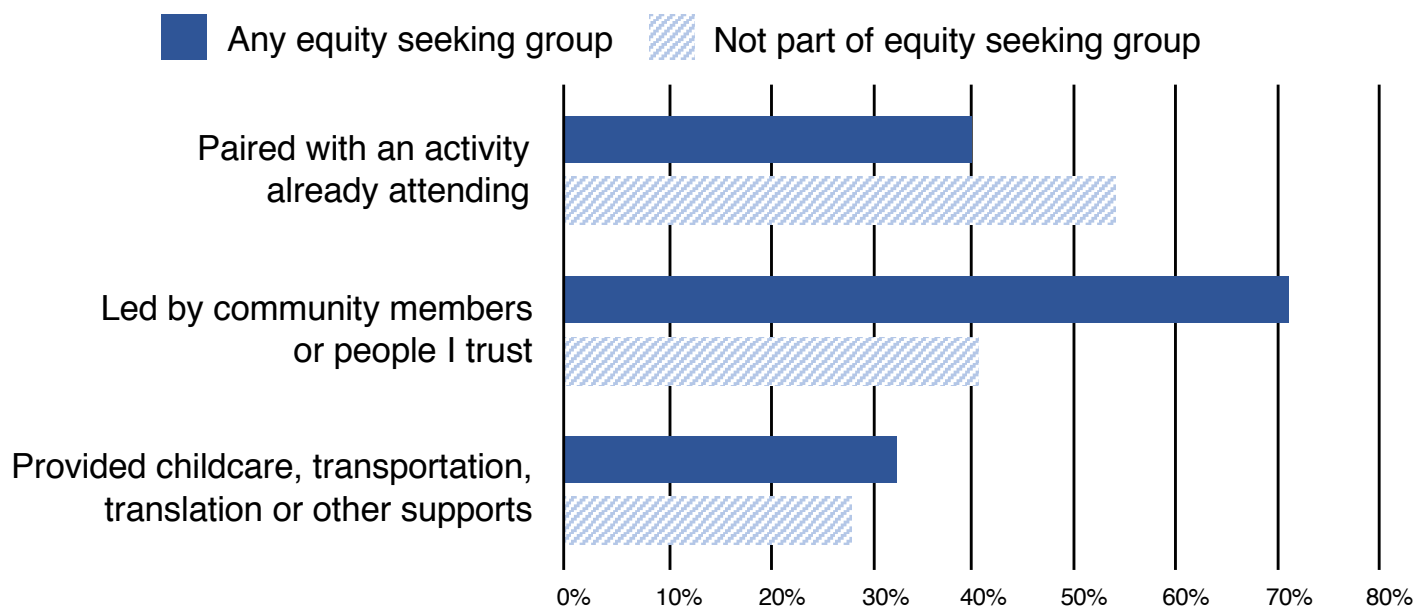
Reason for not attending a consultation session



We also tried to understand how to improve community input in the consultation process. We asked: “What would make it more likely for you to attend a consultation event?”. Here too there were differences for those identifying as part of an

equity-seeking group, noting the need for additional supports such as childcare, transportation or translation (53% compared with 28% for those that did not identify as part of an equity-seeking group), as well as for other highly ranked responses.

What would make it more likely for you to attend a consultation event?



Lessons From Other Communities

Providing Resources for Community-Led Planning

After intense conflict over the lack of participation in an Official Plan process, the City of Seattle established the *Neighbourhood Planning Program* in 1994, which provided resources to support neighbourhood groups to develop their own local plans.¹ This program included capacity building – training thousands of citizens – and large grants to help groups develop their community-led plan.

Critical to the success of this model was providing adequate financial and staff resources for community groups to undertake this work, and multiple measures to ensure accountability and inclusivity.

Neighbourhood groups had to demonstrate that their process was collaborative with plans to include those who might not otherwise participate, and the city provided dedicated outreach funds, such as for translation and interpretation.

Moving Forward

Provide more resources to marginalized and hard-to-reach communities

Communities facing barriers may need more support to be able to meaningfully participate in transportation planning. This may include basic supports such as childcare, translation and transportation, but also need to address issues such as bias, discrimination, and lack of trust of public officials.

Maintain a balance between different types of engagement

Online tools can improve participation rates, particularly among youth, however, they can also reinforce disparities, and have limitations in being able to generate consensus.² Engagement processes should balance both in-person and online methods. In-person events should aim to make it easier and more convenient for people to participate, such as pop-ups in community locations or creative activities.

Focus on capacity building and build community partnerships

While project-specific goals are important (i.e. approving a plan), engagement should also be seen as necessary for ensuring transparency, trust, and invested citizens. These goals require a focus on capacity building, in order to be meaningful. There are also numerous community and service organizations that have long-standing relationships with communities and can help shape the consultation process. In all instances, communities and organizations should be given adequate resources (including financial) to help support their participation.

Provide dedicated revenue stream to address inequities

Equity issues are often identified through community engagement processes but then not acted on, oftentimes due to a lack of funding. In order to restore trust in the planning process, there must be dedicated funds to address the issues that emerge from participatory processes.³

Lengthen the timeframe and scope for public engagement

While all these suggestions may improve both equity in the consultation process and outcomes, they require significantly more time and resources. Longer timeframes for consultation should be built into the work packages for projects, but engagement should also be seen as on-going, rather than only project-specific.

Putting Equity Into Practice

There are different ways of assessing transportation equity, but we know that some people face more difficulties in accessing the places they need to go. These barriers can be severe and impact the ability to access vital services (like employment, education, health care and food), and fully participate in society (such as visit friends and family, leisure and recreation).

The reasons for these barriers are complex, yet by understanding these and prioritizing them in transportation investments, we can better support all members of society. The social exclusion approach notes that it is “beyond the control of excluded persons to reduce or eliminate barriers to inclusion,” making policy interventions necessary.⁴

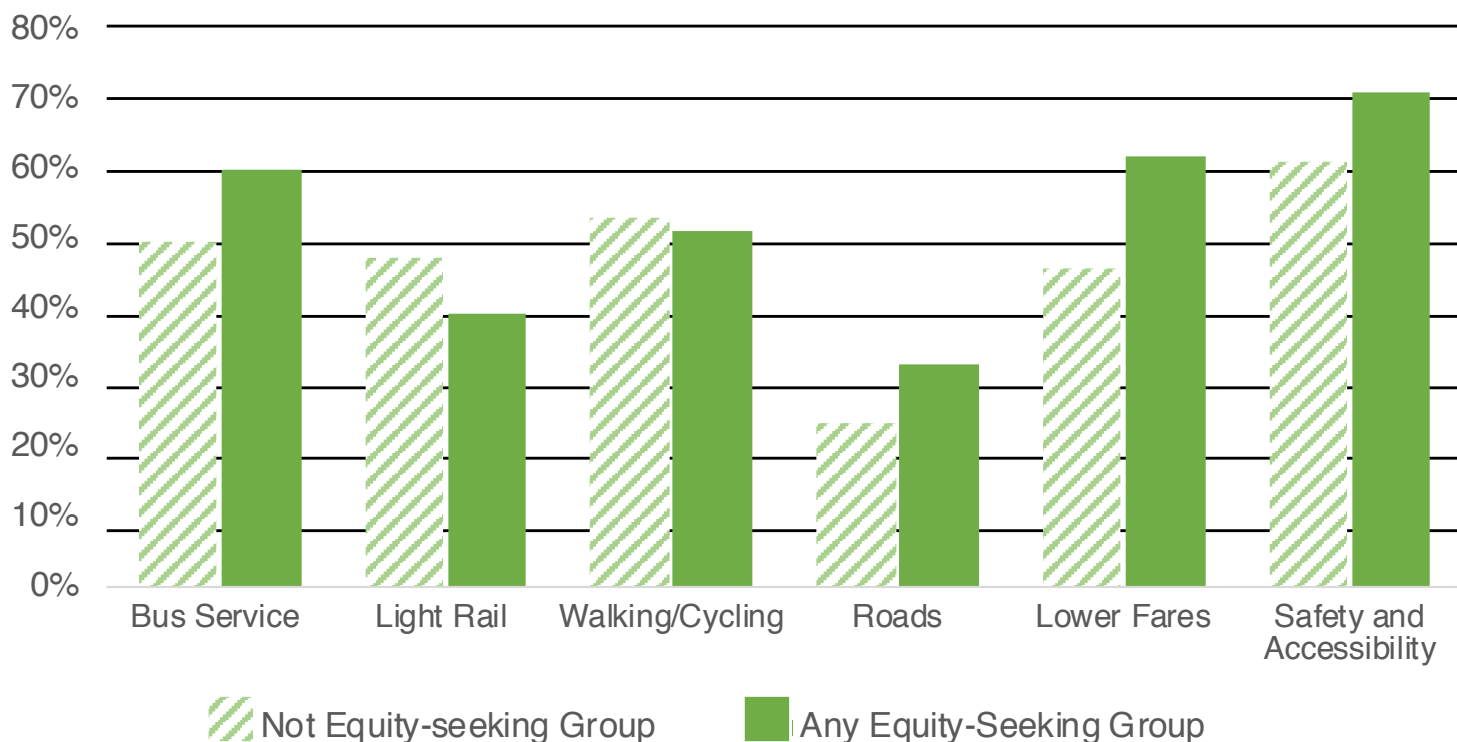
What We Heard

To understand community perspectives on how the transportation system can better serve those facing barriers, we asked several questions related to investment priorities. First, we asked:

“To improve transportation in Ottawa, where do you think more money should be spent?”

The highest priorities were for public transit investments, safety and accessibility improvements, and increasing affordability for transit. People who identified as equity-seeking groups prioritized different investments, placing more emphasis on bus service and cost of fares, while those who did not identify as equity-seeking prioritized light-rail and active transportation investments.

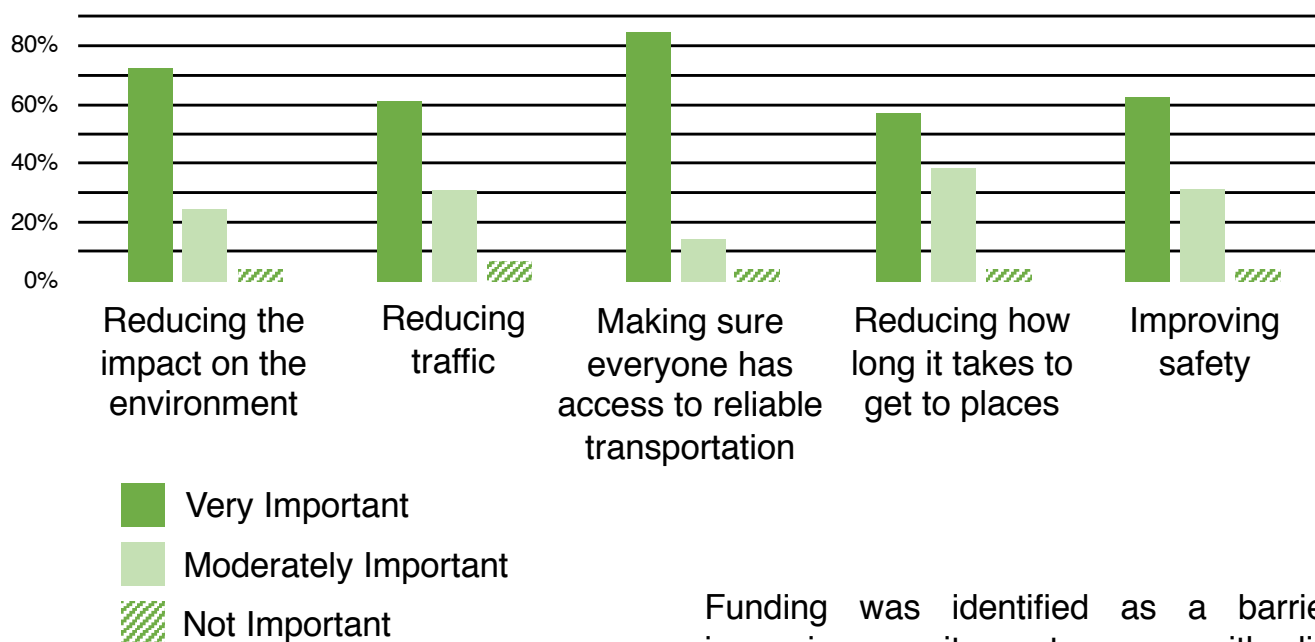
Highest Priorities for Investment



We also asked survey participants to rank the importance of common transportation goals. The two goals that were ranked as “very important” by the most participants were related to equity (“**Making sure everyone has access to reliable transportation**”, 84% ranked as very important) and environment (“**Reducing the impact on the environment**”, 72% ranked as very important).

Goals focusing on travel time (57%) and congestion (61%) were less frequently selected as very important. While transportation goals often focus on reducing congestion, or minor improvements to travel time, these may not improve quality of life for those experiencing transportation barriers.⁵

Ranking of Transportation Goals



In focus group discussions, staff and councilors noted that there were different, and often conflicting, ideas about what equity means for the Ottawa context. This highlights the need to have broader discussions about what *values* should guide integrating equity in transportation decision-making. There also needs to be clear consensus and direction about how equity should be integrated in planning processes, including transportation planning. By establishing these parameters, is it possible to assess how policy and investment decisions may impact equity goals.

Funding was identified as a barrier to improving equity outcomes, with limited transportation funds, and differences in how different types of projects are funded and prioritized. For example, equity may be considered in determining how active transportation projects are prioritized but not applied in the same way to road construction priorities, especially when funded through development charges.

Lastly, some participants mentioned the need for equity to be mandated in higher-level policy documents, such as Provincial Policy Statement and Growth Plans, so that local decision-making would be required to be in agreement.

Lessons From Other Cities

While many municipalities and transit agencies have made commitments to improving equity outcomes, staff may struggle with how this should translate into policy and investment decisions. Metro Transit in Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN developed an Equity Tool worksheet to be used in project planning, implementation and evaluation.⁶ This tool helps planners and decision-makers assess what the impact may be on different communities, how engagement should influence decision-making, and ensuring accountability. Rather than thinking about equity as one element in a process, the guide suggests that it should be “be used early and often”.

National Equity Frameworks

Many countries require consideration of equity values in funding and planning for transportation through national-level policy and legislation. In the UK, the Equality Act (2010) and Public Sector Act (2011), apply to all public bodies, including local authorities. In the U.S., federal transportation funding is dependent on meeting specific equity criteria.

Moving Forward

Discuss what values should shape goals and priorities

Decision-makers and staff should develop a shared understanding of what equity goals are.

Develop clear guidance on how the Equity and Inclusion Lens applies to planning processes

The City of Ottawa has taken a good first step in adopting the Equity and Inclusion Lens. However, there should be detailed guidance about how this should be incorporated in long-range planning and budgeting processes.

Critically evaluate how measures and priorities will improve quality of life

Ensure that the measures being used to make decisions will have equitable impacts. For example, this may mean that minor travel time gains are less highly weighted than other measures.

Link funding decisions to priorities

Often times funding decisions are at odds with policy goals. Include a framework for assessing how funding structures will impact desired outcomes. This should include all aspects of the transportation system (such as road construction), and address the long-term financial impacts.

Provide interim equity progress reports

The long-time frame for master plan updates makes interim progress reports crucial. This should include measurable equity benchmarks, be explicitly linked to policy goals, and accessible to the general population.

Notes

1. Sirianni, C. (2007). "Neighborhood Planning as Collaborative Democratic Design." *Journal of the American Planning Association*. 73(4): 373-387.
2. Afzalan, N., et al. (2017). "Creating Smarter Cities: Considerations for Selecting Online Participatory Tools." *Cities*. 67: 21-30.
3. Karner, A. and R. A. Marcantonio (2018). "Achieving transportation equity: Meaningful public involvement to meet the needs of underserved communities." *Public Works Management & Policy*. 23(2): 105-126.
4. Markovich, J. and K. Lucas (2011). "The Social and Distributional Impacts of Transport: A Literature Review." *Working Paper No. 1055*. Transport Studies Unit, University of Oxford, pg. 13
5. While congestion can impact other aspects of the transportation system, such as transit reliability and freight, it is important to look carefully at the motivation for these goals. For discussion of the equity concerns with using travel-time savings, see: Martens, K., & Di Ciommo, F. (2017). "Travel Time Savings, Accessibility Gains and Equity Effects in Cost-Benefit Analysis." *Transport Reviews*. 37(2), pp. 152-169.
6. <https://www.metrotransit.org/Data/Sites/1/media/equity/equity-tool-5.1.pdf>

Other Resources

Equity Alliance. "Racial Equity Toolkit: An Opportunity to Operationalize Equity"
http://racialequityalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/GARE-Racial_Equity_Toolkit.pdf