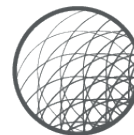




# Social Equity White Paper

Oregon, USA

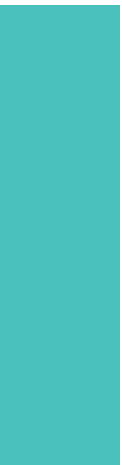


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September  
**2021**



Oregon Department of Transportation

# Social Equity White Paper

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# Purpose of the Social Equity White Paper

This white paper serves as a primer on the topic of Social Equity in transportation policymaking and as a tool to inform the development of the Oregon Transportation Plan (OTP) and Oregon Highway Plan (OHP), which are in progress and continuing to be developed through 2023. It provides a definition of Social Equity and identifies Social Equity best practices. The definition and best practices are based on evaluations of ODOT's most recent equity-focused efforts, all of which are ongoing, and case studies of efforts made by other transportation agencies to prioritize Social Equity within transportation planning.

Those involved in the OTP and OHP updates, the Oregon Transportation Commission (OTC), project-specific Policy Coordination Committee, Planning Coordination Team, Project Management Team and subject matter expert Work Groups will seek ways to actively address historic inequities through the transportation policies developed within the OTP and OHP update process. We approach this work with humility, empathy and seek to understand the experiences of historically

excluded and underserved communities by validating and amplifying their voices. We cannot assume we understand one another's lived experiences accessing our transportation systems. Social Equity underscores the importance of having diverse voices involved in the process and amongst decision-makers. Collectively, as a society, we are continuing to understand how our systems, including our transportation system, uphold inequities and can be used to redress them.

When reviewing best practices, consider how they may affect your personal approach to involvement in the OTP and OHP development, such as recommendations for who participates and how, and specific vision, goals, future scenarios, policies, and performance metrics.

See Appendix A for a summary of methodology used to develop the Social Equity White Paper.

## What is Social Equity? Why is it important?

While the concept of **Equality** strives to give everyone the same access to resources and opportunities to succeed, **Social Equity** asks what type of support may be needed by different people in order to achieve the same level of success and is rooted in outcomes. Both aim to promote fairness and justice, but equality is only effective if all people start from the same place and have the same needs. However, all people do not have the same histories, conditions or the same needs because they were not allowed the same access to opportunities and resources.

Systematically racist transportation and housing policies, urban planning, discriminatory housing practices, and operation of public services such as housing and transportation have led to disparities for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). For example, homes, businesses, and churches in communities of colors were displaced when the interstate system was built in the 1950s, locally and nationally. Until passage of the Fair Housing Act (1968) and the Community Reinvestment Act (1977), mortgage lenders redlined neighborhoods of color as areas they did



not want to make a loan and denied creditworthy applicants of color a loan for housing (Federal Reserve, 2016). These actions resulted in racist and harmful outcomes, including disinvestment in these communities that effectively prevented the building of generational wealth. Historically, the State of Oregon, more specifically the Oregon Highway Department until 1961 and later Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) continued investments in the highway system as a segregation tool. These public investments enabled and resulted in affluent people living further away from existing cities centers and concentrated poverty in specific areas. Simultaneously, governments discontinued investment in public transit and multimodal transportation infrastructure. This resulted in prioritizing a system based on private vehicle use and ownership. The result was an additional burden for low-income households reducing their social mobility and access to resources. For people experiencing low-income or BIPOC in rural areas, their isolation is greater, because they have greater distances to travel and have fewer transportation choices, affecting their access to jobs, education and services.

**Oregon State agency, Oregon Health Authorities (OHA), has defined health equity and has begun to documented health inequities.**

**Oregon Health Authority (OHA) states, “one primary goal of the definition is to get at the root cause of inequities including racism, discrimination and bias, and understand that health inequities are differences in health that are not only unnecessary and avoidable but, in addition, are unfair and unjust. Health inequities are rooted in social injustices that make some population groups more vulnerable to poor health than other groups. An example they provide is that babies born to Black Americans are more likely to die in their first year of life than babies born to White Americans. This remains true even when controlling for education and wealth. This is a health inequity because the difference between the populations is unfair, avoidable, and rooted in social injustice.**

**OHA has developed a framework (pictured below) that emphasizes the importance of moving upstream from health inequities to the understanding that racism, discrimination and bias impact health outcomes of people who have been historically excluded. (OHA, Health Equity Definition, 2019)**

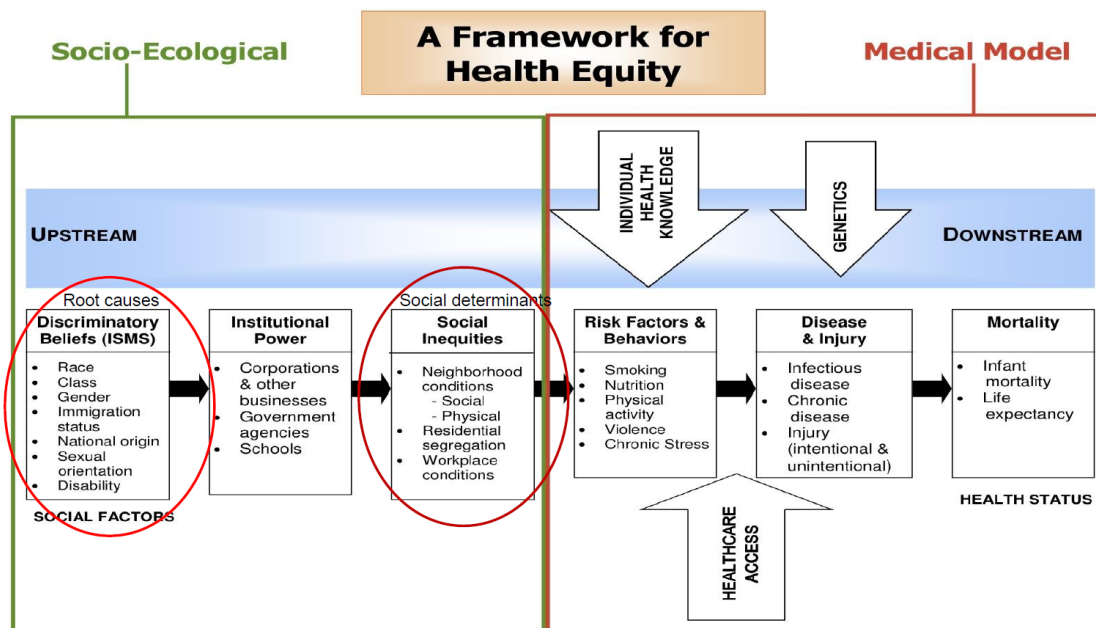


Figure 1. "A Framework for Health Equity." Oregon Health Authority

Social Equity in transportation recognizes the role that transportation plays in affecting people's overall health and quality of life, and the unique history of barriers that historically excluded and underserved communities face. It also aims to ensure access to transportation solutions to get all people where they need to go to enable their quality of life. Since people use transportation infrastructure to access work, school, entertainment, food, commerce, healthcare, and other needs, Social Equity in transportation creates overarching goals for all transportation users and simultaneously develops transportation policies, programs, and solutions that consider the unique situations and barriers faced by specific people.

The image on the next page illustrates the different terminologies Social Equity encompasses. In the first frame, "Inequality" shows how not everyone faces the same path ahead or has the same resources. "Equality" shows that even when given the same tools, in this case a bicycle, the obstacles each person faces are still different. "Social Equity" recognizes inequalities, in this case a more obstructed path, and creates custom solutions—in this case, a bicycle with different tread designed to handle the terrain—but still the obstacles are present. "Social Equity" is on the path to "Justice," which is the final goal of Social Equity, taking away the inequalities, and creates the same outcomes for all.



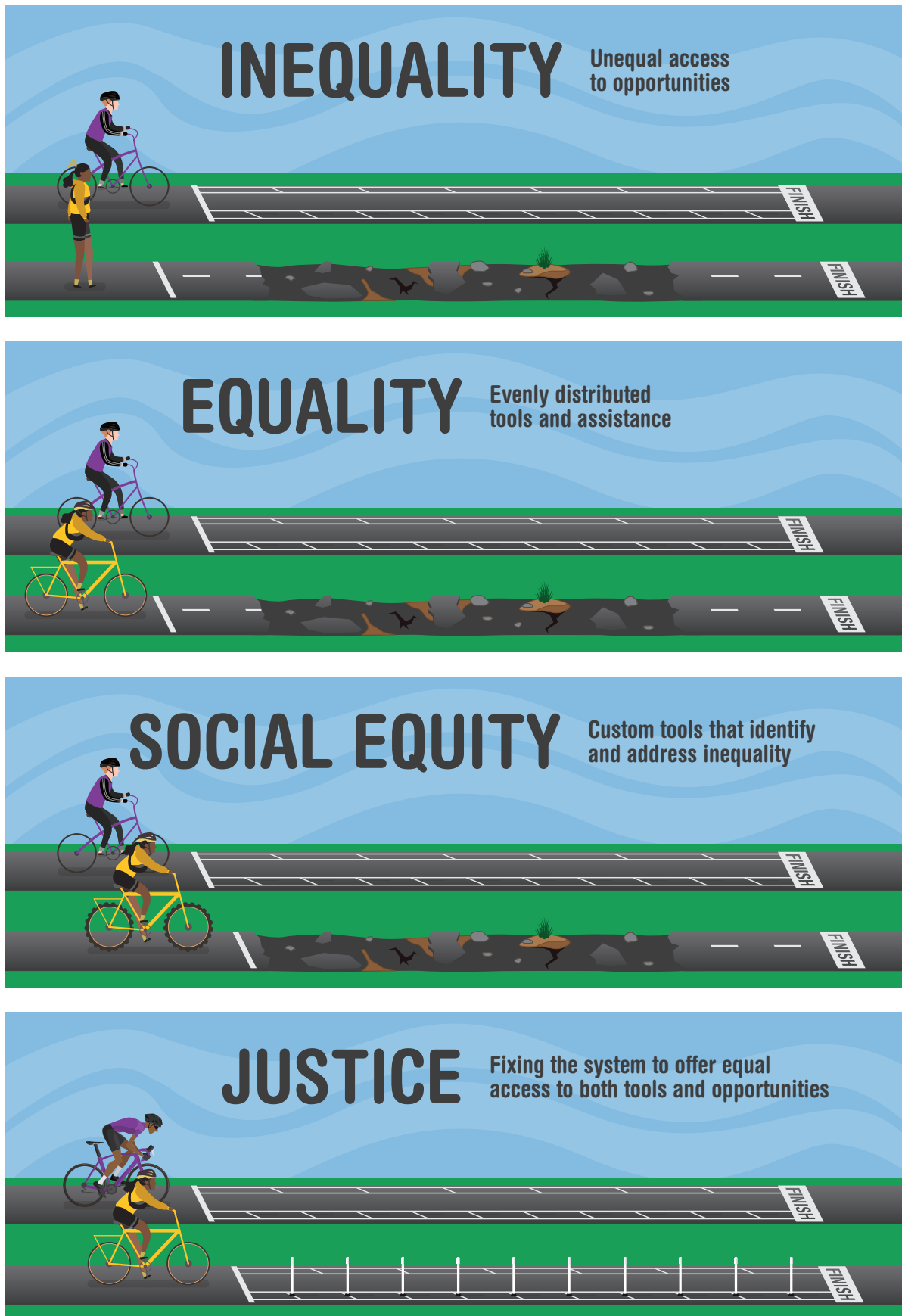


Figure 2. Social Equity — From Inequality to Justice

# Why is Equity a Priority Now?

At the state level, ODOT and the Oregon Transportation Commission (OTC) jointly developed the 2021-23 [Strategic Action Plan](#) (SAP), which names Social Equity as one of three strategic priorities for ODOT (SAP, 2021).

In addition, the OTP and OHP will prioritize Social Equity implementation.

The federal government is also driving change toward more equitable transportation systems. In January of 2021, President Biden issued the [Executive Order 13985: Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government](#). The order sets forth the policy that: **“The federal government should pursue a comprehensive approach to advancing equity for all, including people of color and others who have been historically underserved, marginalized, and adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequality.”** (The White House, 2021)

Some provisions of the Executive Order pertinent to OTP and OHP development are:

- Sec. 5. Conducting an Equity Assessment in Federal Agencies. The head of each agency, or designee, shall, in consultation with the Director of the Office of Management and Budget, select certain of the agency's programs and policies for a review that will assess whether underserved communities and their members face systemic barriers in accessing benefits and opportunities available pursuant to those policies and programs.
- Sec. 6. Allocating Federal Resources to Advance Fairness and Opportunity. The Federal Government should, consistent with applicable law, allocate resources to address the historic failure to invest sufficiently, justly, and equally in underserved communities, as well as individuals from those communities.
- Sec. 8. Engagement with Members of Underserved Communities. In carrying out this order, agencies shall consult with members

**“Equity — Prioritize diversity, equity and inclusion by identifying and addressing systemic barriers to ensure all Oregonians benefit from transportation services and investments.”**

*2021-2023 Strategic Action Plan (2021)*

of communities that have been historically underrepresented in the Federal Government and underserved by, or subject to discrimination in, Federal policies and programs.<sup>1</sup>

In March of 2021, The U.S. Department of Transportation issued an [Equity and Access Policy Statement](#), which states, **“The U.S. Department of Transportation is committed to advancing equity, civil rights, racial justice, environmental justice, and equal opportunity. The simple yet powerful mandate of equity and access in transportation will shape and drive all departmental programs and activities.... It is the Department's policy, as reflected in the Department's Environmental Justice (EJ) Strategy, to incorporate EJ and equity principles into all transportation planning and decision-making processes and project development and to promote these goals through public outreach efforts conducted by the Department and its funding recipients.”**

At the same time as these policy changes, uprisings against structural racism in the pursuit of justice for communities that have been victimized by collective government policies have taken place across the country, including within Oregon communities. These protests were sparked by longstanding injustices and the continued loss of Black lives to police violence nationally. The result has been a social movement focused on dismantling racism.

<sup>1</sup> Executive Order Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through Federal Government. January 20, 2021.



ODOT must not only, at a minimum, comply with both the Executive Order 13985 and the Equity and Access Policy Statement as a recipient of Federal funding, but prioritizing Social Equity will make ODOT more competitive for funding. ODOT has a history of innovation at the DOT level and being highly competitive for federal funding. Prioritizing Social Equity can do the same for Oregonians. Moreover, aside from the federal mandate, addressing Social Equity is a moral imperative.

## Social Equity Defined

In 2020, ODOT created an Office of Social Equity (OSE), which has worked to define equity agency wide. ODOT's Social Equity definition is from the State of Oregon Equity Framework in COVID-19 Response and Recovery, and in the I-5 and I-205 Toll Project Equity Framework (2020).

It reads:

**“Equity acknowledges that not all people, or all communities, are starting from the same place due to historic and current systems of oppression. Equity is the effort to provide different levels of support based on an individual's or group's needs in order to achieve fairness in outcomes.”**

**Equity actionably empowers communities most impacted by systemic oppression and requires the redistribution of resources, power, and opportunity to those communities.”**

This white paper further defines historically excluded and underserved people, as:

- **People experiencing low income or economic disadvantage**
- **Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC)**
- **Older adults (65+) and children**
- **People with limited English proficiency (LEP)**
- **People living with a disability**

Addressing Social Equity has two dimensions, both for the Agency planning process and outcomes.

1. **Process equity** means that the planning process actively and successfully creates opportunities for historically excluded or underserved communities to engage in and co-create plan outcomes.
2. **Outcome equity** means that the OTP and OHP planning processes will acknowledge existing inequities and strive to prioritize and prevent historically excluded and underserved communities from further bearing the burden of negative effects related to transportation decisions. The process will further seek to create more equitable outcomes by improving community health and overall transportation accessibility, options, and affordability.

Neither process equity nor outcome equity can replace the other—both are necessary to prioritize and work toward for Social Equity.

## How is Social Equity the Same or Different from Environmental Justice?

**Environmental justice (EJ)** identifies and addresses the disproportionately high and adverse effects of an agency's programs, policies, and activities on minority (as defined by the census) and low-income populations to achieve an equitable distribution of benefits and burdens, and it includes the full and fair participation by all potentially affected communities in the decision-making process.

Both equity and EJ call for meaningful public engagement, but in practice, EJ focuses on not furthering harm or burdens to already burdened communities (disproportionately high impacts to minority and low-income populations). It

is also procedural and often applied during project impact assessment under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), occurring further downstream in the process, during project impact analysis, and not during long-range planning or project development.

By contrast equity, seeks to uplift historically excluded and underserved communities through programmatic and policy changes to improve their outcomes. It acknowledges past harm, that not all groups start at the same place, and sets baselines, goals, and measures progress toward those both process and outcomes goals.

More information on [Environmental Justice](#).

## Best Practices

This white paper identifies best practices based on ODOT's latest efforts and other agencies' experiences to operationalize equitable processes and outcomes. Identifying best practices allows all those involved in the OTP and OHP updates, from staff, various committee or work group members, and the OTC, to consider these best practices as we work to develop the OTP and OHP. The intent is to provide ODOT with an actionable, structural overview of how to operationalize Social Equity within the OTP and OHP updates.

These best practices have been organized into the following categories:

- Overarching Social Equity Practices,
- Process Social Equity,
- Social Equity Tools,
- Operationalizing Equitable Outcomes

While reviewing the Social Equity best practices, some key considerations to keep in mind during the development of the OTP and OHP, in sequence of early in the planning process towards implementation and monitoring, are:

- Define Social Equity
- Focus on people, not assets or geographies
- Be clear on the causes of inequities, including race
- Identify distinct barriers historically excluded or underserved people face and develop corresponding, distinct solutions
- Develop a relationship-building mentality and seek to co-create with communities
- Make use of ODOT's Social Equity Index, social equity frameworks and other tools

- Be inclusive, transparent, and clear about how equity tools change decisions
- Increase access to transportation options and opportunities, such as walking, bicycling, and using public transit, and make the transportation system more affordable overall
- Measure Social Equity, evaluate, monitor, and reinvest to implement policies and hold ODOT and the OTP and OHP to account.

These key best practices, amongst others, are described further throughout the best practices section.

## Overarching Social Equity Practices

1. **Define Social Equity:** Defining Social Equity, so all involved know what it means and what it does not, is foundational to achieving equitable processes and outcomes. Projects or agencies that did not define Social Equity have struggled to find focus and identify equity as a gap to address. Defining Social Equity precisely, including naming specific people experiencing inequities, provides clarity and focus. Too broad of a definition can dilute the impact of efforts and maintain existing power structures.

ODOT has used the language “social equity,” in the Office of Social Equity to make the focus on people, and the City of San Antonio has defined “racial equity” to center their focus on addressing racial disparities.

Please see the City of San Antonio’s [Racial Equity Indicator Report](#).

2. **Focus on people, not assets or geographies:** Equity does not seek the equal distribution of resources between asset types, geographies, or political boundaries, but instead addresses disparities among people.

DOTs have traditionally identified needs based on transportation assets to drive investments, such as whether roadways meet standards, because of their responsibility to build and maintain transportation systems. ODOT’s Social Equity Index (see page 13) is an example of focusing on historically excluded and underserved people.

3. **Be bold:** MnDOT’s equity efforts have been driven at the staff level, and they recommend being bold in equity work and messaging to better affect necessary change. While equity can be controversial, not taking a clear stand can contribute to maintaining existing power structures and the status quo.

The image below was co-created with a BIPOC community member, Noah Lawrence-Holder, as part of the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan update process, and contains a clear, simple, factual statement. This image was part of a public survey with a strong educational component. Appendix B has the full public survey.



Figure 3. From MnDOT Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan Public Survey (2020), Artist: Noah Lawrence-Holder

4. **Be clear about the causes of inequity, including race:** Inequity is the result of cumulative historical and present-day decisions that result in the marginalization of groups of people. Agencies must be willing to understand and own their contributions to this history and gain trust among groups that have been historically excluded and underserved to better enable more equitable outcomes—safe, affordable and convenient access to daily needs. An early step toward Social Equity and justice is to acknowledge, not justify, and apologize for past harms.





ODOT has recently embarked on an oral history project entitled, “A path forward: ODOT’s Movement Toward Equity,” that researches the impacts of historical transportation projects to help ODOT understand how past practices contributed to barriers in achieving Social Equity.

5. **Identify distinct barriers historically excluded or underserved people face and develop corresponding, distinct solutions:** Barriers faced by different people differ and need to be acknowledged distinctly. One group, such as displaced Black communities in urban and suburban areas, may face different and distinct barriers from those in tribal communities. Those individuals face different barriers compared to people living with disabilities in urban versus rural areas. Additionally, BIPOC individuals living in rural areas likely face different barriers than those in urban areas. Thus, transportation solutions should be developed to respond to the unique barriers and needs historically excluded or underserved people face.

6. **Increase data collection and disaggregate data as much as possible:** Understanding the unique barriers and needs of people by race, ethnicity, income, disability, and age requires collecting data that includes those demographics. Similarly breaking down data as small as geographically possible allows us to understand where historically excluded and underserved populations exist.

To achieve equitable outcomes, ODOT must not only collect data with race, but also disaggregate data as much as possible to understand the presence of historically excluded and underserved communities, particularly in rural areas. MnDOT quickly realized aggregated data at the census tract level, diluted and masked the presence of the most vulnerable communities in their state, which were BIPOC and low-income communities in rural areas. They have disaggregated all data by race, ethnicity, income, disability, and age (Turner, 2021).

Understanding how to achieve Social Equity and the unique needs of people may require developing specific studies to test hypothesis and develop additional findings. The Portland State University transportation study *Racial Bias in Drivers’ Yielding Behavior at Crosswalks: Understanding the Effect*<sup>2</sup> explored the hypothesis that “drivers will exhibit racial bias when making decisions about whether or not to stop for pedestrians waiting to cross the street at a crosswalk, which may reflect conscious or non-conscious bias.” Based on a Centers for Disease Control Study examining crash history, racial minorities are disproportionately represented in pedestrian fatalities (2013). Looking at driver yielding behavior at marked crosswalks, the study found that Black male pedestrians were passed by twice as many cars, and waited 32 percent longer, compared to white male pedestrians. Regardless of race and gender, drivers were less likely to stop for Black and male pedestrians, and when they did stop, drivers were more likely to stop closer to Black male and Black female pedestrians compared to white male or white female pedestrians. These negative

<sup>2</sup> Kahn, Kimberly, Jean McMahon, Tara Goddard and Arlie Adkins. 2017. [\*Racial Bias in Drivers’ Yielding Behavior at Crosswalks: Understanding the Effect\*](#). NITC-RR-869. Portland, OR: Transportation Research and Education Center (TREC).



## Social Equity Index

ODOT has developed a statewide Social Equity Index, which will be foundational to the OTP and OHP development. The Office of Social Equity's description of the Social Equity Index,

*"This map allows us to make data driven decisions with understanding of where home is for Oregon's most vulnerable populations, vulnerable because the impact of our investments are felt deeply, consistently, and often faster in high index spaces than others who may experience the burdens of our projects, programs, policies.*

*We know that age, ability, income, language, and race/ethnicity are predictors in the United States for those that are less likely to be resilience in the face of disaster or health, transportation, education, housing, and economic systems. Additionally, they are more likely to experience disparity with little to no input around how they experience it or what would be most helpful in solution making. So, we have used the most recent block group data from the American Community Survey to share the degree to which Oregonians may be experiencing less than excellence in service, access, investments, and maybe even quality of life. We are using this map to inform how we look at active transportation, safety, air quality, and connectivity through our planning, design, construction, maintenance, finance, compliance, an DMV services to increase the probability of equal outcomes regardless of social demographic or identity."*

The Social Equity Index is comprised of people based on low-income, race/ethnicity, age (65+), limited English proficiency, and disability.

experiences lead to increased stress, harms, and fatalities for Black pedestrians. Currently, crash data does not exist by race.

Recently, the State Legislature passed House Bill 3159 the Data Justice Act that requires healthcare providers to collect and report to OHA data on their patient's race, ethnicity, preferred spoken and written languages, disability status, sexual orientation and gender identity. In addition to mandating data collection by providers, the Data Justice Act directs OHA to develop a database for storing and analyzing patient demographic data. The area of health has been at the forefront of considering Social Equity outcomes. Social Equity mandates, innovations, and practices from the arena of health can be instructive for transportation.

7. **Understanding people's lived experiences are as valuable as quantified data:** Current policies and performance measures tend to value things that can be measured over those things that cannot, and lack of quantifiable data can lead to inaction. Input from those who have been historically excluded and underserved about their lived experiences must balance readily available data, which often do not include demographics. Listening is key, which requires more open-ended questions and conversations during engagement.

For example, MnDOT conducted transportation equity labs. In so doing, they gained qualitative data that spoke to lived experiences that may differ from staff who often do not share those lived experiences. They discovered that some people were paying 25 percent interest on car loans for car access, which made car ownership financially difficult. This was not the experience of staff or those who have traditionally participated in transportation planning processes.

The PedPDX plan is one local example of how equity considerations can drive changes to the transportation system. During the development of PedPDX, the City of Portland

studied the experiences of Black pedestrians in *PedPDX: Walking While Black* (2019), which concluded that while the experience of being a pedestrian in Portland depends significantly on where you live or work, it also depends on who you are. In sum, the plan encourages transportation planners and engineers to not just think about safety in terms of traffic safety (i.e. preventing injuries and crashes), but to also pay attention to community members' sense of personal safety and security in the public realm,<sup>3</sup> which can be gained through qualitative data collected through engagement.

8. **Social Equity is cross-cutting and cannot be isolated:** Understanding how to make our systems more equitable is the responsibility of everyone involved in plan, policy, and project development. When the topic of Social Equity exists in isolation or is tacked on at the end of a project or process as an impact assessment, agencies will struggle to operationalize it. Integrating Social Equity means actively seeking out ways to incorporate Social Equity more deeply into ODOT's processes from the beginning, such as OTP policies, implementing programs, and through agreements between leadership and internal departments to commit to delivering more equitable outcomes ([Metrolink, 2021](#)).
9. **Incorporate a trauma-informed perspective in our current context (tolling):** The I-205 and I-5 Toll Projects' Equity Framework (2020) was co-created with the Equity and Mobility Advisory Committee, made up of Social Equity and/or BIPOC community leaders specifically convened for the tolling project. The Equity Framework calls to, "Incorporate a trauma-informed perspective in our current context by recognizing the trauma associated with multiple historic and current events, including the ongoing killings of African Americans by police, the COVID-19 pandemic, the economic ramification from these events, as well as the impacts of past transportation and land use investments... Embracing this trauma-informed perspective in policy making can begin to address past harms, minimize burdens, and maximize benefits for historically underserved community members." The graphic (Figure 4) developed for I-205

and I-5 Toll Projects' Equity Framework (2020) illustrates a trauma-informed perspective. A trauma-informed perspective recognizes signs of community trauma, such as health disparities and economic instability. The notion of trauma-informed perspectives is derived from mental health fields and has been adapted to a community trauma-informed approach for the tolling projects.

## Process Social Equity

1. **Shift power to historically excluded or underserved groups and celebrate their inclusion:** Shifting power dynamics requires careful examination of who participates at all levels. Consideration includes participating staff, committee makeups, and decision-making bodies to reflect historically excluded or underserved populations. The Oregon Toll program aims to elevate the needs and priorities of historically marginalized communities. To do this, the I-205 and I-5 Toll Projects' Equity Framework (2020) requires that each of the projects recognize, understand, and shift existing power dynamics within ODOT, other government agencies, groups, the community, and the projects' teams.

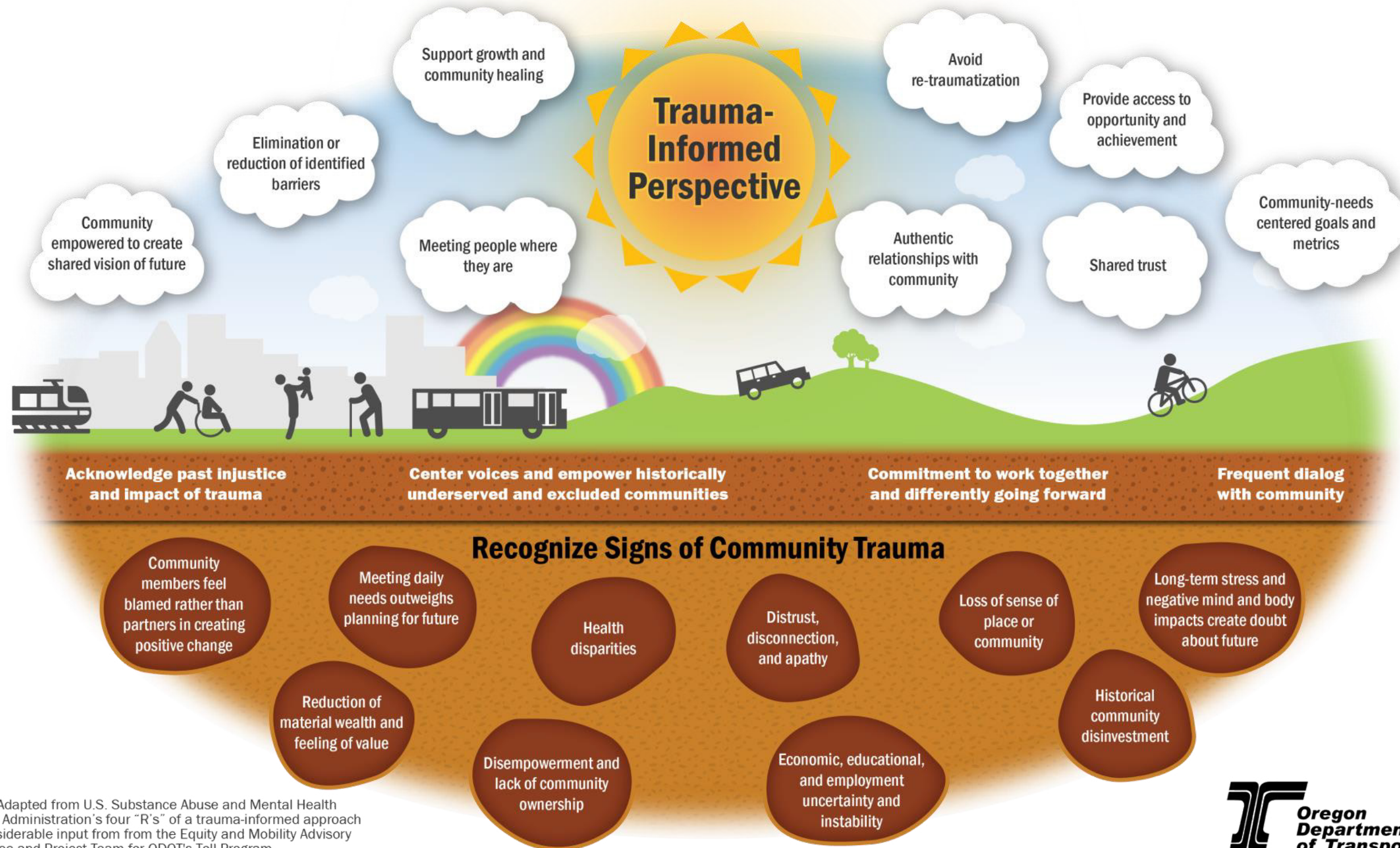
During the development of the OTP/OHP a Social Equity Framework will be used to evaluate both the planning process and plan outcomes to better prioritize Social Equity. The OTP/OHP planning process will also conduct a Power Analysis of stakeholder participants to evaluate whether the most impacted are centered in their influence or have the least amount of influence.

Historically excluded, underserved people and BIPOC communities have rich cultures and have demonstrated enormous resiliency and strength, due to the often multiple types of discriminating, exclusion, and marginalization they have endured. During interviews with ODOT leadership, some expressed concern that BIPOC were too routinely portrayed as victims who need saviors. We can strive to further co-create with historically excluded and underserved people, while recognizing their resiliency and strength.

<sup>3</sup> Portland Bureau of Transportation. 2019. "[PedPDX: Walking While Black](#)." Accessed July 13, 2021.



# Trauma-Informed Perspective



Source: Adapted from U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's four "R's" of a trauma-informed approach and considerable input from the Equity and Mobility Advisory Committee and Project Team for ODOT's Toll Program

Use inclusive framing with language and approaches. Typically, the framing of BIPOC communities is othered by using language such as “non-white” or “minority,” which is a white framing that uses a white perspective. Similarly, our framing of transportation needs and options can be more inclusive. For instance, referring to bicycling and walking as active transportation instead of “alternative modes,” implying alternative to a personal vehicle. The recommendation encourages shifting power to make the perspectives and needs of BIPOC and other historically excluded and underserved people central to the framing and execution of the planning process.

2. **Root out paternalism:** Often, decision-making and ways to participate and influence are clear to those with power and unclear to those without it. In fact, this knowledge itself is power. Those with existing power and influence think they know best and are capable of making decisions for and in the interest of those without power. Yet, those with power often don’t think it is important or necessary to understand the experiences of those for whom they are making decisions. In contrast, those without power often do not know how decisions get made and how to gain influence; however, they often bear the burdens of these decisions.<sup>4</sup>

Elevating technical expertise over the lived experiences of users of the transportation system can be one way the use of paternalism manifests. Another is use of relational or political power and leveraging connections to advantage certain outcomes. These are ways in which paternalism can influence planning processes. Putting into place several of the Social Equity Process best practices in this section, such as affinity groups for historically excluded and underserved people and demonstrating how input from those affinity groups is acted upon are ways to counter paternalism.

3. **Develop and formalize a relationship-building mentality and seek to co-create with communities:** ODOT leadership

expressed the understanding that the agency typically engages communities project by project, and that greater ongoing relationship building must take place to address existing trust deficits among communities that have been historically excluded or underserved. Agencies that have led with equity as a priority have found it is useful to think about their ongoing relationships with historically excluded or underserved communities.

For example, the City of Seattle has established an “Equitable Development Initiative” with an ongoing, standing advisory board. The City of Seattle co-created with historically excluded and underserved people who make up the committee by taking the time to explain the Department of Transportation’s Role, asking, listening and learning so communication was more than one-way. They listened to BIPOC by empathizing, understanding and building relationships that enabled the committee to co-create a definition of equitable development. The City of Seattle defines equitable development as, “public and private investments, programs, and policies in neighborhoods that take into account past history and current conditions to meet the needs of marginalized populations and to reduce disparities so that the quality of life outcomes such as access to quality education, living wage employment, healthy environment, affordable housing and transportation, are equitably distributed for the people currently living and working here, as well as for new people moving in.”

Agencies are likely used to engagement for discrete projects. However, strengthening relationships that outlive individual projects can help agencies deliver more equitable projects by ensuring communities are getting involved early with knowledge of how to participate. When agencies work with community organizations to learn what communities need, they can avoid costly public opposition and increase the appreciation and effectiveness of their work.

<sup>4</sup> Jones, Kenneth and Tema Okun. *White Supremacy Culture: From Dismantling Racism, A Workbook for Social Change Groups*. Minnesota Historical Society. ChangeWork. 2001.



4. **Conduct public engagement where people live, play, and work:** Historically excluded or underserved communities frequently face barriers just to engage in traditional agency outreach methods. A given location may be difficult to access, schedules may conflict, language may be a barrier, and people may lack awareness that meetings are being held or for what purpose, and they may believe that agencies will not listen to or act upon their feedback (Metrolink, 2020).

MnDOT developed an ongoing series of community engagements for the purpose of relationship-building and called them Community Conversations. The Community Conversations are a series of in-person conversations between MnDOT staff and individuals who work with and represent underserved communities in Minnesota. Through these conversations, MnDOT has learned, and will continue to learn, directly from underserved people, their unique experiences and struggles with transportation. Since MnDOT did not have a definition of equity when the project began, conversations focused on connecting with communities that are:

- Currently underrepresented in transportation decision-making processes
- Experiencing known inequities in transportation access or outcomes
- Facing unique transportation needs that are not addressed well by current approaches

In the future, a definition of equity will guide future Community Conversation work. The structure of the Community Conversations project is based around MnDOT's eight districts. This structure was set-up to allowing for district-specific conversations and relationship building between local staff and community-based equity partners.

An additional consideration is to engage people who may have been displaced from a neighborhood or place, and their identities and cultural ties are still to that neighborhood or place. Special care must be taken to identify and engage displaced people.



5. **Focus on cultural agility:** Cultural agility encompasses far more than translating information into other languages. Agencies must develop their capacity to compose messages that speak to the cultural values of the communities they serve, particularly those that are historically excluded or underserved. A literal translation into another language is likely going to be perceived differently than intended because cultural context is not considered. Cultural agility goes beyond linguistic considerations and includes cultural variations across racial, ethnic, and religious lines. Cultural agility requires agencies to be culturally specific, which means adopting new ways of doing things. Greater diversity amongst staff at all levels and stakeholders participating in the development of the OTP that reflects the diversity of the state is one way to achieve greater cultural agility. Another is to engage community-based organizations and community leaders that represent people of specific cultural backgrounds and compensating them for their expertise.

Oregon is becoming more diverse, and our planning process must reflect cultural agility to be responsive to more diverse needs. Based on the 2020 Census, Oregon grew more diverse in the last decade and is now the 29th most diverse state. Growth occurred in the following race/ethnicity categories, from greatest to least: Hispanic or Latino, Asian, White (non-Hispanic), Black, American Indian or Native Alaskan, and Native Hawaiian. However,

the greatest growth was amongst those who identify as multiracial, tripling over the decade (Oregonian, 2021). Cultural agility is critical to serving the needs of Oregonians.

6. **Use affinity groups to draw-out and uplift historically excluded or underserved voices:** Affinity groups are groups made up of people who have shared identity, such as people living with disabilities or BIPOC, and can be at the staff or stakeholder engagement level. For people experiencing low income, older adults, children, people with LEP, and people living with disabilities, participating in mixed groups can feel exposing. Based on feedback from affinity focus groups, people stated that they felt more comfortable sharing their experience amongst others of a similar background. This is intensified for BIPOC who have almost universally experienced racial bias. A history of being excluded has led to legitimate mistrust amongst underserved people and providing them a separate space and way to engage can help engender trust. Likewise, allies who want to enable equity can come together in separate spaces to talk about how they can advocate and enable.
7. **Maintain a learning orientation and operate with empathy:** The prioritization of Social Equity is a new for ODOT and staff and stakeholders involved are learning how to create more equitable outcomes. Centering and honoring the lived experiences of historically excluded and underserved groups requires active listening, a willingness to learn, and entering conversations with empathy.
8. **Slow down and build trust, but make progress:** Operating with a sense of urgency can stymie innovative approaches and has the potential to reinforce the status quo. Further, relationship building and overcoming trust deficits takes time.

The City of Seattle has had a commitment to race and equity for 10 years, and the co-creation of an equity definition and equity drivers has taken place over 3 years, including taking time to educate stakeholders about processes so they could fully participate.

## Social Equity Tools

1. **Make use of equity indices, frameworks and other tools:** Equity tools can assist with intentional and objective analysis and are often the most visible product of an equity analysis. One recent tool the ODOT Office of Social Equity has produced is a Social Equity Index (see description on page 11), which identifies low to high social equity areas and can be used as a tool to understand the distribution of populations and as a means to help set priorities.

The City of Seattle has recommended an approach to racial equity (Figure 5). Their Racial Equity Toolkit lays out a process and a set of questions to guide the development, implementation, and evaluation of policies, initiatives, programs, and budget issues to address the impacts on racial equity.

The California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment has developed [CalEnviro Screen](#), which is a mapping tool that helps identify California communities that are most affected by many sources of pollution, and where people are often especially vulnerable to pollution effects. Amar Cid, Program Manager for Office of Race and Equity at Caltrans says that CalEnviro Screen is fundamental to the way that policy is made in California and relying on communities that are most harmed by pollution is the way they are centering Social Equity. State level health policies that relate to quality food accessibility has also been helpful in shaping transportation policies to focus on Social Equity.

The OTP process will develop an equity framework as a tool to help prioritize equity during the planning process.

2. **Make tools accessible and interactive:** Interactive, map-based equity tools, created by cities like San Antonio, provide a way for an agency to clearly communicate equity data that it has collected. These map-based tools, such as the Social Equity Index being developed by ODOT, can be integrated into decision-making processes both within the agency and

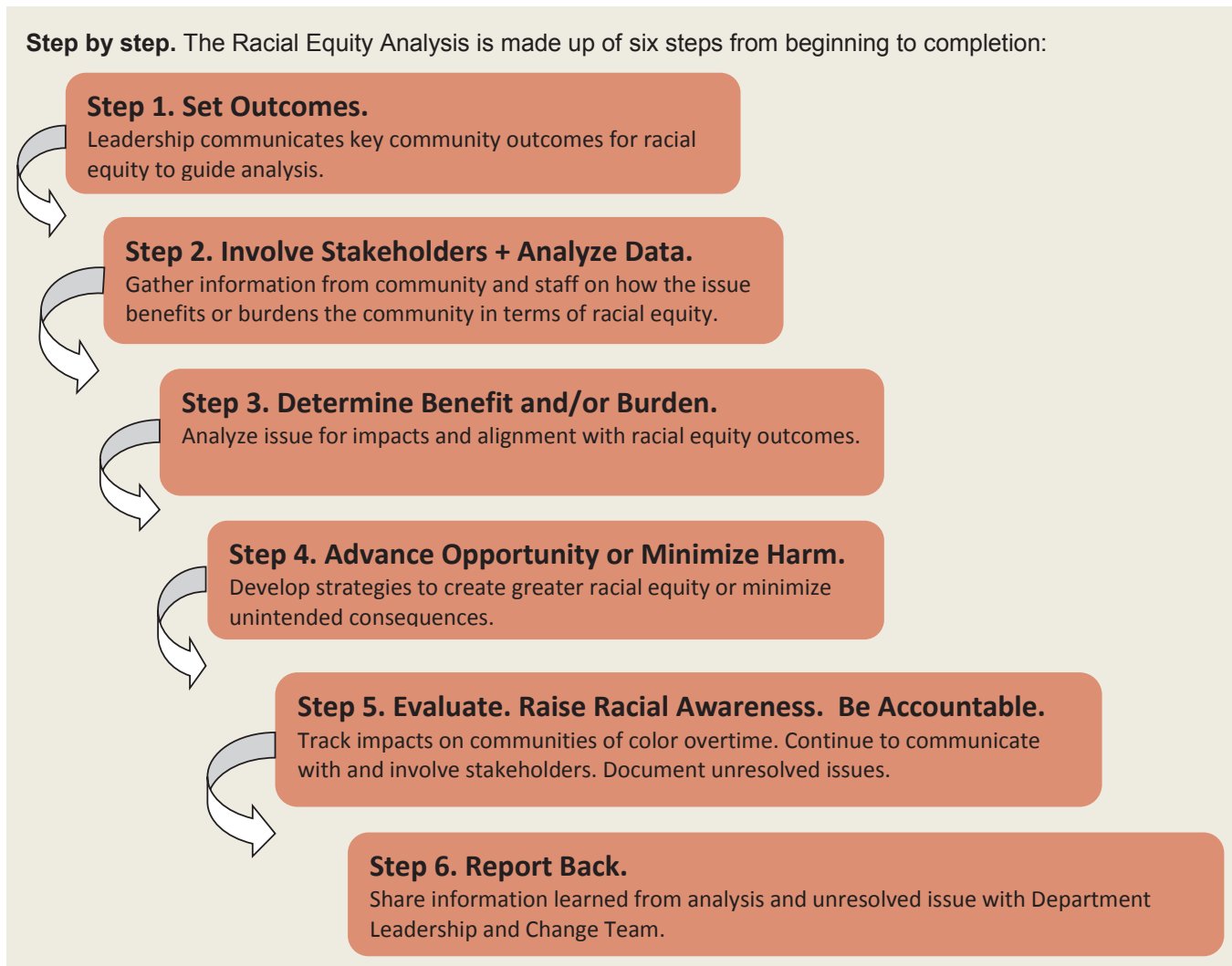


Figure 5. Seattle Race and Social Justice Initiative's [Racial Equity Tool Kit](#) to Assess Policies, Initiatives, Programs, and Budget Issues (City of Seattle, 2012)

beyond. Early use of these equity map-based tools can inform policy, program, and project development.

The [City of San Antonio's Equity Atlas](#) provides census-tract level data based on several regional inequality indicators. These include race, income, education, language, and historic redlining data. The atlas is publicly accessible and allows users to click on tracts to see how the City's scoring system assesses needs and access barriers in detail.

3. **Be inclusive, transparent, and clear about how equity tools change decisions:** The purpose of equity tools is to push agencies toward

innovation and more equitable outcomes and to think critically about the ways in which they serve communities. Agencies must be able to point to how these tools have affected concrete and meaningful change in policies, programs, and projects, or how and why they have not. Being clear with the public about how a given equity tool has changed agency decisions garners trust among stakeholders and provides an opportunity for the public to weigh-in on the effectiveness of the tool, which ultimately leads to better relationship building and different outcomes (Metrolink, 2020).



## Operationalizing Equitable Outcomes

1. **Measure Social Equity, evaluate, monitor, and reinvest—measuring, evaluating, and monitoring Social Equity is an act of an agency holding itself to account.** Measuring Social Equity is important, especially to elevate Social Equity to the same level as other performance-based frameworks used within the Agency. Both MnDOT and Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) have recognized the need for and continue to research and develop equity focused performance metrics. For the 2024-27 STIP process, which sets funding priorities by category, ODOT introduced Social Equity criteria and used active transportation investment as a means by which to measure the prioritization of Social Equity, recognizing that underserved communities are in need of greater transportation options and multimodal access.

Following the implementation of a policy, program, or project, monitoring and evaluating the actual outcomes against stated goals should be completed to assess whether anticipated benefits and burdens are realized and whether any unforeseen issues may require mitigation. These metrics can be coordinated with health equity metrics and outcomes. Baseline and post-implementation evaluations, through data collection or surveys, can be used to confirm whether target outcomes have been achieved. Within health equity, this process is called “Continuous Improvement.” Evaluations provide another opportunity for public transparency and have the potential to build trust among historically excluded or underserved communities, especially if the monitoring and evaluation results in further investment and clarification of ways to meet Social Equity goals.

Within Social Equity, accessibility measures with measurable objectives include accessibility to jobs, education, services, and other essential needs. However, ODOT must balance performance-based measurement with

**In 2020, the Washington State Legislature directed the WSDOT to study the feasibility of performance-based evaluation of transportation projects.** WSDOT studied how to compare transportation projects to determine which investments will best help the transportation system meet the policy goals set by the Legislature. The study included:

- Looking at how WSDOT has used the transportation policy goals to make decisions.
- Reviewing WSDOT’s current tools and procedures for evaluating performance.
- Asking for feedback from stakeholders, including traditionally underserved and historically disadvantaged populations, to help inform how WSDOT and the Legislature could evaluate transportation investments.
- Analyzing how WSDOT engages and communicates with stakeholders, including people who have been historically underrepresented, about project evaluation.

**WSDOT learned through public engagement that the way projects are currently selected is not widely understood, particularly for people without deep experience in transportation policy. The study produced a performance-based project evaluation developmental model that responds to the assessment results and stakeholder input. The model incorporates a sorting layer to take advantage of internal subject matter expertise, a criteria-based scoring layer, and a more detailed evaluation of environmental, health and equity values through a screening layer. The steps of the layered evaluation process contribute to a project’s composite score. Next steps include taking the findings of the study, including the performance-based project evaluation developmental model back to the State legislature to further gauge their interest in implementation.**

qualitative assessments because overreliance on what can be quantified can limit full understanding of historically excluded or underserved communities.



2. **Increase access to transportation options and opportunities:** Increasing transit, bicycle, and pedestrian access greatly benefits low-income households for whom car affordability may be difficult. These individuals are disproportionately BIPOC and/or disabled. Increasing transportation options—transit, bicycle, and pedestrian opportunities, while making them safe, convenient, and affordable—generally provides benefits for all people and has greater potential for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. People experiencing low-income benefit the most from increased transit access because transit riders are disproportionately lower income.

ODOT's 2024-27 STIP allocation process uses multimodal investment, meaning investment in transit, bicycle, and pedestrian access, as a way to approximate greater equitable investments. All efforts the agency investigated identified greater investment in transportation options as a way to make the transportation system more equitable for historically excluded and underserved people. Making these investments in a way that anticipates and responds to the potential of gentrification and displacement is also important. Stabilizing the housing market and keeping it affordable before transportation investments are made, including multimodal investments, helps lead to greater Social Equity. To better understand the dynamics between transportation investments and housing, including identifying anti-displacement tools, ODOT is conducting a [Transit and Housing Study](#), which is currently in progress and expected to be completed in the spring of 2022.

3. **Increase the affordability of the transportation system:** The need to make the transportation system more affordable is directly related to the need to increase transportation options. The connection between land use and transportation is key to overall affordability. Typically, next to housing, transportation makes up the second greatest expense in a household budget.

When evaluating new approaches, such as tolling, or emerging technologies, such as



electric vehicles and charging infrastructure, e-bikes and e-scooters, and highly-automated shuttles to augment public transit, decision-makers need to strive to make the transportation system increasingly affordable, and thus more accessible to all. We need to consider the private household investment required to participate in the transportation systems we create.

4. **Contribute to healthier communities, particularly for those who have been historically excluded and underserved:** Transportation access is a social determinant of health outcomes. Transportation choices are connected and can affect a household's physical environment, health outcomes, economic mobility, educational and cultural opportunities, and numerous other factors that influence quality of life. As with any public works project, transportation infrastructure projects carry potential health and safety impacts such as air quality, noise, and traffic safety. Moreover, people experiencing low-income are more likely to live near highways and are therefore exposed to more traffic noise and air pollution than affluent populations. Highway pollution can disproportionately burden low-income populations who are less likely to drive.<sup>5</sup>

Contrasted with impact analysis, such as Environmental Justice processes, contributing to healthy communities calls for more than mitigating negative effects of a project

<sup>5</sup> Manville, M. and Goldman, E., Would Congestion Pricing Harm the Poor? Do Free Roads Help the Poor? Journal of Planning Education and Research, (2018).

ODOT's recently adopted 2021-2026 Climate Action Plan (2021) lists 5-Year Climate Actions, including a Climate Justice Approach. The list of actions represents the work ODOT is committed to conduct between 2021 and 2026 to reduce emissions from transportation, address equity and climate justice, and make the transportation system more resilient to extreme weather events.

The Climate Action Plan states, "Climate Justice requires acknowledgment that past and current policies, practices, and investments may exacerbate differing social, economic, public health and other adverse effects on communities throughout the state and seeks to eradicate or mitigate these adverse effects on marginalized and underserved communities as much as possible. Modernizing

the transportation system in Oregon offers important opportunities to address climate justice while improving outcomes for all Oregonians. ODOT Climate Office will lead development of a data-driven approach to integrate climate justice into agency policies, decision-making processes, and investments to ensure ODOT's work extends beyond improving the transportation system, and results in an environmentally friendly transportation system that advances the protection of marginalized and underserved communities from climate hazards. The climate justice approach will be developed in conjunction with ODOT's existing work to prioritize equity with an emphasis on designing fair, transparent, and inclusive decision-making processes, accessible to all Oregonians, (Climate Action Plan, 2021)."

after decisions about it have been made. Contributing to healthier communities and people, particularly those who have been historically excluded and underserved, requires upstream action from policy making and program development to implementation and evaluation. Contributing to healthier communities is rooted in creating equitable outcomes, and can be coordinated with education, health, and economic data to understand people's conditions and disparities and to evaluate the distribution of outcomes.

5. **Prioritize equitable investments:** Within WSDOT's Performance-based Project Evaluation Feasibility Report, health and equity factors, such as air pollution and access to employment and education, were evaluated based on screening questions and deemed important to consider during the decision-making process.

The process used the health and equity screening questions below, which are answered "yes" or "no" and could include a brief explanatory statement. The highest screening score came from projects with positive outcomes for environmental, health, and equity value benefits.

For example, with respect to air pollution...

- a. Does the project produce a best outcome?
- b. Does the project have a net positive impact?
- c. Does the project have a negative impact?
- d. Can the project be modified to decrease or avoid impact?
- e. Can the negative impact be mitigated?

Additional screening questions could relate to community support.

6. **Establish universal goals with targeted strategies:** Planning for the City of Seattle Pedestrian Plan focused on walkable communities with accessible sidewalks, which was a universal, citywide goal. There was an understanding that there would not be an even, or equal, investment across the city. Rather, investments were prioritized based on need recognizing that some neighborhoods had sidewalks in greater disrepair. Those areas of the city received a higher priority and were the recipient of a greater share of funds. Therefore, while the goal was universal, the planning process developed targeted strategies to address inequities (or equity).

7. **Seek transformative, not transactional changes:** The Othering and Belonging Institute differentiates transactional and transformational change and recommends striving for transformational change.<sup>6</sup> Transactional changes reform or eliminate a single barrier within a structure to enable more people to achieve a universal goal, and these are necessary changes. Transformative changes are changes in the structures and systems that shape group outcomes. These are more durable and may be sufficient changes.

An example of transformative change, and progressing toward it, could be moving away from traditional roadway investments and moving increasingly toward emerging technologies and transportation options.

8. **Assign ownership and hold staff to account:** To better operationalize equity policies, MNDOT staff recommend the agency assign ownership of activities and provide sufficient staff level resources to support and advance the activities. Sufficient staff levels would enable focused and substantial work towards achieving Social Equity.



## Conclusion

Collectively, transportation agencies at the state and local levels are making equity a priority and are developing policies, programs, and strategies to better achieve equity through their processes and with their outcomes. Having a clear and common definition for equity is a critical grounding step. While all agencies have not taken this step, all staff at agencies interviewed recognize it is necessary. We have much to learn from other current ODOT Social Equity efforts and the work of other agencies. The OTP and OHP, with a planning time horizons of 20 years and beyond, are opportunities to create transformational change toward a more equitable and just transportation system for all.

<sup>6</sup>Targeted Universalism, Policy and Practice, May 2019.



# Resources

## Agencies' Work Related to Social Equity

[Minnesota Department of Transportation Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan](#)

[City of Seattle Pedestrian Master Plan and Progress Reports](#)

[Oregon Department of Transportation Climate Action Plan](#)

[Washington Department of Transportation Performance Based Evaluation Report](#)

[City of San Antonio Equity Atlas](#)

[City of Seattle Racial Equity Toolkit](#)

[CalEnviroScreen 3.0](#)

[I-5 and I-205 Toll Project's Equity Framework](#)

[City of Portland Bureau of Planning and Sustainability's History of Racist Planning in Portland](#)

[Oregon Health Authority's Health Equity Strategy—Case Study by Princeton University](#)

## On Racism, Transportation as a Social Determinant of Health, and Cultural Agility

[A Hidden History: The stories and struggles of Oregon's African American Communities](#) (from Oregon Humanities, by Walidah Imarisha)

[The Racist History of Portland, the Whitest City in America](#) (Atlantic Magazine, by Alana Semuels)

[White Supremacy Culture: From Dismantling Racism, A Workbook for Social Change Groups](#) (Minnesota Historical Society)

[Divorcing White Supremacy Culture](#) (Tema Okun))

[Cultural Agility](#) (Top Talent Solutions)

[Social Determinants of Health Series: Transportation](#) (American Hospital Association)

[Oregon Health Authority Transportation Research Brief](#)

## Legislation Related to Equity

[Oregon House Bill 3129: The Data Justice Act](#) (pertains to Health Care Providers and Oregon Health Authorities)

Currently in House Committee House Bill on declaring Racism is a Public Health Crisis; [Oregon Public Health Association Info Fact Sheet in Support](#)

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# Appendix A

## Methodology

The Social Equity white paper was developed using: a workshop with select ODOT staff who have experience implementing Social Equity efforts; interviews with ODOT leadership on the topic of Social Equity; an examination of the latest ODOT Social Equity-focused efforts; and case studies of other state and local transportation agencies regarding their approaches to Social Equity. This evaluation prioritized other state Departments of Transportation (DOT), as well as two cities that have innovative approaches to Social Equity.

### ODOT Leadership Interviewed:

- Kris Strickler, Director
- Travis Brouwer, Assistant Director of Revenue, Finance, and Compliance
- Nikotris Perkins, Assistant Director of Social Equity
- Amanda Pietz, Policy, Data, Analysis Division Administrator (and former Climate Office Director)
- Lucinda Broussard, Tolling Program Manager (ODOT Region 1)

### ODOT Equity-Focused Efforts:

- 2021-2023 Strategic Action Plan
- I-5 and I-205 Toll Projects Equity Framework
- 2024-2027 Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP)

### Other Transportation Agencies and Interviewees:

- Caltrans (California), Amar Cid, Program Manager for Office of Race and Equity
- Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT), Hally Turner, Policy Planning Director; Abdullahi Abdulle, Transportation Equity Planning Coordinator; Ashley Zidon, Multimodal Program Coordinator
- Washington Department of Transportation (WSDOT), Karena Houser, Statewide Planning
- City of San Antonio, Zan Gibbs, Chief Equity Officer
- City of Seattle Department of Transportation, Annya Pintak, Transportation Equity Program Manager, Office of Equity and Economic Inclusion (OEEI)





# Appendix B

## **Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan (SMTP) Public Survey Related to Equity**

The survey provided information as well as sought feedback from the public. MnDOT staff specifically asked open-ended questions instead of multiple choice questions, which requires more time to evaluate, because they wanted to do their best to listen openly to answers without preconceived notions about what answers may be.

# EQUITY

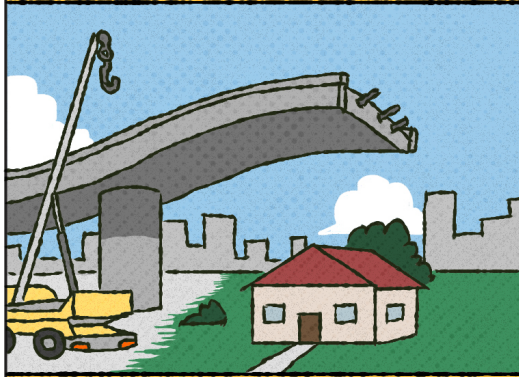
WHAT DOES IT MEAN?



**POLICY, DESIGN AND OPERATIONS IN THINGS LIKE HOUSING AND TRANSPORTATION HAVE LED TO INEQUITIES FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLE AND PEOPLE OF COLOR**



**FOR EXAMPLE, CONSTRUCTION OF INTERSTATES IN THE 1950'S DISPLACED HOMES, BUSINESSES AND CHURCHES**



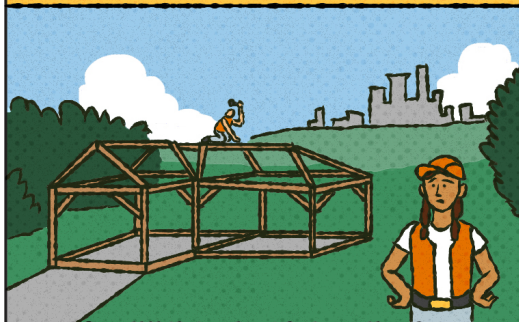
**AND REDUCED HOUSING IN THESE AREAS.**

**THIS MOSTLY TOOK PLACE IN COMMUNITIES WHERE LOANS WERE DENIED OR HOUSING WAS RESTRICTED BY DEED, LEADING TO MUCH LOWER PROPERTY VALUES.**



**THIS DISPROPORTIONATELY AFFECTED POC.**

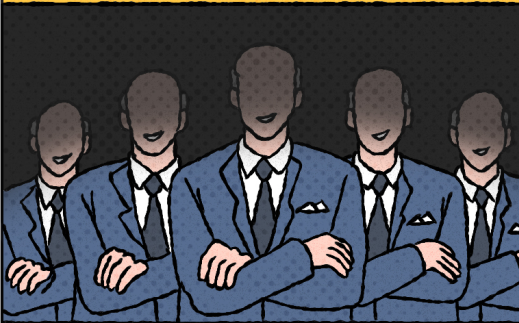
**FAVORING HIGHWAY DEVELOPMENT OVER PUBLIC TRANSPORT LASTED FOR YEARS.**



**THIS ENCOURAGED HOUSING DEVELOPMENT FURTHER FROM KEY DESTINATIONS, FOSTERING SEGREGATION AND INCOME INEQUALITY.**



**LANGUAGE BARRIERS, LACK OF INFO AND LIMITED OPPORTUNITIES MAKE IT DIFFICULT FOR EVERYONE TO PARTICIPATE, OR TO UNDERSTAND ITS IMPACTS.**



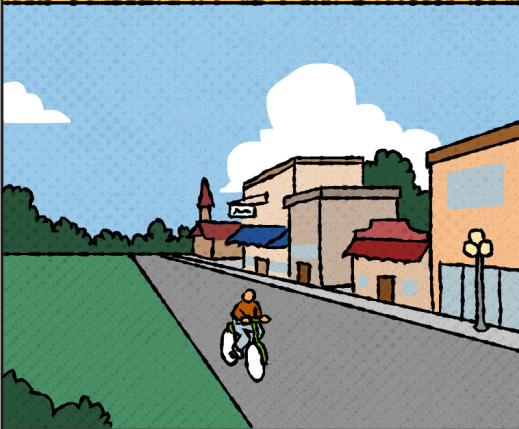
**MEANING THERE IS LITTLE REPRESENTATION IN PLANNING AND DECISION MAKING.**

**NOT TO MENTION THE SEVERE HEALTH RISKS OF LIVING NEAR BUSY ROADS, BUS TERMINALS AND NOISY AIRPORTS.**



**91% OF COMMUNITIES OF COLOR AND INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES SUFFER FROM AIR POLLUTION ABOVE RISK GUIDELINES.**

**AND TRANSPORTATION CAN ALSO SUPPORT THE HEALTH OF PEOPLE, THE ENVIRONMENT, AND THE ECONOMY.**



**TRANSPORTATION EQUITY ENSURES THE BENEFITS AND BURDENS OF TRANSPORTATION SPENDING, SERVICES, AND SYSTEMS ARE FAIR, WHICH HISTORICALLY HAVE NOT BEEN FAIR, AND PEOPLE—ESPECIALLY BLACK, INDIGENOUS AND PEOPLE OF COLOR—ARE EMPOWERED IN TRANSPORTATION DECISION MAKING.**



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