Community of Practice 2022
Briefing Book

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States would set lower highway emissions goals under proposed rule

rollcall.com/2022/07/07/states-would-set-lower-highway-emissions-goals-under-proposed-rule/

July 7, 2022

The Federal Highway Administration on Thursday proposed a rule to require states and municipalities to set targets for reducing roadway greenhouse gas emissions as part of a $27 billion effort to cut emissions from motor vehicles.

The rule would require state departments of transportation and metropolitan planning organizations to establish declining carbon dioxide emissions targets from transportation sources and establish a method for measuring and reporting the emissions to the FHWA.

It would not mandate specific targets, giving states and municipalities "flexibility to set targets that are appropriate for their communities and that work for their respective climate change and other policy priorities." States would be required to establish two- and four-year targets and report on the progress biennially.

The FHWA said that move would help the federal government meet climate goals, including reaching net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by no later than 2050.

“Our approach gives states the flexibility they need to set their own emission reduction targets, while providing them with resources from President Biden’s Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to meet those targets and protect their communities,” Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg said in a news release.

The law signed last November included more than $27 billion to help states and municipalities meet their emissions reduction targets. This includes $6.4 billion for the Carbon Reduction Program, which would provide funding to help states and municipalities develop strategies and fund projects to reduce emissions from on-highway sources.

Other programs

The Transportation Department also highlighted other programs, including $5 billion to build out a national electric vehicle charging network, $7.2 billion for pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure and $250 million to reduce congestion in metropolitan areas.

Currently, 24 states and the District of Columbia have already set greenhouse gas reduction targets under state law. Deputy Federal Highway Administrator Stephanie Pollack said the rule intends to “bring this locally proven approach to scale nationwide.”

Senate Environment and Public Works Chairman Thomas R. Carper said the proposed rule would “fulfill the original congressional intent of performance management and improve the functioning of our highway programs.”

However, the committee’s ranking member, West Virginia Republican Shelley Moore Capito, said that while the bill included provisions to address climate, it did not give the executive branch the authority to establish this reporting requirement.

“Unfortunately, this action follows a common theme by both DOT and the administration, which is implementing partisan policy priorities they wish had been included in the bipartisan bill that the president signed into law.”

According to EPA data, the transportation sector was the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in 2020, mostly from light-duty vehicles. The EPA is currently developing more stringent vehicle emissions standards through model year 2030, with a proposal due in March and a final rule expected a year later.

Evergreen Action, a climate advocacy group, applauded the announcement and said the climate funds distributed through the infrastructure law “can and must be allocated to support ambitious emission reduction strategies.”

“This kind of rulemaking, paired with investments from Congress to support state climate leadership, is exactly what we should be seeing from an administration that promised whole-of-government action on climate,” said Lena Moffitt, the group’s chief of staff.

The Five Pillars Of EV Charging Station Maintenance And Management

forbes.com/sites/forbestechcouncil/2022/07/29/the-five-pillars-of-ev-charging-station-maintenance-and-management/

Thomas Caldwell July 29, 2022

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Forbes Councils Member

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Jul 29, 2022,09:15am EDT|

With the rapid explosion of EV drivers and, thus, chargers across the world, the industry is shifting from a growth business strategy of "land and expand" to one in which the quality of the charging experience matters. In this initial emerging EV charger business model, EV charge point operators (CPOs) raised investments and debt. They chased government grants to fund the rapid expansion and footprint of EV chargers.

The more chargers they deployed, the greater their company valuation became. The faster smart (level 3 and level 4) chargers deployed are equivalent to an intelligent Internet of Things (IoT) device connected to a network and backend cloud. These chargers are more complex and require a greater focus on preventative maintenance and remote monitoring.

While the EV charger market is in its infancy, it is rapidly growing, and governments are now demanding at least 97% availability and uptime before they hand over grant money. Beyond uptime requirements, governments are also proposing rules for certification standards for workers installing, operating and maintaining EV chargers. Quality is beginning to matter in business models over the quantity of deployed chargers.

Quality relates to brand recognition, which still means something in a world where consumers demand value. They want the same experience they are used to enjoying in the fuel retail (gas station) experience. The fuel industry has worked hard on quality of experience to enable some of the top trusted brands in the world, such as British Petroleum, Shell and Chevron. However, the safety and regulatory requirements for fuel tanks and forecourts limit fueling to a retail fuel site.

With EV, chargers can be installed almost anywhere. This freedom in location opens up the entire retail market to offer EV charging services. The "electrical fueling via EV charger" transformation changes the game and business model. Instead of "land and expand," there is a focus on EV driver dwell time in retail and business properties.

The Consolidated Analysis Center, Incorporated, known as CACI, provides business market analysis for retailers. According to a recent CACI U.K. survey, "68% of people who intend to own an electric vehicle (EV) will visit retailers and businesses more frequently if they provide the right charging facilities, highlighting that shoppers expect retail locations to meet their electrification needs."

CACI’s survey also found that 33% of participants had charged their EV at a supermarket, and the report cited research from Savills showing that retailers that provided EV charging stations saw a 50% increase in dwell time and average spend that ranged from £36 to £80 (about $43 to $96) per visit.

As more EV drivers get on the roads, there will be a priority focus on the charging experience and EV charging station reliability. Reliability and customer service are already becoming a top concern for EV drivers. Many EV drivers are complaining about how they arrive at what is reported as an available charging station, only to find it doesn’t work. The EV “range anxiety” then kicks in when they worry they won’t have enough battery to drive to another available charging station.

This range anxiety can also manifest itself on longer trips when they are concerned with the availability of working chargers along the way. Many EV drivers will top off the charge of their EV vehicles along the way to de-risk their trip, causing more stops than if they had a fuelpowered car. These problems can manifest in drivers feeling they have made a mistake in switching to an EV and telling their close network of friends and colleagues about these issues.

Besides the government requirement for uptime for EV chargers, ease of use, cleanliness and safety are all significant concerns that affect the EV charging experience. The EV charging station is not only affected by the EV charger itself but also by the uptime and maintenance of other related EV assets: the electrical feed from the grid, additional solar panels, batteries, signage, lighting and parking spaces. These EV charging station assets are business-critical to operating a charging network and therefore need optimum upkeep and maintenance. A speedy repair is required to minimize downtime if they do break down.

In summary, the process of maintaining and managing operations of an EV charging station requires five key pillars:

1. Manage on-site repairs to minimize downtime and optimize on-site repair costs. Runaway repair costs can easily ruin the ROI on an EV charger investment.

2. Manage scheduled preventative maintenance tasks and track the fail/pass of various types of inspections. If inspections are not carried out, exception handling needs to ensure compliance with operational, electrical and potential government uptime regulations.

3. Ensure visibility and control for tracking uptime and performance by site and by asset.

4. Track SLA performance of regional suppliers that install, maintain and repair chargers.

5. Provide business intelligence reporting. Good, clean operations data can produce accurate business insights, which drive sound business decisions.

A more advanced maturity model for EV charger operations can ease the headaches for other areas, such as tracking repairs tied to insurance claims (yes, someone will run into a charger with their car), dealing with supply chain issues, avoiding excessive downtime on EV chargers by knowing where spares exist and being aware of the lifespan of charging station assets to have long-range visibility in budget planning replacements.

This operational maturity model will require a maintenance and management system, the kind found in facility operations. Big oil retailers are transforming into big energy service providers in their retail and non-retail locations. They will continue to demand observability and control in managing the uptime and quality of service for EV charging. Their brand is everything to them, which requires high availability, reliability and an excellent EV charging experience.

The amount we drive could make or break clean energy plans

ssti.us/2021/09/13/the-amount-we-drive-could-make-or-break-clean-energy-plans

September 13, 2021

By Chris McCahill

There is an important growing consensus around the need for achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2050. The White House, Ford Motor Company, and many state and local governments seem to be on board. Yet the transportation sector—still an afterthought in some bold plans—may be our biggest challenge. Transportation emissions continue to rise and now make up a larger share than any other sector.

"Zero emissions" is a lofty goal, and one worth aiming for, but this line of thinking has caused some in the transportation profession to lean heavily on widespread electrification for hitting the mark. Instead of focusing on that ideal outcome, however, it is important to think about what missing the mark could look like, so that we can take all the necessary steps to limit further environmental damage. We should be asking, for instance, what if our clean energy transition takes longer than we hope? What if gas-powered cars keep getting larger and less fuel efficient? And what if we experience another driving boom, spurred by outward growth and self-driving vehicles?

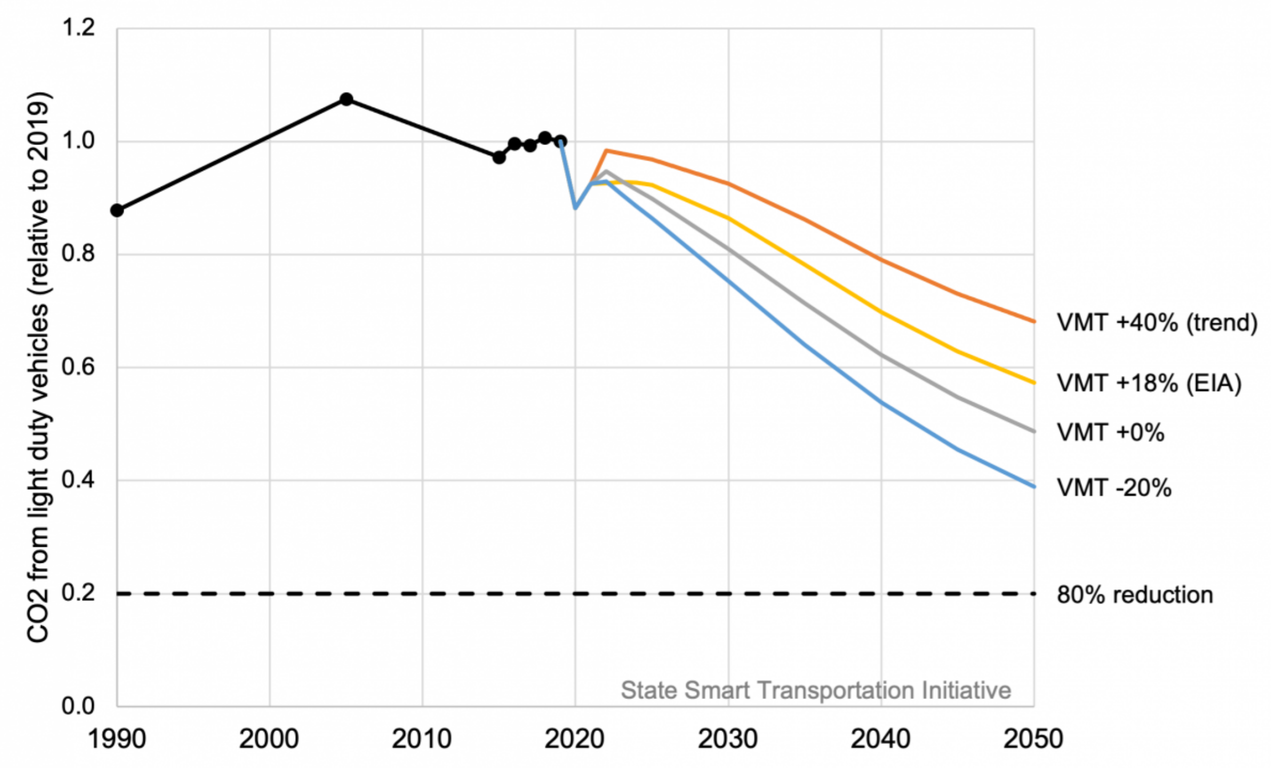
We at SSTI modeled several different scenarios to answer these questions and to understand how far off from our goal we might land in each case. The results (shown below) suggest that without considering factors like total vehicle miles traveled (VMT), we could be producing the same transportation emissions decades from now as we are today, or worse. This should be no surprise, since it is the same trend we have seen over the last 30 years.

A handful of state agencies have recognized that challenge and taken steps to manage VMT growth. A state law in California, for instance, requires state and local agencies to limit and mitigate any new VMT caused by developments or transportation investments, and a proposed rule in Colorado could have a similar effect. Meanwhile, a longstanding state law in Washington and advisory council recommendations in Minnesota are compelling their state DOTs to formulate more proactive VMT management strategies. Our analysis helps paint a picture of why steps like these could be so important.

Our approach is based on a recent study from Carnegie Mellon that argues for "travel budgets" as a critical consideration in reducing emissions by 80% in 2050. Focusing just on light-duty vehicles, which account for around 60% of transportation emissions, it found that if VMT rises to 4 trillion (a 37% increase), at least 73% of travel would need to be electrified to reduce emissions by 80%. If VMT drops to 2 trillion (a 32% decrease), less than half of travel would need to be electrified.

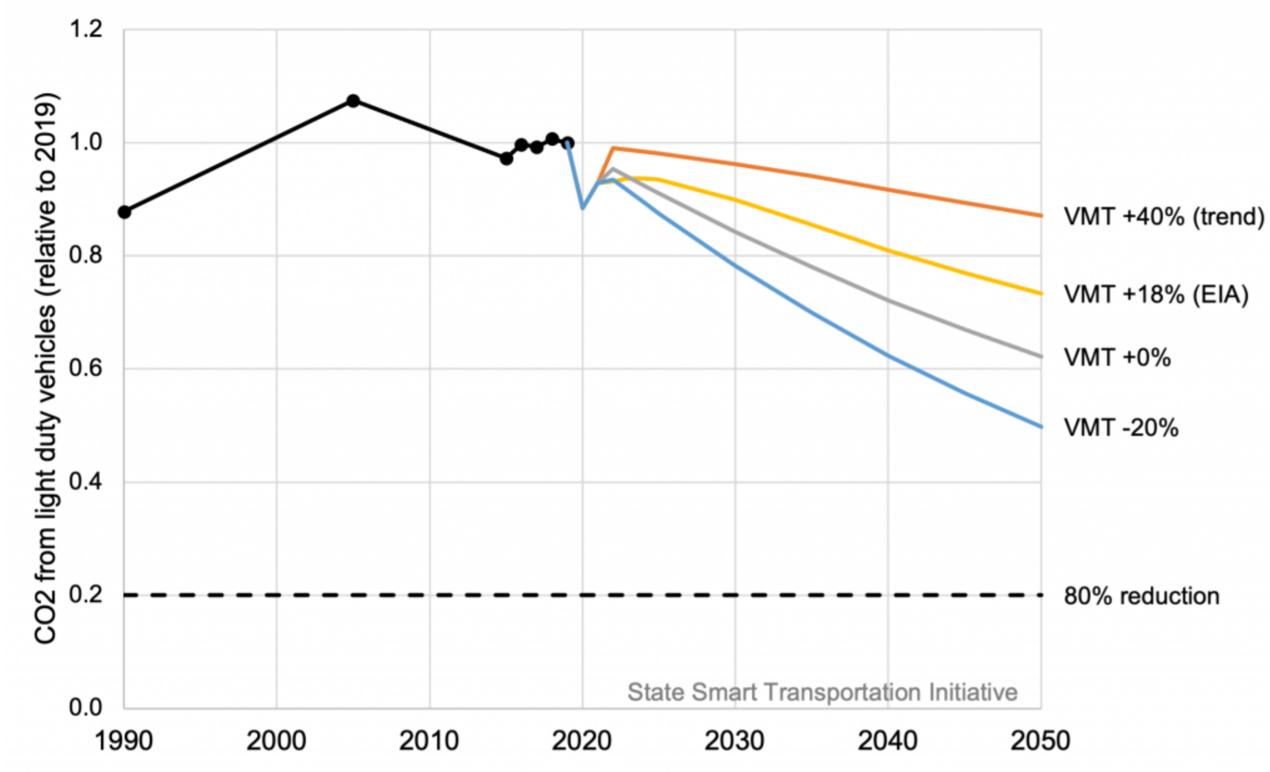
Unfortunately, even those ambitious targets are built on rosy assumptions. For instance, the study assumes that average CO_2 emissions from electrical production will drop by 75%, compared to a 25% reduction projected by the U.S. EIA, and which the authors call "incompatible with the climate targets under consideration." And recent industry forecasts estimate electric vehicles could account for 30 to 50% of total VMT in 2050, which barely puts us on the right track.

Assuming the electrical grid becomes at least 20% cleaner, and the average fuel economy of gas-powered vehicles improves by 46% (Scenario 1), we could expect emissions to drop by anywhere from 30 to 60% in 2050, depending on total VMT. The U.S. EIA forecasts an 18% VMT increase, in which case emissions could drop by around 43%. Keeping VMT flat or reducing it by 20% could help get emissions down by 50 to 60%. If VMT increases at the same rate it has for the last 30 years, however, emissions would only drop by about 30%.



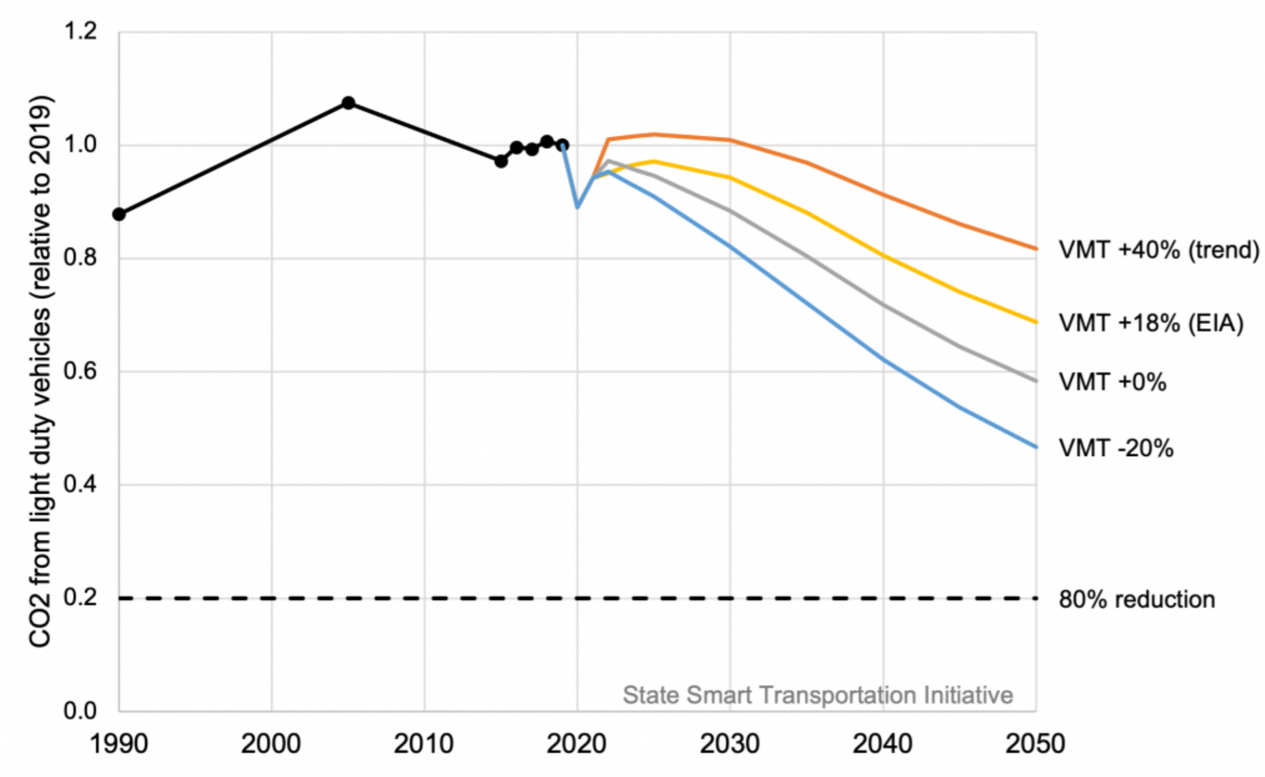
Scenario 1. Electrification based on industry forecasts, paired with major fuel economy improvements

The outcomes in Scenario 1 all depend on electric vehicles accounting for more than 40% of travel. However, if weak incentives and slow production persist, and we see an electric vehicle market closer to what the U.S. EIA anticipates (around 15% of VMT), emissions could drop by only 13 to 50% (Scenario 2).



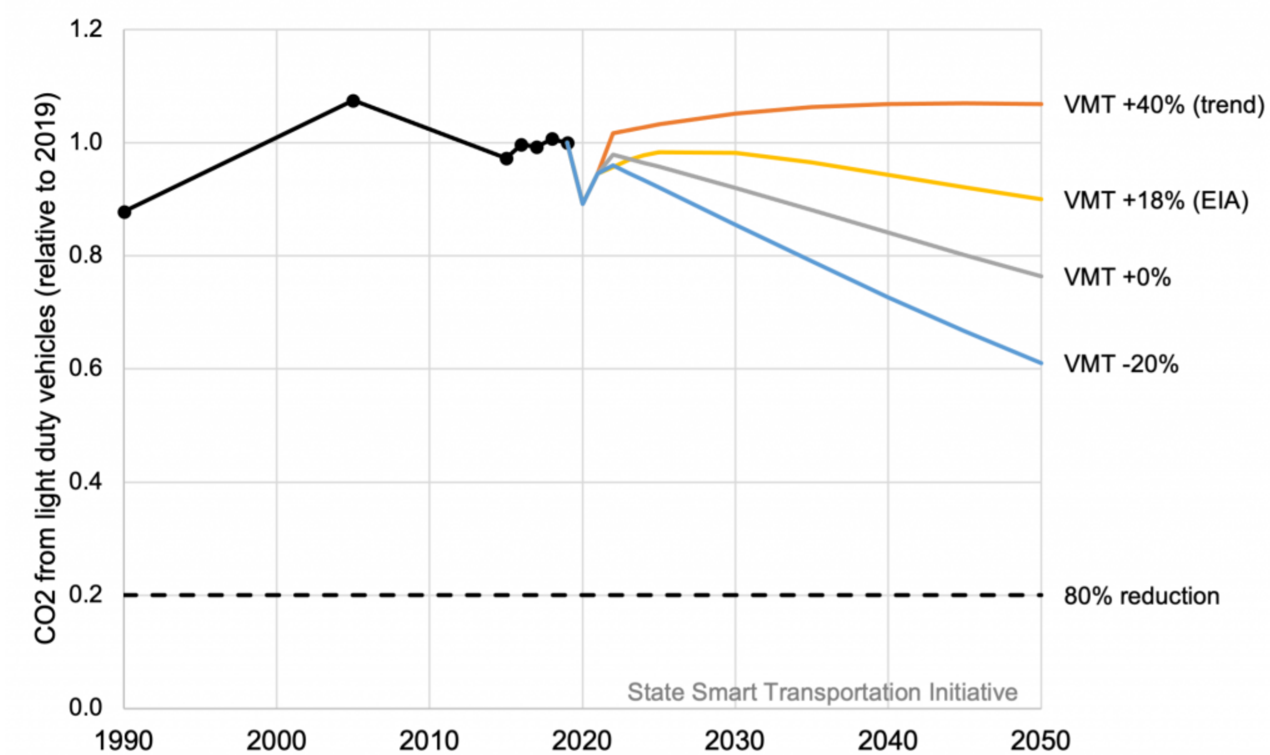
Scenario 2. Electrification based on U.S. EIA's Annual Energy Outlook, paired with major fuel economy improvements

Assuming we do stay on track to electrifying at least 40% of travel, the remaining 60% will still be gas-powered and the fuel economy of those vehicles will be critically important. The scenarios above assume those numbers will improve from around 25 miles per gallon today to 36 MPG in 2050. At the current 30-year rate, however, we could expect something closer to 29 MPG. The outcomes in that case are like those under a weaker EV market, except that rising VMT could cause emissions to hover around the same level for another decade before beginning to drop off (Scenario 3).



Scenario 3. Electrification based on industry forecasts, paired with modest fuel economy improvements

And in one of the worst-case scenarios—one with modest EV uptake and fuel economy improvements—emissions are likely to stay roughly where they are through 2050, or even increase, unless we can slow VMT growth (Scenario 4). Lowering VMT or keeping it flat, however, could help us cut emissions by 30 to 40%.



Scenario 4. Electrification based on U.S. EIA's Annual Energy Outlook, paired with modest fuel economy improvements

This is not to suggest that we cannot meet ambitious clean energy goals. Instead, it is to remind those leading the charge that no strategy should be left off the table. To learn more about taking a comprehensive approach, interested state officials can read a recent brief from the Colorado DOT or reach out to SSTI staff for opportunities to engage with peers and experts working in the field.

Our assumptions and methods

Scenario	Light-duty VMT (trillions)	EV share of VMT	Average fuel economy (gas)
2019	2.9	0.02	24.9 mpg
Scenario 1	2.3 to 4.1	0.42	36.4 mpg
Scenario 2	2.3 to 4.1	0.15	36.4 mpg
Scenario 3	2.3 to 4.1	0.42	29.4 mpg
Scenario 4	2.3 to 4.1	0.15	29.4 mpg

We used an equation developed by Alarfaj et al. to estimate CO_2 emissions from light duty vehicles, including their electric loss factor (L = 0.12 + 0.045), electric vehicle fuel economy (6 miles per kWh), gasoline fuel economy (36.4 miles per gallon in 2050), and gasoline carbon intensity (821 grams per gallon). We assume gasoline fuel economy in 2019 is 24.9 miles per gallon, based on estimates from the U.S. EPA. For modest fuel efficiency improvements, we assume gasoline fuel economy in 2050 is 29.4, based on the 30-year trend. We also assume the carbon intensity of electric power drops from 428 grams per kWh in 2018 to 329 in 2050, based on the U.S. EIA projections reported by Alarfaj et al.

We estimate the electric vehicle share of VMT from two sources. Our industry forecast is the average of three forecasts provided by the Columbia Center on Global Policy and our other forecast is from the U.S. EIA's Annual Energy Outlook. We base our high VMT scenario on the 30-year trend in FHWA's Highway Statistics (+40%) and our medium-high VMT scenario on the Annual Energy Outlook (+18%). We also include a constant VMT scenario and a 20% reduction.

Our historical estimates of light duty vehicle emissions are from the latest inventory of greenhouse gas emissions from U.S. EPA.

Minnesota and California move toward reducing VMT to address climate change

ssti.us/2021/03/30/minnesota-and-california-move-toward-reducing-vmt-to-address-climate-change/

March 30, 2021

By Rayla Bellis

Minnesota and California both made progress this month in their efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by reducing the need to drive.

The Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) recently made a highly anticipated decision to adopt a number of recommendations from the state's Sustainable Transportation Advisory Council (STAC) made in December 2020, including setting a preliminary statewide goal for a 20% VMT reduction statewide and per capita by 2050. For the average Minnesota driver, that will mean traveling about 45 fewer miles per week in 2050 than today. MnDOT's response to the STAC recommendations notes that the state will finalize the goal (including potentially setting interim targets and different targets for the Twin Cities region and Greater Minnesota) after engaging the public and stakeholders through the Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan process that will occur throughout 2021.

MnDOT also plans to develop an approach for estimating program and project VMT outcomes by assessing both induced demand from adding lanes and reduced demand from increasing walking access, as well as evaluating the accuracy of travel demand forecasting methods.

In California, the California State Transportation Agency (CalSTA) released a public discussion draft of its plan to use infrastructure development to reduce VMT. The Climate Action Plan for Transportation Infrastructure (CAPTI), created in response to Governor Gavin Newsom's executive order, will be finalized later this year.

The draft CAPTI comprises 28 action items, intended to "help advance a slate of projects that meet climate goals, ensure that these projects are prioritized for state funding, and promote project construction and operations that minimize emission and impacts from climate change."

Here are some of the action items that are of particular interest to the state DOT community:

- CalSTA and Caltrans will develop new ways to mitigate increases in VMT from highway projects. One such approach would be mitigation banks, permitting project sponsors to purchase allowances that would go to fund VMT-reduction projects.
- CalSTA and Caltrans will convene a working group to explore regional pricing strategies, such as cordon pricing and congestion pricing.
- State agencies will leverage transportation funding to incentivize low-VMT land use policies, including streamlined approval for multifamily and mixed-use developments, reduced off-street parking requirements, or density bonuses.
- CalSTA and Caltrans will convert underutilized highways into multimodal boulevards.

Though motivated primarily by climate policy, CAPTI also seeks to address the transportation system's entrenched inequities, such as pollutants that disproportionately affect low-income and minority communities. For example, one action item calls for Caltrans and the California Transportation Commission to reform the way they prioritize projects by using a newly created equity assessment tool.

Photo credit: Michael Hicks at Flickr

One State Is Showing Us How to End America’s Addiction to Highway Expansion

curbed.com/2021/12/colorado-department-transportation-highways-funding-emissions-climate.html

Alissa Walker December 17, 2021

Colorado passed a first-in-the-nation rule requiring new transportation projects to prove they can reduce emissions. Photo: Michael Ciaglo/Bloomberg via Getty Images

At the last meeting of the year of Colorado’s transportation commission, sitting in a bedroom in front of an array of ornately wrapped Christmas presents, chair Kathy Hall introduced the final motion as “the biggest thing this commission has ever been asked to do.” After a brief and lively discussion, 10 out of the 11 commissioners in attendance had approved a new rule requiring the state’s Department of Transportation to direct its dollars to projects proven to lower greenhouse-gas emissions. “CDOT should be applauded for taking this big step,” said Danny Katz, executive director of CoPIRG, one of the state’s larger environmental groups. “It’s absolutely critical in a state where transportation is the largest contributor to greenhouse-gas emissions, including ozone pollution.” As money from a trillion-dollar federal infrastructure bill begins to siphon into state transportation departments, the timing is also fortunate, as Colorado could serve as a model for how the entire country might begin to wean itself off a half-century of freeway-expansion addiction. In this one state, at least, every new transportation project will now need to come with a detailed model showing exactly how emissions will be reduced.

“If they don’t meet the target, they have to come up with a mitigation plan,” says Boulder-based transportation strategist Martha Roskowski, which could mean shifting trips away from cars by adding bike lanes or boosting transit service. The rule is a good step forward, she agrees, even if it requires more work to ensure benefits reach the communities devastated by previous highway construction, and although it won’t necessarily eliminate driving-centered projects — CDOT still has several road-widening projects in its ten-year plan — it will definitely deprioritize the biggest ones. “I don’t think we’ll see them axing highway projects,” Roskowski says, “but I think we’ll see them getting pushed back.” The rule also might lead the state to get extremely creative about using highway funding. For example, CDOT operates the popular and successful Bustang system, which runs intercity bus service to tourist and recreation destinations, offering traffic relief along congested roadways like the I-70 corridor that connects Denver to local ski areas. That program, and others like it, could be expanded under this new policy.

The vote comes at an extremely uneasy moment for transportation policy, with news this week that the Build Back Better Act, and all its climate mitigation provisions, might be delayed or gutted even more just as a whopper of an infrastructure bill gave states an unprecedented amount of money for roads. This week, the Federal Highway Administration announced that $52.5 billion will go to highway funding just in 2022, 20 percent more than states got this year. (About $350 billion of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act is allocated for highway projects over five years.) Based solely on the number of legislators cheering the announcement by promising to widen or lengthen highways, it’s hard not to imagine those billions of dollars being funneled directly into more lanes, more miles, more emissions.

One big difference in Colorado, says Darryl Young, director of the sustainable cities program at the Summit Foundation, is CDOT’s executive director Shoshana Lew, the rare state transportation leader who knows expanding highway infrastructure is untenable. “If we had 50 Shoshana Lews we’d be in a much better place in the United States,” he says. “You cannot work on climate without examining how you reduce the amount of driving — not end driving, because there are a lot of places driving is necessary. But how do you reduce the number of places that you need to get to by driving, through either walking, biking, or transit? You cannot get there by just electrifying everything.” And every added mile of highway is guaranteed to induce more driving, more cars, more pollution, and more traffic, despite the ongoing proclamations of state transportation departments to the contrary, says Carter Rubin, a sustainable-transportation expert at the Natural Resources Defense Council, who collaborated with the Colorado-based Rocky Mountain Institute on a calculator that will be used to quantify the impact of proposed highway projects. In addition to reducing emissions, Colorado’s rule will start to correct the historic imbalance in infrastructure investments that has favored driving above all else, says Rubin. “You can get anywhere in the state in a car, but if you choose other ways you have a fraction of access to jobs and opportunities and nature because we haven’t invested in those modes.”

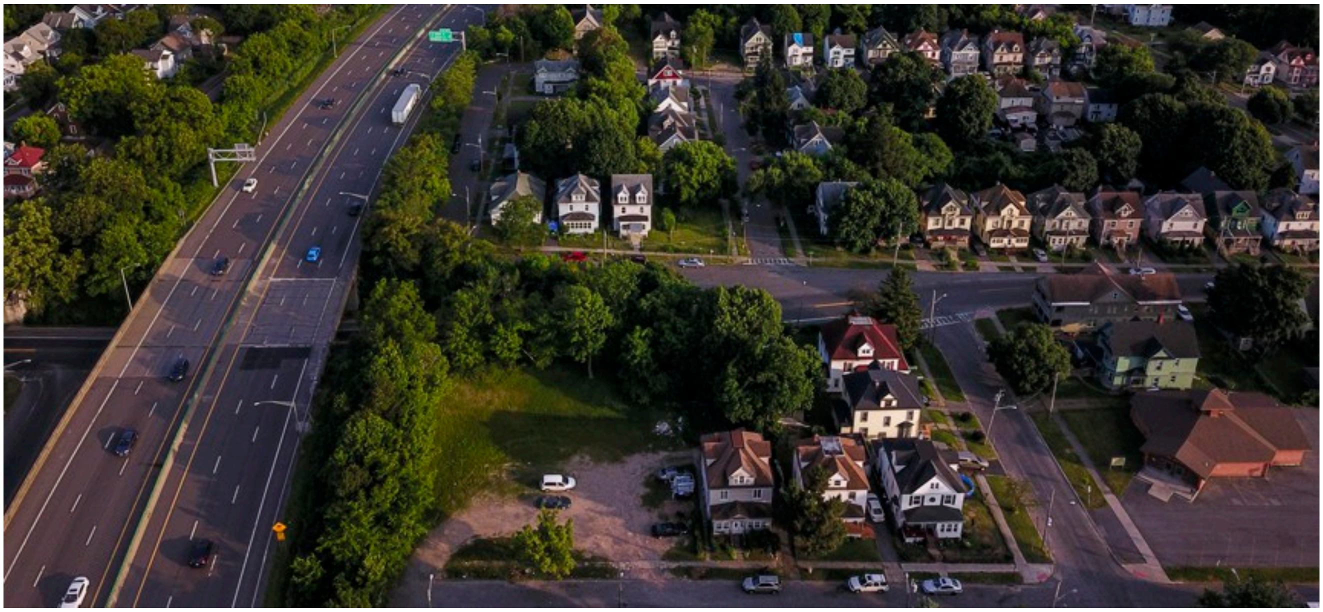
In Colorado, this shift may also mean funds may be diverted from expanding interstates into transforming arterial roads. The extra-wide surface streets in cities and towns are, in some cases, just as dangerous, polluting, and dividing as highways, says Katz. “The same guidance that has been used to design interstates to move cars and trucks quickly are used for these main streets. They’re unsafe for people walking, not conducive for transit and biking, and often part of the high-injury network.” Colorado already has a head start on this, too, with its Safer Main Streets initiative, which designated highway money to make the business districts of smaller cities safer and more pleasant. Sometimes that means utterly basic improvements, like adding the sidewalks the roads didn’t have when they were first built.

In passing this rule, Colorado is leaps and bounds ahead of even the most progressive states when it comes to transit and climate. California, often praised for its climate action, is now severely lagging in implementation; a new report out this week estimated that it probably won’t hit its 2050 greenhouse-gas reduction targets until 2111. Just weeks ago, Governor Gavin Newsom enthusiastically announced that expanding the 15 freeway to Las Vegas would “tackle congestion.” (Spoiler: It won’t.) Massachusetts also has some promising greenhouse-gas reduction efforts that should get a boost from the recent election of Michelle Wu, the T-riding mayor of Boston who ran on transportation reform. But that’s only three states out of 50. Nearly everywhere else, it’s highways, highways, highways.

Transportation secretary Pete Buttigieg, to his credit, has singled out highway expansion, and particularly its destruction of urban neighborhoods, as uniquely harmful. A memo from his highway department yesterday “gently” urged states to consider fixing existing ones before building new, and analysis on the infrastructure bill out yesterday shows that a “fix it first” mentality alone could bend the curve enough on greenhouse-gas reductions to change the country’s transportation fate. Under Buttigieg’s leadership, the feds have even intervened at the state level, putting a freeze on projects like the planned I-45 expansion in Houston that would wipe out several low-income communities. This week, U.S. DOT announced that additional money will be released in 2022 for “reconnecting as many as 20 communities by removing portions of interstates.” Getting rid of them could undo some of the damage wrought upon those neighborhoods. But we also have to stop building highways in the first place.

Senate Package Has $3B for Communities Cut Apart by Highways

route-fifty.com/infrastructure/2022/08/neighborhood-access-equity-grants-highway-removal/375468/



Seen here in 2019, Interstate 81 slices through a predominantly African American community in Syracuse, New York, one of the cities that has pursued a highway removal project in recent years. Jahi Chikwendiu/The Washington Post via Getty Images

By Daniel C. Vock

| August 5, 2022

The "neighborhood access and equity grants" would supplement earlier funding in the infrastructure law and could go towards a range of projects. About a third of the money is earmarked for lower-income areas.

More help could be coming from Washington for neighborhoods that have long been cleaved apart by highways and other infrastructure, if a major spending bill now before Congress becomes law.

The legislation would set aside $3 billion for reconnecting the divided communities, through a new program called Neighborhood Access and Equity Grants. The program would greatly expand similar efforts contained in the federal infrastructure law that passed last year, both in terms of the amount of money available and the scope of projects that would qualify.

The new neighborhood grants are included in the Inflation Reduction Act, a spending measure backed by Democrats, which the Senate approved on Sunday in a party-line vote. The sweeping proposal—which includes around $370 billion for climate and energy programs, as well as health care and tax provisions—surprised advocates and just about everyone around Capitol Hill, who had assumed negotiations on the bill had stalled.

“Certainly no one was counting on it in this session of Congress,” said Rick Cole, executive director of the Congress for the New Urbanism, which has long pushed to remove interstate highways in cities. “But given the magnitude of need and increasing national attention to that need, adding almost three times as much as in [the infrastructure law] shows there is growing momentum for this.”

The new money could be used for a variety of purposes, including covering a highway, turning a highway into a boulevard, adding trails and bike lanes, installing sound barriers, providing better connections to transit, using “green infrastructure” to handle storm runoff, reducing urban heat island hot spots, building safety features and curbing air pollution.

The Biden administration originally asked Congress for $20 billion for a program to help neighborhoods divided by infrastructure, but Senate negotiators pared that down to $1 billion by the time the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act reached the president’s desk. What’s more, the Reconnecting Communities program became a pilot project, rather than a permanent program.

Dozens of advocacy groups pushed Congress to add more funding for those kinds of efforts, and they proposed ways to ensure that disadvantaged communities benefited from the extra money. More than 10 million Americans live next to major transportation corridors, such as highways or railroad tracks, they said.

“Too often, their communities bear the brunt of a highway’s ill effects, from the noxious emissions leading to lifelong health conditions to the severe disinvestment that drives away local businesses, services, and amenities,” a group of over 80 organizations wrote in a letter to congressional leaders last year. The grants “represent a historic investment in these communities and help them heal from the damage highways have caused.”

They touted a feature of the new neighborhood grants that would direct money to underrepresented communities. The current proposal designates $1.1 billion for “economically disadvantaged communities.” To qualify for that funding, those areas must have “an anti-displacement policy, a community land trust or a community advisory board in effect,” as well as a plan to employ local residents in making the improvements.

“This makes it explicit that this is a program meant to heal harms that have been inflicted upon communities by highway building,” said Ben Crowther, the advocacy manager for America Walks, and one of the advocates who has championed the new neighborhood grants.

Unlike the Reconnecting Communities program, Crowther noted, the new money could not be used for projects that add more travel lanes to roads. State transportation departments have begun adding caps over highways in places like Denver and Portland, even as they expand the road's footprint underneath, as a way to address community concerns. But those kinds of projects would not qualify for the new grants.

"That's a net *decrease* in community connectivity," Crowther said.

Beth Osborne, the director of Transportation for America, said the new grants could help address concerns about roads that aren't necessarily grade-separated highways. The grants can be used for transportation infrastructure where "high speeds, grade separation, or other design factors create an obstacle to connectivity within a community."

Roads with four or more lanes that connect major destinations for drivers can also be big obstacles, Osborne said.

"These roads are overbuilt," she said. "They create a level of danger. Anyone walking around the neighborhood who just needs to cross is facing a real risk to their physical safety. That creates a massive barrier for just getting their day-to-day needs, much less to reach real economic opportunity."

Cole, from the Congress for the New Urbanism, said he expects the new program would supplement the work already underway for the Reconnecting Communities grants. The U.S. Department of Transportation is still accepting applications for the pilot program, but Cole said federal officials will be able to apply what they learn through that process toward the neighborhood grants.

Cole said he expected communities that got planning grants through Reconnecting Communities would be able to get funding for the actual project through the new neighborhood grants program.

The programs will give communities and advocates a chance to show whether they can mitigate some of the long-term harms of locating major infrastructure projects in disadvantaged areas.

"For any program, it has to be effective—meaning both cost effective and politically effective—and address a demonstrable need," Cole said. "The question is: Can we reknit communities back together without creating widespread displacement? Can we do that without bureaucratic horror stories or changes in administration throwing everything in disarray?"

Daniel C. Vock is a senior reporter for *Route Fifty* based in Washington, D.C.

One Historic Black Neighborhood’s Stake in the Infrastructure Bill

nytimes.com/2021/11/20/us/claiborne-expressway-new-orleans-infrastructure.html

November 20, 2021

More than two generations after the Claiborne Expressway was built in New Orleans, the economic, environmental and cultural costs of its development are being reconsidered.Credit...William Widmer for The New York Times

By Audra D. S. Burch

Nov. 20, 2021

NEW ORLEANS — In the days after the House passed a $1.2 trillion spending package that promises to pour money into America’s aging infrastructure, several residents of a storied New Orleans neighborhood turned to the highway that divides their streets and pondered a common question: What does this mean for us?

For decades, that highway — an elevated stretch of Interstate 10 that runs above North Claiborne Avenue in the Tremé neighborhood — has been cast as a villain that robbed the historic African American community, taking many of its homes, businesses and a glorious strand of oak trees when it was built more than a half-century ago.

Since then, generations have envisioned a day when it might be removed — or at least closed off to traffic — and the neighborhood restored to its former vibrancy. Now, the infrastructure bill sets aside federal funding to help neighborhoods like Tremé.

“Finally. Finally. Finally,” said Amy Stelly, co-founder of the Claiborne Avenue Alliance, a community organization working to dismantle the highway, which was singled out by President Biden this year. “We have been talking about what to do with the highway for as long as I can remember.”

Amy Stelly, a longtime Tremé resident, is a leader in the campaign to remove the Claiborne overpass.Credit...William Widmer for The New York Times

But with just $1 billion — 5 percent of the $20 billion the Biden administration originally proposed — allocated to reconnecting neighborhoods that suffered after highways divided them, it could be considerably longer before Ms. Stelly and other Tremé residents witness the removal of the Claiborne Expressway, which one early study estimated would cost more than $500 million.

The infrastructure bill, signed by Mr. Biden on Monday, earmarks $250 million in planning grants and another $750 million in capital construction grants to reconnect neighborhoods bisected by highways. But that money is just a small fraction of what it would cost to address aging highways in New Orleans and dozens of other cities across America, from Tampa, Fla., to Rochester, N.Y.

Today, more than three dozen citizen-led campaigns are underway, according to the Congress for the New Urbanism, all focused on grappling with the consequences of the highways that were carved through their communities.

Removing or retrofitting any one of those highways — which were built as a way to modernize regional transportation and meet the demands of postwar progress — will be neither inexpensive nor quick.

A plan to remove a section of Interstate 81 in Syracuse, N.Y., and rebuild a portion of Interstate 690 carries a price tag of at least $2 billion — about twice the amount of funding approved by Congress for the entire country. The project to fill in a portion of the Inner Loop East highway in Rochester cost about $25 million.

“It’s an important step, but a small step,” Ben Crowther, program manager for the C.N.U.’s Highways to Boulevards and Freeways Without Futures initiatives, said of the congressional funding. “I am looking at this as a down payment.”

Some residents believe that urban highways, despite the disruptions they may have created when they were built, should remain. They cite the cost of removal or modification and the impact to traffic, particularly if there are no easy alternative routes.

But the national conversation about the impact of highways in urban communities gained fresh traction as the country confronted its history of racism and racist policies after the May 2020 murder of George Floyd. Those campaigns took on new urgency as Mr. Biden made racial justice and climate change part of his domestic agenda.

“There’s the recognition that driving these highways through the communities in the first place was wrong,” said Chris McCahill, managing director of State Smart Transportation Initiative, a transportation think tank based at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. “And so now the question becomes, what to do about it now?”

Louisiana cleared more than 100 properties along the corridor to make room for the highway.Credit...William Widmer for The New York Times

While Louisiana leaders could see about $6 billion from the larger $1.2 trillion package steered to the state's aging roads and bridges, they said it was too early to know how much might go to New Orleans or whether removal of the Claiborne Expressway would even be among the top priorities.

In New Orleans, city officials had not yet decided whether to pursue federal grants and were in the "early stages of reviewing the legislation and the opportunities it creates," said a city spokesman, Beau Tidwell.

Still, Representative Troy Carter said he hoped the city might be a model in both removing the highway and in reinvesting in the neighborhood and protecting its "heritage." In various scenarios that state and local leaders have explored, a number of ramps would be taken out or the highway itself would be removed from downtown, with traffic diverted around the area.

"I would love to be able to restore that beautiful corridor to its original luster. But the devil's in the details," he said, adding that community input was critical to "make sure we don't swap one evil for another."

The highway's age means it would need to be rebuilt if it were not torn down, said Shawn Wilson, secretary of the state's Department of Transportation and Development. "So that gives us an opportunity to re-envision what the corridor looks like, in terms of housing, green space and economic opportunity, and in terms of transit, safely connecting the neighborhood."

In Tremé, century-old oak trees, towering and lush, once lined the wide median along North Claiborne Avenue. As far as the eye could see, they formed a protective green canopy above children playing after Sunday Mass, couples holding picnics and families celebrating the parades and pageantry of Mardi Gras.

"If you talk to anybody in Tremé, they can tell you about the day the trees came down or when the highway was built," said Lynette Boutte, a hair salon owner whose family's roots in the neighborhood extend back generations. She wants to see the highway, nicknamed "the bridge" or "the monster" by residents, closed and retrofitted as a green space.

"If you talk to anybody in Treme, they can tell you about the day the trees came down or when the highway was built," said Lynette Boutte, whose family's roots in the neighborhood extend nearly two centuries.Credit...William Widmer for The New York Times

In announcing the infrastructure plan this past spring, Mr. Biden acknowledged the damage that highway systems had done to some communities across the United States. He specifically pointed to Claiborne Avenue as an example of how transportation projects had severed neighborhoods and helped drive racial inequities.

Claiborne Avenue, once referred to as the "Main Street" of Black New Orleans with more than 100 businesses, wilted under ill-fated urban renewal policies. Only a few dozen businesses stand today.

Formally named Faubourg Tremé, the neighborhood is imbued with a rich cultural and musical history. Dating back to the early 19th century, the neighborhood was racially diverse, made up of free people of color, enslaved African Americans and Caribbean and European immigrants. Claiborne Avenue was both walkable and affordable, what Richard Campanella, a geographer at Tulane, called “urbanism at its best.”

For a long time, the avenue was bustling with work and play. It was lined with insurance businesses, hardware stores, pharmacies and tailors, along with jazz halls and social clubs. Much of that changed with the highway project, which was pitched as an efficient way to shuffle cars downtown and keep it thriving. About 500 homes were cleared to make room, according to C.N.U., a disruption that led shops to shutter and property values to fall.

Advocates for the highway’s removal contend that the stretch of Interstate 10 should never have been built through such a vibrant neighborhood, and that race played a role. They point, too, to an elevated highway that was slated to run along the edge of the famous French Quarter. That plan was stopped by preservationists in the late 1960s while the Claiborne project proceeded.

Over the years, the highway has been seen as an unwanted — and very loud — neighbor.
Credit...William Widmer for The New York Times

“Here is this neighborhood rich with so much history and contributions to music and culture,” said Raynard Sanders, executive director of the Claiborne Avenue History Project. “But it’s also a place that has felt like it was attacked over and over.”

With about 4,600 residents, Tremé is still an intimate, mostly working-class neighborhood with enduring ties to its history and culture, where people can spend an afternoon talking about Mardi Gras and jazz — and just as passionately trace their roots back to that first relative who moved into the neighborhood a century ago.

Some Tremé residents, already fighting for civil rights, objected to the Claiborne Expressway when it was first proposed. But they were not heard.

“They didn’t have the political clout, the get-your-representative-on-the-phone political access to stop it,” said Mr. Campanella, a geographer at the Tulane University School of Architecture who has written several books about the history, culture and geography of New Orleans. “Some people didn’t even realize it was happening until the backhoes showed up.”

Barbara Briscoe remembers the day in February 1966 when the soaring oak trees, under which she played with friends and rode her bike, were suddenly uprooted. “It was devastating,” Ms. Briscoe, now 80 years old, said. “Can you imagine growing up around all those beautiful trees, and then they were gone? Claiborne was never the same after that.”

Over the years, neighbors said the highway settled in as a kind of unwanted and loud neighbor. It spewed thunderous roars and thick grime, and its entrance and exit ramps facilitated all manner of crime. But something else happened, too: a new culture, one with its own traditions, developed beneath the highway.

In an effort to reclaim the space, social gatherings began to organize beneath the Claiborne Expressway.Credit...William Widmer for The New York Times

It is not uncommon to see funerals spill from the doors of nearby churches, with mourners and brass bands marching along Claiborne, the spirited notes from the trombones and trumpets rising above the rumbling of trucks overhead. On weekends, the grounds are often full with music, dancing and vendors selling cups of fruit.

Some fear that a complete removal of the highway will further destroy the neighborhood — or usher in a wave of gentrification that would push out longtime residents who directly experienced the highway's ills. Others believe that the money might be better spent on other priorities in the neighborhood.

"With the size of the ramps, how can you move all that concrete without tearing the neighborhood up even more? When it was built it was disruptive," Ms. Boutte said. "I do not like it, but I am not sure you can take it down without causing even more damage. We might just have to live with it."

But there also remain those like Ms. Stelly, who has longed since childhood to see the highway completely gone and Claiborne Avenue restored to its former glory. As an architectural designer, she believes that the highway — about a block from the home where four generations of her family have lived — crushed much of Tremé's promise.

"I was just a kid," she said, "but I knew that monstrosity should not have been in the middle of our neighborhood. It is a monument to racism."

Credit...William Widmer for The New York Times

People living along I-94 in Rondo debate: lid or rid?

minnpost.com/metro/2022/03/people-living-along-i-94-in-rondo-debate-lid-or-rid

By Solomon Gustavo   March 22, 2022

Anthony Ware and Jenna Czapiewski live on the St. Anthony Avenue side of the freeway in St. Paul. The couple disagrees on what the fate of I-94 should be.
MinnPost photo by Solomon Gustavo

The glorious mid-March sun was being taken in by Odester James as he sat in a wheelchair on his front porch and pop music played softly from a boombox. His home of 29 years at the corner of Chatsworth Street and Concordia Avenue overlooks Interstate 94.

There are two plans to make major changes across the street from James' porch: Reconnect Rondo wants to build a land bridge across the highway, and Our Street Minneapolis would rather remove the highway altogether.

On top of those two efforts is MnDOT's Rethinking I-94 project. MnDOT is still in the early phases, which includes asking residents what should be done. MnDOT has yet to release plans for rethinking the highway. MnDOT's goal is to reverse some of the harm inflicted on a largely Black community by the construction of the freeway through the old Rondo neighborhood in the 1950s and '60s.

The freeway cleared homes and businesses and split the region and its sense of community. The traffic that's taken the once-vibrant neighborhood's place now pollutes the air with noise and vehicle exhaust.

With MnDOT's plans still being ironed out, people living along and near the highway are looking at two options; a land lid or get rid of the freeway.

Reconnect Rondo's vision for a bridge would keep the freeway intact but place a lid of land over the top of 94. It would be a bridge that completely caps the interstate, "approximately 2,600-3,200 linear feet," according to the organization's website, reconnecting one side of the freeway with the other. The cost estimate tops $450 million, which Reconnect Rondo hopes to gather from federal and state sources by 2024. On the landbridge, there would be space for housing, parks, and commercial spaces.

MinnPost photo by Corey Anderson
MnDOT's goal is to reverse some of the harm inflicted on a largely Black community by the construction of the freeway through the old Rondo neighborhood in the 1950s and '60s.

Our Streets Minneapolis' plan to get rid of the highway is called the Twin Cities Boulevard. The plan is to fill in the valley with dirt, which would erase the highway and reconnect the neighborhood, and replace the freeway with commuter lanes. There would be green spaces, shops, bike and bus lanes, and other public spaces. And it would ease highway pollution. Proponents for ditching the highway argue that there are alternatives for long-distance highway travel, like Highway 36, Interstates 494 and 694, and the St. Paul-to-Minneapolis boulevard would be used primarily for the short trip between the two cities. The exact details

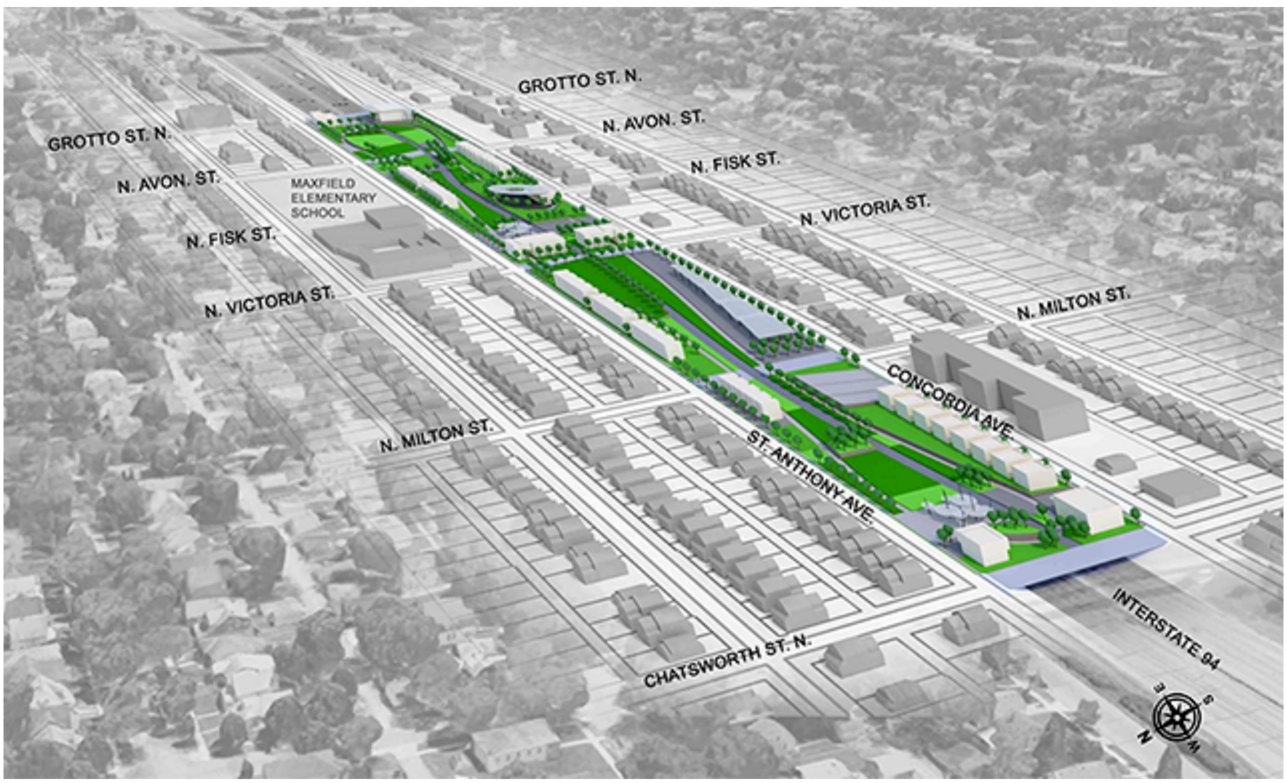
of what would come with the Twin Cities Boulevard are being nailed down, according to the website for the plan, which is being done through engagement with the public.
These plans do have one thing in common – they are just plans. Even in the best-case scenario for either proposal, it will take years, perhaps even decades, for them to be completed.

James said he doesn't mind living on the lip of I-94. He lives directly in front of where the landbridge would be.

"I guess I'm used to the noise by now, it don't bother me," said James.

When it comes to the big question – lid or get rid – James said he is unsure of either plan.

"I don't know, I cant' figure (the landbridge) out," said James. He said the exact plan has not been made clear to him by anyone – from what will be on the bridge, exactly, to how the engineering will work to pull it off.



Design by Melo and Visuals by James
Reconnect Rondo's vision for a bridge would keep the freeway intact but place a lid of land over the top of 94.

If building a land lid and placing buildings for housing and businesses on top can be pulled off, James said he's worried about outside business interests rushing in and pushing out residents like him, who were there before the landbridge.
He is dubious about getting rid of the highway.

“If anything, they should add a lane,” he said.

James believes if something is going to be done it should be more subtle. A suggestion would be to build a land lid and simply place a park on top, which would be something nearby residents would enjoy, but isn’t something that would attract the sort of outside attention that might bring along gentrification.

But, James, 75, expressed little confidence he would see anything built in his lifetime. He said, shortly after he moved in nearly 30 years ago, talks began about constructing and improving pedestrian bridges over the highway near his home. He said it took years just to break ground.

“A (landbridge) will take 100 years,” said James.

Keith Milham, 55, who has lived at the corner of Victoria Street and Concorida Avenue for more than a year, thinks the land lid idea is “really cool.”

“I think it would really help the neighborhood, help the local businesses, bring businesses to the neighborhood, ya know?” said Milham.

Milham said he has no concerns about displacement.

“I don’t think that’s gonna happen. I think growth is great. I think it’s awesome for everybody, everything to come. You stay the same and nothing ever changes,” he said.

Milham had yet to hear about the plan to get rid of the freeway. When he did, he did not like it.

“It’s gonna screw up a lot of people’s lives, ya know what I mean? To me, (I-94) needs to be widened,” Milham said. “Going to downtown in the morning: (it’s) packed. Coming back … packed. Ya know? I just don’t see it,” Milham said. He added that it would “screw people up” to have to make it to another freeway, especially for those who live in old Rondo now (which is now the Summit-University neighborhood).

Jenna Czapiewski, who lives on the St. Anthony Avenue side of the freeway with her boyfriend, is adamant that something needs to be done – specifically for the people who were displaced when the highway was built, and their descendants.

“We need to bring back those families,” said Czapiewski, “I know a lot of the original people have passed away, but they have a lot of relatives and family members who are still alive. It needs to go back to them.”

Czapiewski said she would “love to get rid of the highway.” She said she knows of a woman who remembers losing her home and watching the freeway construction, and who has since refused to ever cross the freeway, let alone actually travel on I-94.

“Because of what 94 represents, it needs to go,” said Czapiewski.

Czapiewski’s boyfriend, Anthony Ware, disagrees. The two have owned their home since 2011.

Ware, 55, was born and raised in the neighborhood, living today in a home that is two houses down from where he grew up. There are people who he remembers from his youth, those who are now elders, like Odester James, who are retired and less mobile than they used to be and who enjoy sitting on their porch and watching cars whiz by on the freeway on a nice day.

He thinks the plan to get rid of the highway was created by people who saw an opportunity to have a major plan funded – an opportunity created by the landbridge planning first made by Reconnect Rondo.

“It’ll be the Rondo name, but it will be owned by (other people) or (MnDOT),” said Ware. He said he likes that the Reconnect Rondo landbridge plan came first and from people he knows in the neighborhood.

That being said, Ware said he feels the Reconnect Rondo group has done a woeful job of reaching out to people who live near the freeway. Czapiewski and Ware said they have never heard from the organization. Meanwhile, said Ware, the local organizer Tish Jones, who held a virtual town hall last summer on the landbridge, has stopped by his home to discuss her concerns that the landbridge plan may lead to gentrification.

Ware shares concerns about gentrification and said he only supports a landbridge if it is done so in a way that protects people from displacement. No matter what those guardrails might be, Ware said he and his neighbors need to hear more directly from the Reconnect Rondo organization, so they have a clear idea of what the plan is, and can feel confident that it’s the right plan for the region.

Oregon DOT Plans Improved Outreach to Diverse Stakeholder Groups

ssti.us/2020/10/12/oregon-dot-plans-improved-outreach-to-diverse-stakeholder-groups

October 12, 2020

By Chris McCahill

A recent audit by Oregon's Secretary of State praised the Oregon DOT for its ability to deliver road projects safely and efficiently across the state, but also found it could improve its outreach to include a broader range of stakeholders such as representatives from bicycle and pedestrian advocacy groups. The agency agreed with the findings and plans on making changes over the next year, building on efforts already underway.

The audit focuses mainly on work zone safety, pointing to ODOT's "robust project delivery process that supports traffic control and permanent design decisions that emphasize the safety of both workers and transportation users." It makes just three recommendations in this area, which emphasize better consistency among districts and coordination between designers and construction teams.

The remaining seven recommendations, however, have to do with the review and oversight of projects by stakeholder groups. A Stakeholder Forum was established by state rule in 2013 for reviewing any permanent capacity reductions and was meant to include a variety of representatives. That forum is now comprised mainly of the 12-member Mobility Advisory Committee (MAC)—a group largely made of freight industry representatives responsible for reviewing project designs. According to the audit, the group—which has no formal bylaws or term limits—has sometimes pushed for costlier projects to avoid longer detours during construction, in spite of safety concerns and local preferences. The audit calls for an overhaul of this stakeholder process, including better outreach to bicycle and pedestrian groups.

ODOT Director Kris Strickler points out: “During the course of this audit, several efforts were already underway to make improvements to our project delivery processes and stakeholder outreach efforts. The observations, findings and recommendations further highlight the efforts we will continue to make to improve in these areas.” In response to the audit, ODOT has committed to implementing a charter for the MAC by the end of this year. This will lead to a “membership reset,” resulting in more stakeholders at the table as early as January of 2021, followed by more wide-ranging changes throughout the year.

Photo credit: Oregon DOT at Flickr

California state transportation agencies announce call for applicants for interagency Equity Advisory Committee

calsta.ca.gov/press-releases/2022-08-05-call-for-applicants-for-interagency-equity-advisory-committee

New joint committee will help agencies achieve meaningful outcomes in transportation equity, environmental justice and equitable economic opportunities

SACRAMENTO – California state transportation agencies today announced an open call for applicants to serve on an interagency Transportation Equity Advisory Committee, convened in partnership between the California State Transportation Agency (CalSTA), the California Transportation Commission (Commission) and the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans). The Equity Advisory Committee will advise each agency on how to achieve meaningful outcomes in transportation equity, environmental justice and equitable economic opportunities, especially in transportation planning and programming.

“When it comes to transportation, ‘equity’ isn’t just some abstract concept – it’s part of the fabric of everything we’re doing to achieve our vision of a cleaner, safer, more accessible and more connected future for all Californians," said CalSTA Secretary Toks Omishakin. “This advisory committee will help guide CalSTA and our partners toward achieving that future.”

“The Commission is excited to take this next step in advancing the goals laid out in our Racial Equity Statement,” said Commission Chair Lee Ann Eager. “We look forward to working with our Equity Advisory Committee members and our partners at Caltrans and CalSTA to thoughtfully and respectfully address inequities in our transportation system caused by racial segregation and the historical disinvestment of transportation funds.”

“The creation of the interagency Equity Advisory Committee will provide a forum where the community’s voices will be respectfully heard and considered as California seeks to improve the state’s transportation system by many measures including equity,” said Caltrans Director Tony Tavares.

Members of the Equity Advisory Committee will review, advise, and make recommendations on transportation related plans, programs, and policies to CalSTA, the Commission, and Caltrans during open public meetings. Committee membership is intended to elevate diverse and historically marginalized voices, including Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, rural communities, women, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and asexual individuals, older adults, youth, low-income, and unhoused individuals in California.

Committee membership will consist of up to 15 members serving two-year staggered terms. Each member must be a resident of California and must clearly demonstrate a history of equity-centered personal or professional experience or community leadership, or be actively engaged in transportation equity, policy, programming, advocacy or related fields such as health, air quality, climate, housing justice, community development or socio-economic development.

The Committee will include experts representing tribal and indigenous communities, community-based organizations, climate and air quality organizations, housing and housing justice organizations, statewide environmental justice and equity organizations, individuals or organizations offering an accessibility and disability perspective, and community members reflecting different geographic areas of the state, especially rural areas.

To apply to participate on the Equity Advisory Committee, please visit the following website: https://forms.office.com/g/r7kzHkQcvT

Interested applicants can also utilize the following QR code to access the application:

To request a paper copy of the application, please call (916) 654-4245, or email RaceAndEquity@dot.ca.gov

For more information on the Equity Advisory Committee, please visit: https://catc.ca.gov/programs/equity-and-public-engagement

More information about the state transportation agencies may be found at:

CalSTA: https://calsta.ca.gov/, on Twitter @CA_Trans_Agency

CTC: http://www.catc.ca.gov/, on Twitter @California_CTC

Caltrans: https://dot.ca.gov/, on Twitter @CaltransHQ

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FOR JUSTICE IN TRANSPORTATION, WE CANNOT JUST BE PLANNERS

Laurel Paget-Seekins

In 2003 my girlfriend and I were (unwisely) hitchhiking through the Southeast. While sitting outside a Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) station we decided to move to Atlanta. However, we did not have a car. By riding my bike and MARTA and talking to my fellow transit riders, I soon realized that transportation is at the intersection of social and racial justice, environmental, and energy issues. Like many in this profession, I chose to study transportation planning and engineering in the hopes of making sustainable structural changes to address all of these issues simultaneously.

Almost 20 years later, those changes can't come soon enough. We are in a moment of urgency with the Movement for Black Lives organizing for liberation and climate change requiring immediate action. Changing how transportation resources and spaces are allocated, designed, and enforced is critical to dismantling white supremacy and reducing emissions. The question is not what needs to change, but how to make changes to systems where the people in power benefit from the status quo.

We cannot just be planners; we must also be implementers and change-makers. To be successful, we have to be very intentional about how we, as transportation planners, shape relationships between government and communities and change power structures inside and outside transportation agencies. In addition to creative technical skills, we need organizing skills and strategies rooted in impacted communities. Moreover, those of us who are white have to commit and recommit to our journey of continually growing in how we understand our power and privilege.

Grassroots movements, largely led by Black women and women of color and youth, continue to push change and gather votes. They are electing officials to positions from City Hall to Congress with agendas to pass policies and investments aimed at rebuilding transportation infrastructure, tackling climate change, and upending systemic inequity. Whether legislation, including the 2021 Federal infrastructure package, will lead to achieving our goals will depend on implementation across state departments of transportation

(DOTs), metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), transit agencies, and local governments. Transformative implementation requires continued organizing power and political leadership pushing from the outside and internal efforts to overcome the status quo and build functioning bureaucracies.

I am fond of saying that government agencies are a collection of people managing technical systems, physical assets, and business processes that are tenuously connected through years of patchwork and infrastructure related under-investment (Kane & Tomer, 2019). The patchwork of systems, digital and analog, creates considerable complexity, and inequities and dependence on fossil fuels are hard-coded in (Chester, 2021). Even with investment, the maze of funding sources and requirements adds to the complexity. Transformational change will require maintaining the essential functions of transportation agencies while implementing new programs and technological systems; changing how we design and build infrastructure; and reshaping the relationships between many communities and government, all while overcoming the human dynamics inside large organizations that impede change.

While everyone in the transportation sector has a responsibility to address the crises of racism and climate change, transportation planners have a significant advantage in that they usually are not responsible for operations. Most transit agency or transportation department employees are responsible for daily operations (or construction) and deal with emergencies. In contrast, planners have the time, and capacity in their job duties, to learn from the past and think about the future. Also, planning teams are often well-positioned within an agency to work across the department silos, and between leadership and operations. This makes planners well-positioned to push and implement change inside their agencies.

Transformation requires both the idealistic belief that a better world is possible and the pragmatic understanding of how to make changes work in the world we have today. The key is to keep our eyes on the future vision while our daily experience finds us deep in the weeds of implementation. Planners are trained to look at the future and at current conditions, and imagine ways to bridge the gap.

In the six years I worked at the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA), I ran processes to rewrite the major public-facing policies: from service delivery to fares, implemented programs to lower fares for students and low-income youth, shepherded several service pilots into permanent service, and successfully pushed the agency to change the state law to decriminalize fare evasion and lower fines. While graduate training in transportation planning and engineering provided the subject matter expertise I needed, the skills I learned in a previous experience as a community organizer were needed to implement these changes inside a complex agency like the MBTA (Figure 1).

For institutions to change, people within them have to depart from the accepted norms that perpetuate the status quo. This divergence is a constant balancing act to determine when to compromise and keep pushing past the point of comfort for the harder-won and more just outcomes. It is easier to focus on advancing to the next position with more power instead of using one's power. I constantly remind myself that my power comes from my principles, and not my position, and that my principles come from my responsibility to the community.

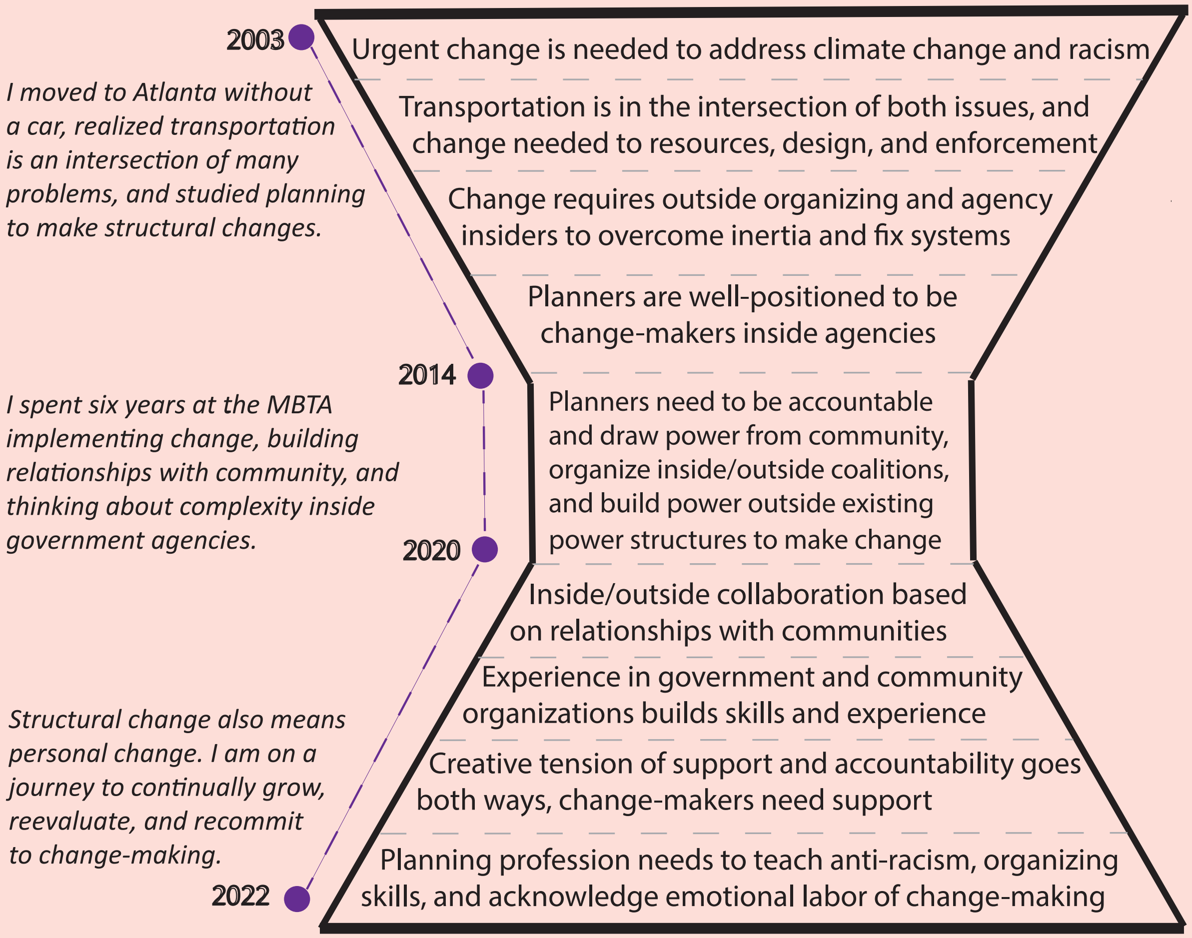

Figure 1: Graphical abstract of the author's journey

In a government agency (especially a public-facing agency), it is easy to fall into the group defense mechanism often called the "fortress mentality." In the face of constant criticism that lacks a nuanced understanding of the daily challenges, employees have the tendency to pull up the proverbial drawbridge which blocks them from hearing reasonable and necessary complaints and concerns. During my time at the MBTA, I intentionally built relationships with people who were accountable to transit riders to make sure my insider thinking was consistently challenged. The practice of personal accountability (by listening to people directly impacted by the decisions in my purview) helped me know when to compromise and when to keep pushing.

The difficulty of implementing change across a patchwork of government systems is very real and not usually transparent. Change-makers must understand and communicate the challenges of implementation internally and externally, while not using these challenges as excuses for inaction. Pragmatic empathy helped me understand both the urgency for change from outside and the internal impediments to achieving it. By building relationships with my colleagues across departments, I was able to strategically assess the impediments and figure out how to best advocate for the resources to address them. Supporting my colleagues in their battles was critical to my success.

Just like organizing for progressive change in general, change inside government agencies requires diverse coalitions with clear objectives and the strategies and tactics to achieve them. Change-makers have to act outside existing power-over structures to build power-with people internally, across government entities, and between government and community partners. Outside organizations can provide political cover, reshape priorities, and speed up timelines.

Making the needed transformational change in transportation will require the collaborative work of dedicated organizers both inside and outside of government. I am aware of many encouraging examples of these collaborations across the country and likely there are many more happening outside public view, solving problems deep in the weeds of bureaucracies.

Collaboration requires relationships between people working inside government agencies and people in the communities they serve, particularly the communities most impacted by the agency's lack of change. This reinforces why more transportation planners need to come from and reflect the lived experiences of these communities. Representation and accountability are currently lacking in the transportation sector. Instead of the proverbial revolving door between government and private sector, we need to encourage a revolving door between government and community organizations. Experience in both sectors builds the skills and perspectives needed to strategically make transportation more just.

Government and community relationships should be grounded in the creative tension of accountability and support. While it is the job of public employees to serve the community, the relationships need to go both ways. Trying to make change from the inside of a large government agency can be lonely and career jeopardizing. Employees are not encouraged to have their own public voice. Not unlike the private sector, public sector workplaces can replicate structural inequities that make change-making challenging, particularly for people of color and women. Change-makers need support from community organizations and the planning profession.

The profession needs to provide transportation planners with the skills and support systems to be change-makers, starting with planning education. What is needed is a deliberate analysis of power and the difference between power-over and power-with; discussion of how white supremacy shapes our current built environment and how it shapes the planning profession; and the development of organizing strategies and community building skills. Planning organizations should provide opportunities for members of our profession to exchange strategies and share the joy of the victories and the pain of the losses. There is an emotional component of working to make change that often is not acknowledged or supported.

This is not a time to just plan; we have to act to address climate change and structural racism. Change in transportation has to be part of the solution, and planners are well situated within transportation agencies to push for change from the inside. We have to use our bifocal planning vision to strategize how to make changes to the existing patchwork of complex systems. Planners need to build and support inside/outside coalitions to overcome the inertia and existing power structures. We have to be rooted in the community for accountability and support.

In reflecting on the state of planning in transportation (in December 2021), I realize that I am not the same person who moved to Atlanta seeking community and found transportation. It turns out making structural change also requires making personal changes.

I chose to embrace change as a constant learning journey to figure out how my identities shape my understanding of the world and what I can best contribute. I have benefited from personal and professional relationships that have pushed me to grow, reevaluate, and recommit. By the time this essay is published, my thinking will already have changed a bit, so consider this a work in progress. Please get in touch to continue the conversation!

About the Author

Laurel Paget-Seekins

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Cover photo: MARTA N3 (North Avenue) station in 2005 (Wikipedia)

U.S. Department of Transportation





Equity Action Plan

January 2022

A MESSAGE FROM THE SECRETARY

From the construction of the transcontinental railroad to the Montgomery Bus Boycott, transportation has always been inseparable from America's struggle for racial and economic justice. At its best, transportation can be a powerful engine of opportunity, connecting people to jobs, education, and resources—whether they live in a big city, a rural community, or anywhere in between. Ensuring equity and accessibility for every member of the traveling public is one of the Department of Transportation's highest priorities.

As we continue to advance this work, it's important to recognize that past federal transportation investments have too often failed to address inequities, or even made them worse. And because a piece of physical infrastructure endures for decades, families and communities today must contend with the results of discriminatory choices that may date back generations. For example, highways routed directly through Black and brown neighborhoods, often in an effort to divide and destroy them, continue to affect the well-being of the residents who remain. In other cases, we see inequities in our failures to invest, as with transit deserts that leave out the communities that most need affordable transportation options, or contracting opportunities for transportation projects that fail to engage and utilize women and people of color.

The Department — and the entire Biden-Harris Administration — are committed to doing the right thing for our shared future, addressing these inequities, and building a better, more equitable transportation system.

On his first day in office, President Biden signed Executive Order 13985, establishing a whole-of-government approach to advancing equity and opportunity. In the year since, this Department has worked hard to implement that order. We've stepped up our efforts to engage with underserved communities, to enforce key provisions of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and to rebuild our Departmental Office of Civil Rights, ensuring that equity is considered as a key factor in every program we administer and every policy we set.

We've also made clear how equity and civil rights compliance belong in our discretionary grant programs, consistent with the law, acting to ensure that federal dollars are available to support projects that will tangibly benefit underserved and overburdened communities. We are strengthening our Disadvantaged Business Enterprise Program, to ensure that business opportunities in transportation and infrastructure reach women- and minority-owned small businesses. And we've begun working to implement the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, which provides for historic investments in transportation equity.

This Equity Action Plan is a major milestone for the Department of Transportation that represents a shift in how we view and deliver transportation programs. We have a long way to go toward creating a truly equitable transportation system. But the actions outlined in this plan form a strong foundation, and I encourage the public to hold us accountable as we work to meet these goals.

Done right, transportation policy can help level the playing field. It can transform economies, connect people to opportunity, and empower underserved communities to build generational wealth for the future. In partnership with community leaders, state and local governments, and the traveling public, we at the Department of Transportation look forward to continuing this vital work.

Secretary Pete Buttigieg

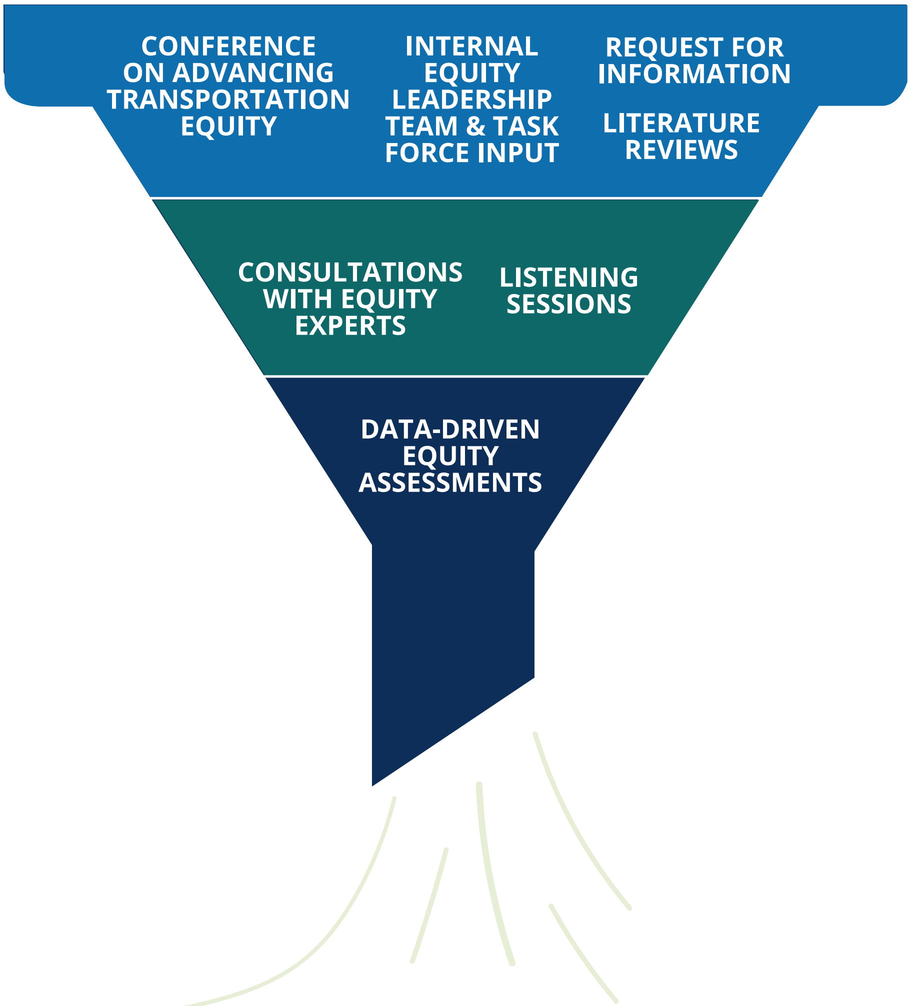
Executive Summary

The U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT or Department) is committed to pursuing a comprehensive approach to advancing equity for all. In response to Executive Order 13985: Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government, this Equity Action Plan highlights key actions that USDOT will undertake to expand access and opportunity to all communities while focusing on underserved, overburdened, and disadvantaged communities. The actions described here fall under four focus areas – wealth creation, power of community, interventions, and expanding access. Actions include providing technical assistance to small disadvantaged businesses, reinvigorating USDOT's programmatic enforcement of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, launching a national technical assistance center, and developing a national transportation cost burden measure. These actions were developed through an intensive effort, combining knowledge, experience, viewpoints, and data from the public, experts, and USDOT staff.

- Wealth Creation
- Power of Community
- Interventions
- Expanding Access

Led by the Equity Leadership Team, a group of 30+ senior leaders from across the Department, and supported by a task force with over 160 civil servants, USDOT has already taken important steps to address historic inequities in the transportation system, but more needs to be done. The actions outlined in this plan represent the next steps of USDOT's efforts to advance equity and fulfill the mission of USDOT.

Developing the Vision



USDOT'S EQUITY FOCUS AREAS

Using a variety of sources and activities, the Department identified four equity focus areas to guide its equity advancement activities. The focus areas – wealth creation, power of community, interventions, and expanding access – are designed to place people and communities at the center of USDOT's equity efforts.

USDOT is using these focus areas to develop concrete actions that will thoughtfully redress historic inequities, positively impact historically underserved or overburdened communities in meaningful ways, and ensure that the Department is equipped to equitably deliver its resources and benefits. Initial sets of actions for each focus area are highlighted in this document.

HIGHLIGHTED EQUITY ACTIONS

WEALTH CREATION

By providing technical assistance to small disadvantaged businesses, USDOT will help increase their understanding of how to navigate the USDOT contracting process, gain awareness of upcoming contract opportunities, and enhance their core competencies and skills—enabling them to more effectively compete for USDOT contracting opportunities and build wealth.

INTERVENTIONS

By launching a national technical assistance center, USDOT will provide direct, hands-on technical support with local impact—providing targeted assistance in areas of planning, project development, grant applications, and project delivery to ensure that transportation investments and benefits support underserved and overburdened communities.

POWER OF COMMUNITY

Reinvigorating USDOT's programmatic enforcement of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, including re-emphasizing agency review of the potential discriminatory impact of grantees' proposed activities before awarding federal funds—as opposed to waiting until a project is delivered to enforce civil rights protections—will prevent disparate impacts on protected classes and empower communities in transportation decision-making.

EXPANDING ACCESS

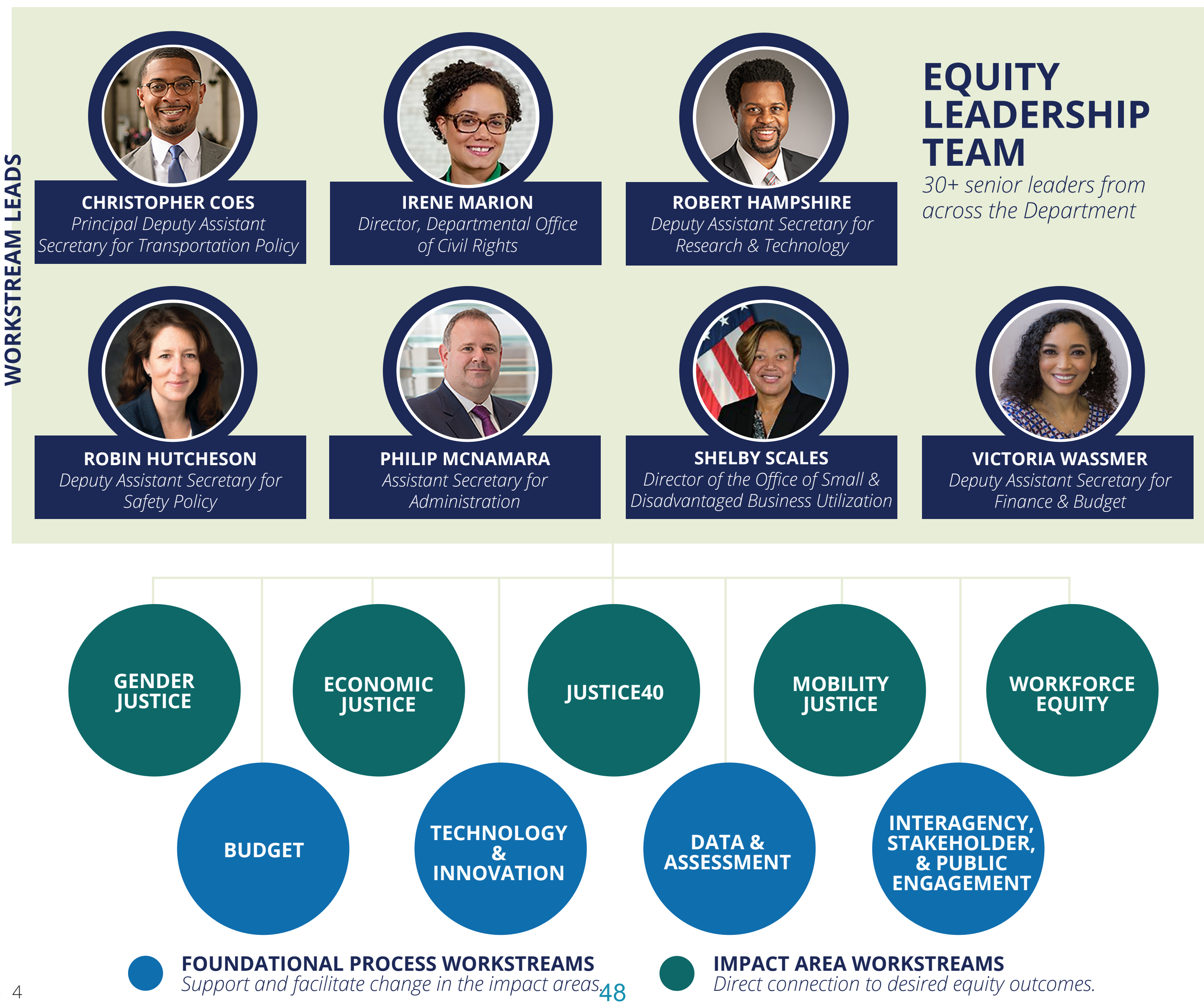
By developing a national transportation cost burden measure, USDOT will have a critical tool to address barriers to accessing affordable transportation options that have consequences on economic mobility—and help bring measurable transportation benefits to disadvantaged communities per Justice40.

Setting the Foundation for Equity

In order to achieve the Administration's ambitious equity goals and implement [Executive Order 13985: Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government](), the Secretary has mobilized top officials from across the Department to lead equity advancement in USDOT programs and policies.

First, the Secretary has convened an Equity Leadership Team (EQLT), which is made up of **30+ senior agency officials** from across the Secretarial Offices and the Operating Administrations. These officials lead the Equity Task Force (EQTF), which is composed of **over 160 senior level management and program area staff** who are well-versed in topical areas such as civil rights, environmental justice, climate justice, research and development, human resources, procurement, and small business.

EQTF members have worked across nine workstreams that are directly responsible for implementing the Department's work under Executive Order 13985. Gender and disability justice efforts are also integrated into workstream activities, including the advancement of [Executive Order 13988: Preventing and Combating Discrimination on the Basis of Gender Identity or Sexual Orientation](). In addition, the workstreams address environmental justice efforts as part of the Justice40 initiative, which aims to deliver 40 percent of the overall benefits of relevant federal investments to disadvantaged communities. Each workstream is led by one or more EQLT members. This structure will adapt as needed to advance the Department's equity objectives.



Recent Accomplishments

FEBRUARY 2021 — Introduced racial equity and barriers to opportunity as a consideration for awarding discretionary grants

MARCH 2021 — Established the Equity Leadership Team & the Equity Task Force to lead the Department's equity efforts

MARCH 2021 — Consulted with Federally Recognized Tribes on updates to USDOT Tribal Policy & Consultation Plan

MAY 2021 — Published a Request for Information asking the public for comments about transportation equity

JUNE 2021 — Proposed that equity be included as one of the Department's fiscal year (FY) 2022-2026 Strategic Goals

JUNE 2021 — Reinvigorated USDOT's programmatic enforcement of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, the Americans with Disabilities Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and the Air Carrier Access Act

NOVEMBER 2021 — Began implementation of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, which contains historic investments in transportation equity

DECEMBER 2021 — Reinforced small business requirements in the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) acquisition governance process

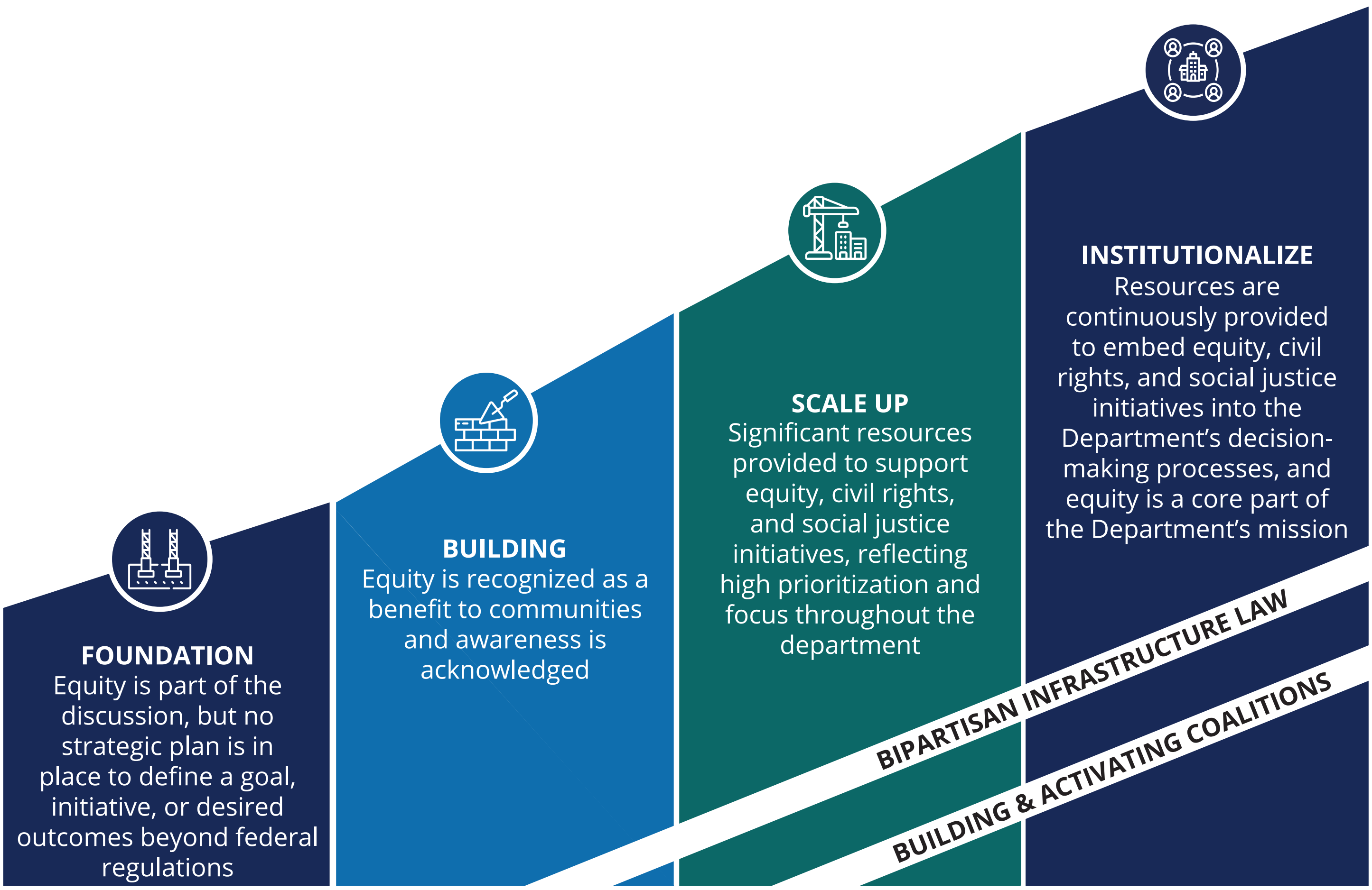
JANUARY 2022 — Launched USDOT-wide procurement dashboard to drive accountability for small and disadvantaged business goals

JANUARY 2022 — Published toolkit for planning and funding rural and Tribal electric mobility infrastructure

The Equity Action Plan as a Living Document

The Equity Action Plan will **lay the foundation** for institutionalizing equity in all of USDOT's programs and policies.

The Equity Action Plan establishes a foundation for USDOT's path towards building a transportation system that works for all people. The plan outlined on the following pages considers equity from multiple angles, centering on communities that have been underserved, overburdened, and disadvantaged by past transportation decisions. Rather than being a complete synopsis, this document marks an early step in the Department's journey, one that will inevitably grow and change throughout the process. To accommodate this evolving process, this living document will be regularly adapted. At any time, it will represent a portion of the actions the Department is taking to advance equity.



WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE EQUITY ACTION PLAN?

The Equity Action Plan highlights key actions and steps that will be taken by USDOT to create a more equitable transportation system and country.

WHO SHOULD READ THE EQUITY ACTION PLAN?

The Equity Action Plan is designed to benefit and inform ***everyone.***

HOW CAN I ENGAGE ON THE EQUITY ACTION PLAN?

Send an email to equity@dot.gov to share your thoughts on advancing transportation equity. Stay up to date on USDOT's equity efforts by visiting transportation.gov/equity.

Wealth Creation

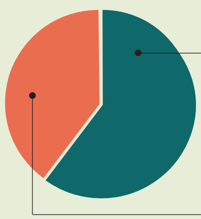
OUTCOME

Building capital, expanding business networks, and attaining new skills and experience through increased USDOT contracts.

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Increase USDOT direct contract dollars to small disadvantaged businesses to an aspirational goal of 20% by FY25.

CRITICAL GAPS[1]



67% of FY20-FY21 USDOT direct contracting dollars were awarded by FAA.

The other 33% of USDOT direct contracting dollars were awarded by other operating administrations.

USDOT will focus equity efforts on programs that will have the greatest impact on small disadvantaged business opportunities, ***including the many FAA contracting opportunities.***

These top 4 industries accounted for $2.8B out of $7.8B total FY20 USDOT direct contract dollars:

- *Engineering Services*
- *Highway, Street, and Bridge Construction*
- *Computer System Design Services*
- *Other Computer Related Services*

Black and Hispanic-owned businesses were underrepresented, receiving only 1.7% and 2.4% of FY20 USDOT direct contract dollars in these 4 industries, respectively.

ROOT DRIVERS

Restrictive Procurement Practices

- **Federal law, policies, and programs can become inadvertent barriers.** At USDOT, priorities to reduce contract awards may have led to contract consolidation, harming small disadvantaged business opportunities.
- **Requirements and resource constraints create incentives for agencies to purchase from large, established businesses.** Filling high-volume contracts can lower costs but often excludes new entrants and small businesses seeking to grow capacity.

Uneven Resource Distribution

- **Lack of access to capital sources mean Black and Hispanic-owned businesses have less growth capital.** These businesses are half as likely as non-minority counterparts to be fully approved for loans, lines of credit, and cash advances.[2]
- **Minority-owned businesses and small disadvantaged businesses often have inadequate bonding capacity and access to surety expertise.** This makes it difficult to compete and perform in government contracts, which limits award opportunities of many small disadvantaged businesses.

Limited Networks

- **Minority-owned businesses and small disadvantaged businesses often lack a robust professional network.** This makes it more difficult to develop working relationships with those who have industry access, expertise, and experience when navigating the complex federal marketplace.
- **Minority-owned businesses and small disadvantaged businesses often do not know how and when to engage with federal programs.** Limited awareness of federal programs can impact ability to provide input on program design, access to funding, and contract opportunities.

TIMELINE OF USDOT ACTIONS

- Reinforce small business requirements in the FAA acquisition governance process – ***December 2021***
- Launch USDOT-wide procurement dashboard to drive accountability for small and disadvantaged business goals – ***January 2022***
- Initiate rulemaking to improve and reduce burdens associated with the DBE and Airport Concession DBE program – ***April 2022***
- Promote and provide technical assistance to small disadvantaged businesses – ***Ongoing***
- Provide increased internal trainings regarding recent acquisition policy updates and incorporate into performance standards for program leaders – ***Ongoing***

THE OPPORTUNITY AT STAKE

Addressing systemic barriers and achieving the 20% goal for small disadvantaged businesses could result in **+$1.6B** of USDOT direct contract dollars annually to these businesses.[1]

KEY USDOT ACCOUNTABILITY ACTION

Incorporate elements of small disadvantaged business goals into management performance plans.

Power of Community

OUTCOME

Individuals and communities have a greater voice in transportation decisions affecting them.

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

- Increase in the number of State Departments of Transportation (DOTs) and Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) officially adopting a quantitative Equity Screening component to their Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) and Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) development processes to incorporate community vision and need in project selection and design.
- Increase in the number of meaningful and representative public participation engagements held by MPOs and State DOTs in the development of STIPs and TIPs in rural and urban communities.

CRITICAL GAPS

More than 30 million Americans live in areas where there is no broadband infrastructure that provides minimally acceptable speeds.[3]

About ***1 in 10 Americans lack high-speed internet access***, making it difficult to participate in virtual public involvement activities.

Individuals who are young, have low-incomes, or have less formal education are less likely to attend public meetings.[4] This means that the interests of these groups may be underrepresented in the transportation decision-making process.

Factors that influence public meeting attendance:

ROOT DRIVERS

Status Quo Thinking

- **Public involvement is often treated as an event rather than a process.**[5] In many cases, community members are not involved in early discussions to identify solutions with agency partners.
- **Traditional print and radio reach limited audiences.** Social media, pop-up events, and community meetings, used by some, are more effective at reaching diverse groups in rural and urban areas.

One-Size-Fits-All Methods

- **Public meetings are a common public involvement strategy, but can be inconvenient or impossible to attend for some.** Physical meeting locations may be inaccessible for some, including those with disabilities. Virtual public meetings are inaccessible for people without internet access or computer literacy.
- **Various methods may be needed to allow people with diverse circumstances to have a voice in decisions that affect their community.** Adaptive engagement strategies can be a resource-intensive but valuable endeavor that is responsive to specific community needs, including different language and cultural backgrounds.

Lack of Accountability

- **Measuring the effectiveness of public involvement is challenging and time-consuming.**[6] Few practical methods for evaluating the success of public involvement activities have been developed, and they have not yet been applied at large scale.
- **Agencies are often compliance-focused when it comes to public involvement.** Measures of inputs, such as number of meetings, are not distinguished from measures of impacts, such as changes to a proposed project.

TIMELINE OF USDOT ACTIONS

- Reinvigorate USDOT's programmatic enforcement of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, the Americans with Disabilities Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and the Air Carrier Access Act – ***June 2021***
- Conduct assessment of MPO and State DOT inclusion of quantitative equity screenings and meaningful and representative public participation in STIPs and TIPs – ***June 2022***
- Issue guidance for USDOT funding recipients to meet the requirements of meaningful public participation under Title VI, NEPA, and other existing requirements, with accompanying best practices and trainings – ***March 2023***
- Establish Department-wide monitoring of USDOT funding recipient compliance with their meaningful public participation obligations – ***September 2023***

THE OPPORTUNITY AT STAKE

Meaningfully involving the public in decision-making processes will help ensure that **+$446B** in transportation formula grants authorized by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) for FY22-FY26 to be distributed through State and local government agencies benefit communities and mitigate any potential harms to them.[7]

KEY USDOT ACCOUNTABILITY ACTION

Binding USDOT Orders on programmatic enforcement of Title VI and NEPA, including obligations for meaningful public participation.

Interventions

OUTCOME

Historically overburdened and underserved communities in urban and rural areas benefit from access to a generational investment in the nation's infrastructure through direct, hands-on technical support for transportation projects with local impact.

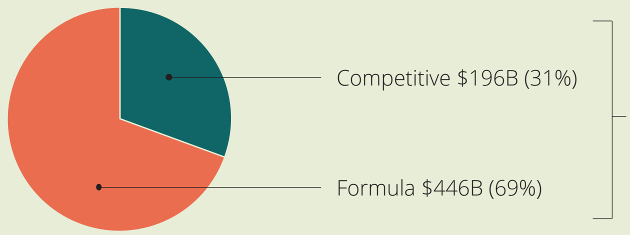
KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

- Increase in the number of USDOT discretionary grant applicants from disadvantaged communities in urban and rural areas who have never applied for USDOT funding before.
- Increase in the number of new projects in disadvantaged communities utilizing formula funds added to Statewide Transportation Improvement Programs (STIPs) and Transportation Improvement Programs (TIPs).

CRITICAL GAPS

BIL provides an **unprecedented level of competitive grant funding** that can directly benefit disadvantaged communities in urban and rural areas under the Justice40 initiative. Yet **69% of transportation funding will be allocated by formulas** set by statute. The formulas are not required to account for equity, limiting the Department's ability to direct resources to underserved, overburdened, and disadvantaged communities.[7]

Transportation Grants Funding from Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL), FY22 through FY26



$642 billion total transportation grants funding

ROOT DRIVERS

Limited Resources

- **Underserved communities may lack the resources needed to develop successful discretionary grant applications.** Without assistance, many underserved communities may miss chances to compete for discretionary funding due to a lack of resources rather than a lack of need.
- **Community Based Organizations (CBOs) have limited capacity to advocate on behalf of their community.** CBOs can represent the most underserved and overburdened communities and understand them best. However, coordinating with stakeholders, transportation agencies, and contractors is a costly and time-consuming process.

Systemic Barriers Remain

- **Disadvantaged communities have experienced decades of infrastructure injustice.** Disinvestment and lack of infrastructure funding have compounded years of systemically racist transportation decisions which have been left unresolved.[8]
- **Communities of color are disenfranchised from the decision-making process.** Members of underserved communities have received less priority in infrastructure investments, often shouldering the burden of its environmental and economic impacts.[8]

Income and Wealth Disparities

- **Navigating the complex environment of federal grant opportunities requires specialized expertise and experience.** Overburdened or disadvantaged communities in urban and rural areas may not have adequate resources to gain access to the necessary expertise and experience.
- **Benefit-cost analysis (BCA) is very influential in discretionary grant applications.** BCAs require specialized analysis tools. When underserved communities do not have access to those tools, potentially beneficial projects in underserved communities might not be selected due to incomplete or flawed BCAs.

TIMELINE OF USDOT ACTIONS

- Publish toolkit for planning and funding rural and Tribal electric mobility infrastructure – ***January 2022***
- Launch federal partnerships with key agencies making place-based investments – ***April 2022***
- Re-launch Advisory Committee on Transportation Equity to provide independent advice on USDOT equity programs – ***May 2022***
- Pilot a new approach that will reduce administrative burden for applicants considering applying for multiple discretionary grant programs – ***June 2022***
- Launch a national equity accelerator to provide hands-on support to underserved and overburdened communities accessing USDOT funds – ***December 2022***
- Issue a call for projects for place-based initiatives that are co-designed with communities most impacted by poor access and climate change – ***April 2023***

THE OPPORTUNITY AT STAKE

Providing technical support to underserved communities will make sure they have the opportunity to access the **+$642B** in transportation grants funding authorized by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) for FY22-FY26.[7]

KEY USDOT ACCOUNTABILITY ACTION

Consultation with the re-constituted Advisory Committee on Transportation Equity.

Expanding Access

OUTCOME

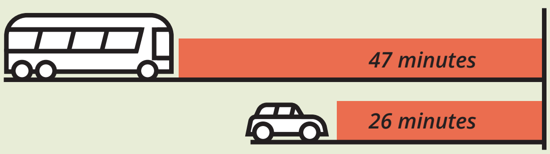
Increase in social and economic opportunity for disadvantaged and underserved communities from the provision of affordable multi-modal transportation options and the development of a transportation cost burden measure.

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

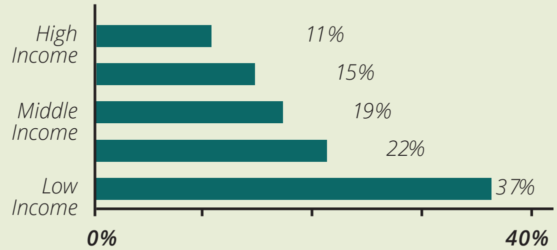
- Reduction in transportation travel cost as a percent of income.
- Reduction in transportation travel time.
- Increase in access to key destinations, including work, education, grocery stores, health care.
- Increase in mobility measured by number of trips at the individual level.

CRITICAL GAPS

Workers who commute by bus have commute times 1.7x longer than workers who commute alone by car: 47 minutes for bus commuters compared to 26 minutes for car commuters.[9]



The lowest income households spend on average 37% of their after-tax income on transportation, compared to 19% by the middle-income households.[10]



Transportation Spending as Percent of After Tax Income

ROOT DRIVERS

Higher Transportation Costs

- **Lower income people spend a far greater percent of their income on transportation than middle-income or high-income households.[10]** Equitable and high quality transportation systems can help address these disparities and increase residents' upward economic mobility.[11]
- **The transportation cost burden experienced by an individual is influenced by numerous factors.** Inadequate coordination of land use, housing and transportation policy and investment leads to inefficient transportation options that negatively impact social, economic and health outcomes. These factors can vary substantially across communities.

Lack of Transportation Options and Access

- **Many areas of the country have been labeled "transit deserts."** The inability to access jobs, schools, health care and social service organizations leads to higher rates of unemployment, poverty, chronic illness, and isolation.
- **Infrastructure and land use policy has often made car-ownership a necessity.** Decades of transportation and land use policy have focused on mobility for automobile users. This bias has left people without access to vehicles lacking in mobility options.
- **Multimodal options have been neglected.** Policies that ensure that streets have sidewalks and bike lanes that are safe and accessible to pedestrians, bicyclists, and users of public transit gives residents more travel options and more control over their transportation expenses. Land use policies that prevent people, jobs, goods, and services from being proximate to one another or near transit reduce the feasibility of low cost, environmentally efficient modes such as walking, cycling and transit.

TIMELINE OF USDOT ACTIONS

- Introduce racial equity and barriers to opportunity as a consideration for awarding discretionary grants – ***February 2021***
- Require discretionary grant projects to report on benefits (including expanded access) to disadvantaged communities – ***January 2022***
- Pilot transportation cost burden measure using existing data sources to screen transportation projects for funding – ***December 2023***
- Major completion of the National Transit Map to improve data on transit access, system quality, and performance – ***December 2024***
- Develop new data collection focused on capturing individual and household cost, travel time, trips not taken, accessibility, and access to key resources across different demographic groups – ***December 2026***
- Launch enhanced transportation cost burden measure (incorporating new data sources) as part of a transportation disadvantage index – ***December 2027***

THE OPPORTUNITY AT STAKE

Building a transportation cost burden measure will help USDOT better understand the second largest expenditure category for households, accounting for **$10,742** on average (15% of after-tax income) in 2019. Transportation expenses are second only to housing expenses.[10]

KEY USDOT ACCOUNTABILITY ACTIONS

- Develop criteria for incorporating transportation cost burden measure in project selection decision-making.
- Incorporate elements of the transportation cost burden measure into funding programs and policy documents.

Glossary of Concepts & Endnotes

TERM	DEFINITION
Advisory Committee on Transportation Equity	This committee provides advice and recommendations to the Secretary of Transportation on comprehensive, interdisciplinary issues related to transportation equity from a variety of stakeholders involved in transportation planning, design, research, policy, and advocacy.
Air Carrier Access Act (ACAA)	The ACAA prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in air travel.
Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)	The ADA prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in all areas of public life, including jobs, schools, transportation, and all public and private places that are open to the general public.
Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE)	DBEs are for-profit small business concerns where socially and economically disadvantaged individuals own at least a 51% interest and also control management and daily business operations.
Disadvantaged communities	Disadvantaged communities are communities that experience disproportionately high and adverse health, environmental, climate related, economic, and other cumulative impacts.
Equity	Equity means the consistent and systematic fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals, including individuals who belong to underserved communities that have been denied such treatment, such as Black, Latino, and Indigenous and Native American persons, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and other persons of color; members of religious minorities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) persons; persons with disabilities; persons who live in rural areas; and persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality.
Justice40	A government-wide initiative established under Executive Order 14008: Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad that aims to deliver 40 percent of the overall benefits of relevant federal investments in climate and sustainable transportation to disadvantaged communities.
Minority Business Enterprise (MBE)	A minority business enterprise is defined as a company that is at least 51% owned and operated by an individual that is at least 25% African American, Asian, Hispanic, or Native American. If the company is publicly traded, then the stock must be at least 51% minority-owned as well.
Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs)	MPOs are organizations designated to carry out the metropolitan transportation planning process in urban areas with populations greater than 50,000 people.
National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)	NEPA requires Federal agencies to assess the environmental effects of proposed major Federal actions prior to making decisions.
Overburdened communities	Overburdened communities are minority, low-income, tribal, or Indigenous populations or geographic locations in the United States that potentially experience disproportionate environmental and/or safety harms and risks. This disproportionality can be a result of greater vulnerability to environmental hazards, heightened safety risks, lack of opportunity for public participation, or other factors.
Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act	Section 504 prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in programs that receive federal financial assistance.
Small Disadvantaged Business	A small disadvantaged business is a firm that meets the following criteria: 51% or more owned and controlled by one or more disadvantaged persons; the disadvantaged person or persons is socially disadvantaged and economically disadvantaged; the firm is small, according to the Small Business Administration's size standard.
Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP)	STIPs are federally mandated 4-year funding and scheduling documents for surface transportation projects (road, highway, pedestrian trails, bicycle facilities, bridge facilities and transit projects).
Title VI of the Civil Rights Act	Title VI prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin in any program or activity that receives Federal funds or other Federal financial assistance.
Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP)	TIPs are approved and planned at the MPO level, and must be included in the STIP to receive federal funding.
Underserved communities	Underserved communities are populations sharing a particular characteristic, as well as geographic communities, that have been systematically denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic, social, and civic life, as exemplified by the list in the preceding definition of equity.

ENDNOTES

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State DOTs’ commitment to equity made clearer through federal Request for Information

ssti.us/2022/08/16/state-dots-commitment-to-equity-made-clearer-through-federal-request-for-information

August 16, 2022

By Liz Biskar, Policy Lab

Equity, diversity, and inclusion have been of growing importance among state and federal transportation agencies, and yet there isn’t a clear consensus on how that commitment translates into tangible outcomes. A new report from the Policy Lab at Claremont McKenna College, produced in partnership with SSTI, offers some clarity through an in-depth look at state DOT responses to the USDOT’s 2021 Request for Information (RFI) on transportation equity data. Over 300 public comments were submitted to the RFI, including 11 from state DOTs. The RFI was intended to help the USDOT identify its role in perpetuating or removing barriers for people of color and other underserved groups, and to solicit input on the best data sources, methods, and tools to advance equitable federal transportation programs.

This report adds to a growing body of research seeking to demystify transportation equity and document the progress state DOTs are making toward advancing equity goals. It provides a working definition of transportation equity and an overview of the major pieces of federal legislation governing transportation equity analysis, as well as identifies the common themes and best practices found in state DOT responses to the RFI. Lastly, the report leverages a rough maturity index to gauge current efforts among state agencies to advance transportation equity.

The study finds:

- In spite of the general lack of consensus among transportation scholars and practitioners on how to define transportation equity, state DOTs agree on the baseline variables that should be the center of equity analysis—race, ethnicity, income, and limited English proficiency—in addition to the importance of community engagement at all stages of the transportation planning process.
- Although state DOTs largely agreed that more federal resources are needed to boost their capacity to measure transportation equity, there were some divisions on whether state DOTs wanted stronger mandates from USDOT for measuring transportation equity.
- State DOTs from California, Washington, and Minnesota, scored the highest using our maturity index–a tool typically used to measure institutional progress towards a set of equity goals–which used information obtained from RFI responses and agency websites to assess efforts to advance transportation equity. Index questions ranged from whether a state DOT had established performance metrics to assess internal progress toward equity goals to whether there is an equity commitment statement on the agency website.
- Many innovative programs, tools, and studies were highlighted in state DOT responses to the RFI to advance equity goals. These include a recently enacted law in Washington state requiring the DOT to conduct an environmental justice assessment for any investment over $15 million; a community engagement project in Minnesota to develop a new plan for the I-94 corridor; and an Equity Index Pilot Project in California, which uses measurements of health, mobility, accessibility, and social demographics to produce a transportation equity score for underserved communities to help guide Caltrans prioritization and investment in the state.

The full report is available for download here. These efforts will also be a topic of discussion at SSTI's upcoming Community of Practice meeting specifically for leaders of state DOTs.

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Streamlined grant procedures can make competitive funding fairer

ssti.us/2022/08/09/streamlined-grant-procedures-can-make-competitive-funding-fairer

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By Leslie Orrantia

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) is a more than $850 billion historic investment in support of state and local government work to increase access and safety while redressing inequities across the country. However, a recent article by Brookings contributors Ellory Monks and Shalini Vajjhala points out that the existing structure of federal and state grant application processes may inhibit the fair allocation of the funds.

Equitable access to these funds means that every community, regardless of size, experience, or budget, should be able to apply, compete, and win state and federal money. However, many competitive grant protocols were informed by the big infrastructure needs and projects of large cities, inadvertently creating barriers to entry for smaller, less-resourced, and less-experienced communities to apply and compete. This often results in funds being awarded to similar recipients and projects—commonly whiter and wealthier communities at the expense of low-income, rural, small, and medium-sized candidates with restrictive staffing and finances.

Monks and Vajjhala argue that patchwork efforts to remedy grant and loan solicitation procedures are not enough. They argue for comprehensive restructuring to ensure diverse applicants, including those with reduced capacity, can pursue funding. They propose many areas for improvement like combining multiple applications into a single form, making information available without required logins, and requesting simpler information (like financial estimates and data requirements) early in the process. Additionally, they propose dedicated front-end budgetary and technical support to help low-capacity agencies meet preliminary design requirements and data estimates.

Standardized applications—another recommendation in the report—can help new applicants understand the overall grant process, growing their familiarity and comfort level with each submission, and increasing their chances for success. This consistency also helps the applying agency gauge the required personnel and financial commitments early on, instead of encountering insurmountable hurdles along the way, such as time constraints, data requests, and design requirements that exceed their capacity. Standardization may also allow for streamlined review by the funder and keep them apprised of differing needs and dynamic projects proposed by the diverse stakeholders they aim to serve.

Communication of funding opportunities, procedures, and requirements can also be simplified and made publicly available on the web. Information—if and when online—commonly lives behind a login screen or a mandatory agency profile, at times adding a cumbersome extra step. This can challenge small agencies as they seek more information before investing a great deal of time and attention into an application that may not align with their needs, intended goals, and staff or budgetary constraints.

Eligibility criteria have largely been shaped with big cities in mind, which means extensive data and design requirements early within the process can be impossible for low-capacity governments to meet. Data requirements, cost estimates, performance metrics, and draft designs require dedicated staff time and specific skillsets. Not all agencies have such talent or bandwidth in-house. This frequently results in some agencies being forced to forgo applying or invest early in costly consultants or overtime without the guarantee of a competitive submission. Preliminary steps in an application protocol should therefore consider the limitations of diverse applicants and pare back early-stage requirements accordingly. Targeted proactive technical assistance and financial support for early requirements could also help to alleviate undue burdens.

The federal government has recognized existing practices as a risk to IIJA implementation, and earmarked dollars for less-resourced state and local governments with concerted efforts to improve information access for prospective applicants. The Office of Management and Budget has released guidance for equitable distribution of IIJA funds by federal agencies. However, implementation of these guidelines falls to each agency, with no implications whatsoever for states, despite their responsibility for distribution of the majority of IIJA funding.

While federal efforts may show promise, they alone are insufficient to fix inaccessible grant structures. As states play a critical role in awarding the money, they too must scrutinize their procedures and eliminate barriers for low-capacity applicants. Monks and Vajjhala capture the urgency of this issue and share insightful steps toward fair allocation of IIJA funding at the state and federal levels—offering foundational reforms for future equitable application processes.

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