



Road to Zero Coalition

Connecting Prioritizing Safety with Transportation Equity Working Group

Reaching a Common Understanding of Transportation Equity

Vision: An equitable transportation system affords all transportation system users the freedom to move about, by whichever mode best suits their needs, without risk of harm. An equitable transportation system is one that provides fairness in mobility and accessibility to meet the needs of all community members. A system is not safe unless it is equitable, and Vision Zero cannot be achieved if some transportation system users are still harmed (e.g., through racial profiling, exposure to pollutants, gentrification, etc.) to achieve zero deaths or serious injuries. An equitable, safe transportation system is one in which the many harms that users face—crashes, death, injuries, long-term health impacts, and limitations to accessible and bountiful social life—are prevented.

Dimensions of Transportation Equity: Achieving an equitable transportation system entails grappling with historic and current injustices and inequities that have and continue to preclude the abilities of some road users to travel safely and without risk of harm. Creating an equitable transportation system requires understanding where inequities exist, who is most at risk, and how populations are harmed, due to neglect and insufficient efforts to address community safety needs.

Geographic Equity: In the United States, many transportation projects have historically disadvantaged some transportation system users—predominately Black, Indigenous, and People of Color road users—while prioritizing the needs of other users—predominately white and higher-income road users—within specific geographic locations. The construction of highways and other transportation facilities disproportionately demolished homes, businesses, and other assets in communities of color. At the same time, policies like redlining, disinvestment, and the impoverishment of reservations have led to unequal investments in safe infrastructure (like sidewalks) across cities and local jurisdictions, and between urban and rural contexts as well. Geographic inequity is closely linked to community inequity, but historic decisions around land use and planning continue to harm specific geographic locations, regardless of who lives there. Achieving geographic equity requires prioritizing those locations and investing equitably where transportation safety risks are greatest.

Community Equity: Inequitable transportation is not solely bound to geographic locations. Members of some communities are at greater risk when using roadways in the United States due to: inequitable access to various travel modes; enforcement (of people walking, biking, driving, and riding transit) that can create harmful interactions with the police; and the historic neglect of some demographic communities' transportation needs. Achieving community equity will require understanding the needs of diverse communities based on race and ethnicity, income, age, ability, sex, gender, language skills, immigrant status, employment status, and health.

Outcome Equity: Transportation safety is typically perceived as the absence of crashes, but there are other ways in which specific communities are harmed when using the roadways. Some populations are

more vulnerable to pollution from transportation systems, more likely to receive inequitable enforcement of traffic laws, and more susceptible to latent crash risks within the transportation system due to inequitable investments. Achieving outcome equity requires careful consideration of what safety means, how it is achieved, and what steps must be implemented to produce it.

Instituting Equity as Standard Procedure: The goal of a Safe System is zero deaths or serious injuries on the roadway, so agencies responsible for stewarding safety must make equity the standard procedure to ensure that all transportation system users benefit equitably from modifications to the transportation system. To achieve this, equity-deserving communities must be prioritized. Transportation system owners and operators should:

- Consider where deadly crashes are most likely to occur within a system.
- Consider which population's needs are being served by new projects or existing infrastructure.
- Consider whose needs are being ignored or not adequately addressed.
- Consider where historic transportation decisions have created or exacerbated inequity.
- Develop and use proactive ways to prioritize new projects and maintain transportation systems valued by the community.
- Engage with community members as equal stakeholders.

Agencies must commit to engaging with impacted communities in ways that meet the needs of those communities. The standard public input procedure is insufficient for facilitating meaningful input from many communities, especially those historically excluded from the process. Agencies must commit to making improvements in decision-making procedures when safety outcomes are not equitably distributed.

Outcome of an Equitable and Safe System: A Safe System is one that protects all transportation system users from harm, starting with those most at risk due to unsafe conditions in our existing system. An equitable system will:

- Prioritize safe travel by any mode, not just primarily automobiles.
- Accommodate the needs of all transportation users by actively considering and engaging with persons of diverse ages and abilities.
- Not utilize harmful policies or enforcement practices to achieve its safety goals.
- Accommodate human failures when they do occur.
- Realize a goal of zero deaths and serious injuries for all transportation system users.

A Safe System is one where every part of town is safe for all transportation system users, where race and ethnicity do not affect someone's risk of being involved in a crash, where pedestrians and bicyclists are free to use the road without fear, and where no community has to fear being overpoliced to keep the road safe for others, all while breathing clean air.

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