

# Transportation, Sustainability, and Equity



and the Effect on the African-American Community

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# OVERVIEW


*“Transportation equity has always been an invisible driver of equal opportunity and social change. Lack of access and affordability have long been correlated with race when it comes to African Americans and have historically served the purposes of segregation. It is critical that public policies and state and local efforts address transportation equity and sustainability with an eye towards comprehensive approaches that tackle the socioeconomic and racial disparities that resulted from our past.”<sup>1</sup>*

Transportation in the United States has historically favored middle-class and affluent neighborhoods at the expense of disadvantaged communities, resulting in skewed patterns of infrastructure development in metropolitan areas across the country.<sup>2</sup> Development has concentrated on highway construction for automobile travel, giving little consideration to sustainable, transit-oriented development (TOD). The dependence on automobiles as the primary mode of transportation in the country has fueled the development of a low-density, sprawl-like pattern which has defined America’s large cities. This development resulted in neglect of the central city. Residents living in the city, primarily being low-income people of color, therefore, witnessed their neighborhoods deteriorate over time and problems such as crime and high unemployment increased. Those residents who desired to move away faced challenges in accessing the suburbs where the greatest opportunities for employment were located.

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1 Dr. Menna Demessie, Congressional Black Caucus Foundation, Inc. Quote obtained on March 10, 2016.

2 PolicyLink: “All Aboard: Making Equity Central in Transportation Planning,” 2014. <http://equitycaucus.org/find-resources/library/all-aboard-making-equity-central-webinar>.



However, the central neighborhoods of cities are redeveloping at a rapid pace. New residents, who are mostly young and highly educated, are moving back to communities where both work and leisure activities are within walking distance of their home. A negative side-effect of this migration is that low-income residents and residents of color living in the city are eventually forced to leave because they cannot afford rising rent costs. They end up moving to the suburbs and often settle in the most impoverished areas, which are often underdeveloped, suffer from underfunded schools, are located near polluting facilities such as coal-fired power plants, and have streets devoid of sidewalks. Furthermore, the displaced residents are forced to move away from opportunities for employment, good health care, and viable education. Many suburbs, built exclusively for well-off residents with cars, have less-than-developed public transit systems, which many low-income people depend heavily on.

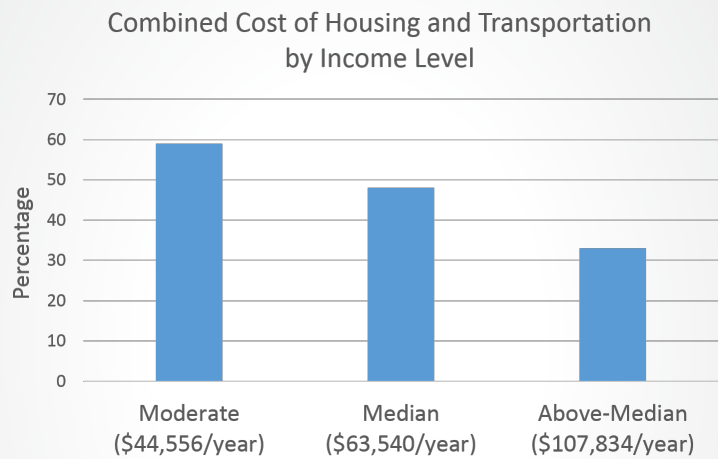
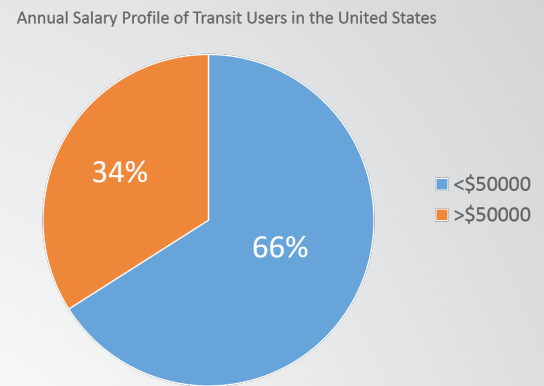
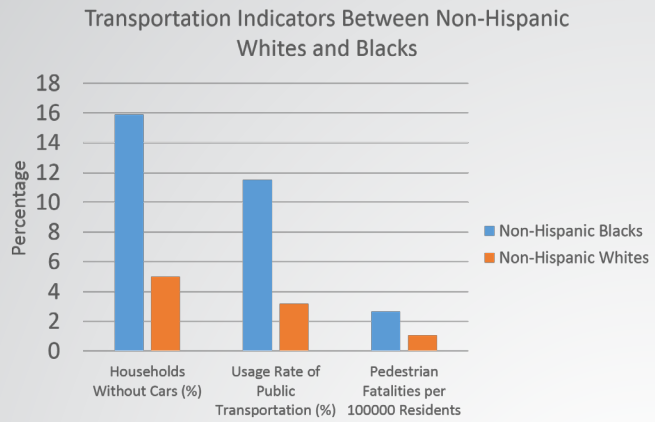


Figure 1: Race and Income-Based Transportation Impacts.

Research studies illustrate a number of statistics that show how low-income communities of color are negatively impacted by the current transportation infrastructure in the U.S.:

- Over 70% of regional jobs are now more than 3 miles away from central business districts<sup>1</sup> while most low-income people continue to live within the central city;<sup>2</sup>
- Since 2000 - 2010, household income has grown 25%, but the combined costs of housing and transportation have increased 44%;<sup>3</sup>
- Transportation costs are now the second largest expense for most American households, eating up an average 20 cents of every dollar in income and as much as 55 cents for every dollar earned by the poorest households. (High-income

1 Glaeser, Edward. 2001. "Decentralized Employment and the Transformation of the American City." Brookings-Wharton Papers on Urban Affairs: 1-47.

2 Glaeser, Edward L., Matthew E. Kahn, and Jordan Rappaport. 2008. "Why do the poor live in cities? The role of public transportation." *Journal of Urban Economics* 63, no. 1: 1-24.

3 Partnership for Sustainable Communities, "Partnership for Sustainable Communities: Five Years of Learning from Communities and Coordinating Federal Investments," 2014. <http://www.sustainablecommunities.gov/sites/sustainablecommunities.gov/files/docs/partnership-accomplishments-report-2014-reduced-size.pdf>.

households spend only nine cents for every dollar earned);<sup>4</sup>

- African Americans suffer a pedestrian fatality rate that is 60 percent higher than non-Hispanic Whites, at 2.65 per 100,000 persons (age-adjusted);<sup>5</sup>
- African Americans make up 12.7 percent of the U.S. population, but they account for 17.3 percent of all pedestrian deaths;
- Children from low-income families are twice as likely to walk to school than those of higher-income families, and therefore have a higher risk of being injured or killed as pedestrians.<sup>6</sup>

4 PolicyLink: "All Aboard: Making Equity Central in Transportation Planning," 2014. <http://equitycaucus.org/find-resources/library/all-aboard-making-equity-central-webinar>.

5 Smart Growth America, "Dangerous By Design 2014", 2014, <http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/documents/dangerous-by-design-2014/dangerous-by-design-2014.pdf>

6 Safe Routes to School National Partnership, "Implementing Safe Routes to School in Low Income Schools and Communities: A Resource Guide for Volunteers and Professionals," June 2010.



# TACKLING TRANSPORTATION INEQUITY BY INCREASING ACCESS

The CBCF supports policies that promote access to multiple modes of transportation for all people, especially African Americans from lower-income communities. What does “access” mean? We think it means:

- 1. Building multimodal transportation facilities (rail stations, bike-sharing stations, bus rapid transit, etc.) located in low-income areas to give residents the ability to move around a city without a car;**
- 2. Ensuring a safe, efficient, and easy-to-follow trip when using multimodal transportation (everyone from the preschool student to the elderly should not have difficulty riding and should be safe), and;**
- 3. Linking low-income residents with employers, health care access, grocery store locations, and recreational needs which will provide access to jobs, good health, nutritious food, and enjoyable activities that make for high quality living.**

Case studies in Denver and Seattle are presented to show the impact of transit on the mobility of low-income residents, and the consequences when their concerns are not heard or acknowledged. In addition, the impact of the sharing economy will be discussed.



Figure 2: Denver Light Rail System Map  
The W Light Rail Line is highlighted in blue.<sup>2</sup>

## CASE STUDIES

### Denver, Colorado<sup>1</sup>

In April of 2013, the Regional Transportation District (RTD) in Denver, Colorado opened up the W Line Light Rail, which runs from downtown through West Denver, Lakewood, and Golden. The W Line is part of a rapid transit expansion program called *FasTracks*, which when finished, has the potential to be a key connector between

low-income communities and communities of color to the jobs, schools, medical care, and services from which they have been previously isolated. It will also relieve some of the environmental impacts of driving, which are shown to disproportionately impact low-income communities and communities of color.

1 9to5 Colorado, "Left at the Station, A Civil Rights Perspective on Transit Justice in the Front Range," January 2014.

2 Accessed from <http://www.rtd-fastracks.com/>



However, many residents felt that RTD did not reach out to them to hear their concerns about the new line; a local nonprofit organization called *9to5 Colorado* was the first organization most residents interacted with regarding the building of the line. A number of concerns were raised by affected community members, including affordability (72% of residents stated that they could not afford monthly passes, and 80% did not receive any transit benefit from their employer); cuts to bus services (many residents felt their mobility decrease after bus routes were cut with the opening of the light rail line); safety (35.8% of residents expressed concern about the pedestrian walkways and crossings leading to light rail stations and 42.3% of participants stated they had concerns about the safety of pedestrians near the stations); and gentrification (several residents reported rent increases ranging from \$75 to \$150 a month, as well as a decrease in maintenance to rental properties). *9to5* worked with residents and provided recommendations to improve the

ability for residents to use the new light rail line, including implementing income-based fares, improving the accessibility and clarity of the fare system, expanding bus service, creating a more effective process for rider feedback and participation, and creating policies to limit displacement and gentrification.

The study in Denver illustrates the importance of community engagement in successfully addressing transportation equity issues. Often, transportation planning organizations do the minimum when it comes to community engagement. Without the work of *9to5*, the residents along the W Line would have not had any say in the planning and construction of the line.



### *Seattle, Washington<sup>1</sup>*

The city of Seattle has been rapidly expanding its light rail system, especially in Rainier Valley, over the last decade. An effect of this expansion is that rapid development, and in turn gentrification is occurring. Without the implementation of specific policy actions - such as preserving affordable land for TOD goals, creating financial programs that generate revenue for low-income residents, and encouraging development of family-sized units - low-income residents in the Valley will continue to be pushed out. Property values have increased dramatically around the light rail stations in Rainier Valley and the majority of new tenants own multiple cars, meaning they are not required to use the transit system to get around the city. Low-earning Rainier Valley residents use transit more frequently to get to work than their higher-earning neighbors (23 percent to 14 percent respectively). Displaced residents of Seattle are increasingly being forced into the suburbs, where they experience less frequent and lower density transit service. In Rainier Valley, 56 percent of all jobs in the region are accessible by public transit in less

than 90 minutes. However, further out in suburban Renton and Kent, this access drops to 40 percent and 37 percent, respectively. With new immigrants and people of color being among the fastest-growing populations in Seattle, the city faces a risk of increased sprawl if it does not encourage TOD that can be accessible to residents of all income levels and ethnicities.

Puget Sound Sage, a Seattle based organization, has focused its work in the Rainer Valley area on promoting good jobs and providing quality employment, a cleaner environment, and affordable housing for low and moderate income families in the Seattle metropolitan area. The organization suggested a number of recommendations to ensure that TOD planning included the concerns of new residents in the Rainer Valley area, such as preserving affordable land for community TOD goals as gentrification occurs and connecting low-income workers of color in Rainier Valley to high quality jobs throughout the corridor.

<sup>1</sup> Puget Sound Sage, "Transit-Oriented Development that's Healthy, Green, and Just: Ensuring Transit Investment in Seattle's Rainier Valley Builds Communities Where All Families Thrive," May 2012.




# THE SHARING ECONOMY

The sharing economy rests on the ability of peer based consumption of goods and services and has grown significantly in the last decade. Also referred to as the peer-to-peer rental market, such services include everything from utilizing services like Airbnb to rent an apartment or timeshare while on vacation, to the use of Uber and Lyft ridesharing to hitch a ride at a presumably lower cost than taxis. Transportation-focused sharing services maximize the use of vehicles by sharing them among multiple users and can potentially address the mobility issues of low-income communities. From an employment perspective, sharing services, particularly transportation network companies (TNC) like Uber and Lyft, are significantly changing workforce norms. Many people, both low and middle-income residents, are going into business for themselves as drivers for these companies and are able to work their own schedules during various days of the week. Another benefit is that these companies offer instant employment opportunities for African-Americans while combating racial profiling, since African-American drivers work for themselves and are ranked by passengers not by their skin color, but for their ability to drive and get to a specific location on time. Furthermore, since many low-income people increasingly hold jobs during off-peak hours (such as nights and weekends) when transit routes are poorly served, sharing services can help these residents reach their jobs if they do not have a car. <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> David King, Interview (March 21, 2014), Columbia University.



Transportation sharing can be used to connect people within the first and last mile, where public transit is not able to reach. Nevertheless, the sharing services have yet to gain traction in low-income communities due to a lack of communication and reluctance of companies to invest in certain areas due to perceived safety issues. Furthermore, the lack of return on investment, in addition to the requirement of personal information and use of a smartphone, which many residents do not have or are unwilling to share, remains a challenge to full implementation of ridesharing or bikesharing.<sup>1</sup> Another issue is the penetration and access of transportation sharing services to low-income, African-American residents. In the majority African-American Wards 7 and 8 in Washington DC, Capital Bikeshare - the top bikeshare program in the area - only has seven stations, a total of 38 registered members, and has been used just 946 times since the system's launch. This is in contrast to the 1,317 members in wealthier zip codes near the busiest station, DuPont Circle, which had 24,271 trips (as of April 11th 2011)<sup>2</sup>. Many reasons are postulated for this lack of usage, including the hilly topography of the wards, the high start-up costs (particularly the \$75 annual fee), and lack of marketing and dissemination of information, which has caused confusion among the residents in the area.<sup>3</sup>

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1 Pucher, John. 2003. "Socioeconomics of Urban Travel: Evidence from 2001 NHTS" *Transportation Quarterly*, Vol. 57, No. 3, (49-77). Eno Transportation Foundation, Inc., Washington, D.C.

2 Institute for Transportation and Development Policy, "Case Studies: Connecting Low-Income People to Opportunity with Shared Mobility," 2014. <https://livingcities.s3.amazonaws.com/resource/285/download.pdf>

3 Davis, Veronica. "Why is Capital Bikeshare usage low east of the river?" <http://greatergreaterwashington.org/post/9020/why-is-capital-bikeshare-usage-low-east-of-the-river/>. Published January 31, 2011; Accessed January 7, 2016.


# RECOMMENDATIONS

## *Policies*

1. Members should be involved in their metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs); the MPOs outreach should include the use of minority media - including flyers, radio stations, and television spots – and workshops should be conducted that cater to African-Americans.<sup>1</sup> When black community leaders and residents are involved with MPOs – whether serving on citizen advisory committees or going to public commenting sessions – they will be able to provide insight and influence on future transportation decisions.
2. The federal government should increase funding for public transit and development of walkable, sustainable communities in the next iteration of a multi-year surface transportation bill.
3. The U.S. Department of Transportation should require states to set measurable safety goals for those walking or bicycling to ensure state and local transportation agencies are held accountable for meeting their goals.


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<sup>1</sup> Department of Transportation, TIGER Discretionary Grants, <http://www.transportation.gov/tiger>

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4. Local governments should work with sharing companies to ensure that they can operate safely and legally in metropolitan areas. Too often the sharing companies – especially ride-sharing companies like Uber and Lyft – are fighting city taxicab commissions.
  5. Cities should develop or revamp their zoning policies to allow more construction of mixed-income units near transportation hubs to offer low-income residents the opportunity to live in TOD-focused areas.

### *Programs*

1. Funding for sidewalk and bike-lane development programs such as Safe Routes to School, should be provided for cities to use to improve sidewalks, construct right-of-ways, and build bike lanes.
2. Bikeshare programs should continue to expand to areas where a majority of the residents are low-income and people of color. Providing the option to bike as a transportation option encourages a healthy lifestyle and can potentially solve the first-mile and last-mile gap inhibiting many low-income individuals who are transit-dependent. The U.S. Department of Transportation also has programs that the community can tap into make transportation more accessible and cities safer - such as the Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) competitive grant program, which provides \$500 million in grants to focus



on capital projects to generate economic development and improve access to reliable, safe and affordable transportation for disconnected communities, and the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP), which provides an average of \$815 million for programs dedicated to safe walking and biking.<sup>1</sup>

3. Communities can search for grants that would help to build infrastructure to develop walkable and sustainable communities. The TIGER and TAP grants are options for community leaders. The DOT just released a \$40 million competitive grant program called the “Smart City Challenge (<https://www.transportation.gov/smartcity>),” which encourages cities with populations between 200,000 and 850,000 people to, in the words of the DOT, “put forward bold, data-driven ideas to improve lives by making transportation safer, easier, and more reliable.” Over 77 cities provided applications.


### *Practice*

1. Community members should explore the Department of Transportation’s Environmental Justice Strategy in the Office of Civil Rights (<https://www.civilrights.dot.gov/civil-rights-awareness-enforcement/environmental-justice/environmental-justice-strategy>).<sup>2</sup>

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1 Federal Highway Administration, MAP-21 Transportation Alternatives Program Fact Sheet, <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/map21/factsheets/tap.cfm>

2 Department of Transportation, Department of Civil Rights, Accessed October 28, 2015, <https://www.civilrights.dot.gov/civil-rights-awareness-enforcement/environmental-justice/environmental-justice-strategy>.

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2. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) work with state departments of transportations, MPOs, transit providers, and other local agencies to ensure Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and environmental justice considerations are integral to all surface transportation activities. The program has three main goals:
    - a. Avoid, minimize, or mitigate disproportionately high and adverse human health and environmental effects, including those of a social or economic nature, on minority populations and low-income populations.
    - b. Ensure the full and fair participation by all potentially affected communities in the transportation decision-making process.
    - c. Prevent the denial of, reduction in or significant delay in the receipt of benefits by minority and low-income populations.
  3. Community members can search for their MPOs at <https://www.planning.dot.gov/mpo.asp>.

The importance of developing an equitable, transportation system must be of utmost importance to all interested parties, including government agencies and neighborhood citizens. By raising awareness and supporting government efforts, the desire for a transportation system which benefits everyone will come to fruition.





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