

# NEW ROUTES to EQUITY:

The Future of Transportation  
in the Black Community

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## **Congressional Black Caucus Foundation, Inc.**

The Congressional Black Caucus Foundation, Inc. (CBCF) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan public policy, research, and educational institute that seeks to advance the global Black community. CBCF envisions a world in which all communities have an equal voice in public policy through leadership cultivation, economic empowerment, and civic engagement. The mission of CBCF is to advance the global Black community by developing leaders, informing policy, and educating the public.

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The Center for Policy Analysis and Research (CPAR) identifies, analyzes, and disseminates policies and policy-related information critical to the economic independence, quality education, and health equity of African Americans. CPAR helps to fill the need for quality research and effective policies regarding underserved communities and the personal and social welfare of their individuals.

## **Transportation Equity**

The CPAR Transportation Equity program conducts policy analysis and research as it relates to transportation, sustainability, and equity. This program is generously supported by State Farm.



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# INTRODUCTION

Our transportation system is being transformed by three rapidly evolving and emerging mobility options: shared mobility, electric vehicles, and autonomous vehicles (see Figure 1).

Shared mobility services and electric vehicles are already changing the transportation landscape. For instance, 84 million bike share and scooter share trips were taken in 2018.<sup>1</sup> Autonomous, or self-driving, vehicles will disrupt the existing transportation sector. A major concern is whether these mobility options equitably benefit the Black community or perpetuate and exacerbate transportation inequities.

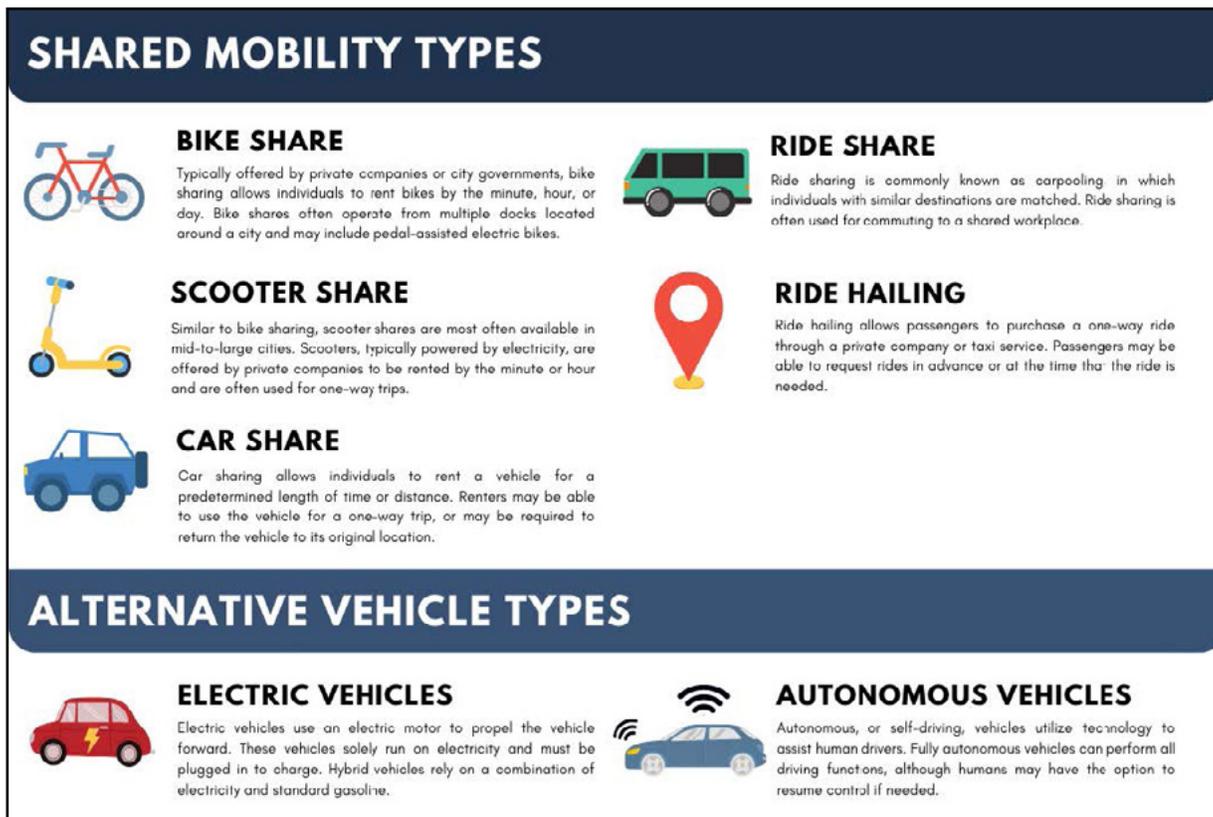


Figure 1. New Mobility Options<sup>2-4</sup>

1. National Association of City Transportation Officials. (2019). Shared Micromobility in the US: 2018.

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## Historical Context

Historically, transportation planning decisions and infrastructure development have systematically created inequitable transportation systems that have imposed a heavy burden on the Black community. Public transportation is a long-standing civil rights issue. Segregated transit was used as a means of controlling the movement of African Americans. Challenges against segregated transit date back to abolitionist Frederick Douglass, antilynching activist Ida B. Wells, and Homer Plessy of the landmark Supreme Court case, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which established the separate-but-equal doctrine.<sup>5</sup> The struggle for desegregation continued, notably by Claudette Colvin and Rosa Parks, whose arrest led to the Montgomery Bus Boycott. This was followed by additional actions, including the 1961 Freedom Rides with the late Congressman John Lewis.

During the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, the link between access to public transportation and economic mobility were highlighted. In 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said:

*When you go beyond a relatively simple though serious problem such as police racism, however, you begin to get all the complexities of the modern American economy. Urban transit systems in most American cities, for example, have become a genuine civil rights issue – and a valid one – because the layout of rapid-transit systems determines the accessibility of jobs to the Black community. If transportation systems in American cities could be laid out so as to provide an opportunity for poor people to get meaningful employment, then they could begin to move into the mainstream of American life. A good example of this problem is my home city of Atlanta, where the rapid-transit system has been laid out for the convenience of the white upper-middle-class suburbanites who commute to their jobs downtown. The system has virtually no consideration for connecting poor people with their jobs. There is only one possible explanation for this situation, and that is the racist blindness of city planners.<sup>7</sup>*

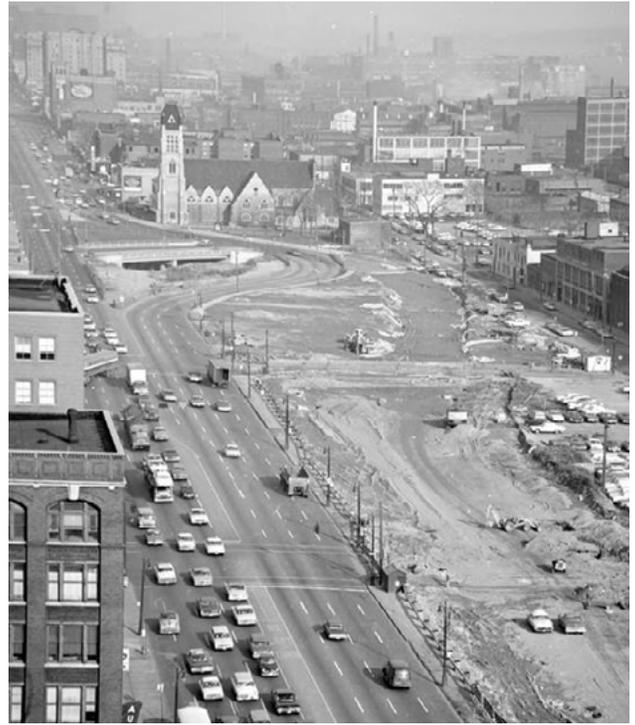


The 1961 Freedom Rides tested two Supreme Court decisions that found segregation of interstate transportation and interstate transportation facilities were unconstitutional under the Commerce Clause and Interstate Commerce Act. Freedom Riders encountered several violent attacks.<sup>6</sup>

Efforts to move out of poverty are impeded by transportation policies that prioritize highways over public transit, further reducing access to employment and other economic opportunities.

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6. Birmingham Civil Rights Institute. (n.d.). Courage Under Fire. Retrieved from <https://www.bcri.org/project/courage-under-fire/>.  
7. Washington, J.M., ed. (2003). A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writing and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr. HarperCollins, 325-326.

Following the Federal-Aid Highway Act, highway construction and urban renewal, or “Negro removal,” programs had inequitable effects on the Black community.<sup>8,9</sup> Highway construction resulted in the demolition, division, and displacement of Black neighborhoods, as well as the destruction of local economies. This construction proceeded with little to no community involvement. Highway investments, in combination with discriminatory housing and lending policies, facilitated white flight and accelerated white suburbanization.<sup>10</sup> This reinforced racial residential segregation and exacerbated economic inequalities as jobs relocated to the suburbs and cities disinvested. The consequences of highway investments and the resulting automobile-dominated transportation system include restricted mobility, concentrated poverty, increased air and noise pollution, and heightened risk of pedestrian injuries.<sup>11</sup>



Chrysler Freeway (I-75) construction in Detroit, Michigan in 1964.<sup>12</sup> Black Bottom, a predominantly Black neighborhood in Detroit, was torn down as part of the city’s Urban Renewal Program and paved over with Chrysler Freeway.

## Purpose

Recent and emerging mobility options offer an immense opportunity to rectify the failed legacy of the transportation policies and infrastructure network that has plagued the Black community for generations. However, current policies have not adequately addressed transportation inequities. This report highlights on-going challenges affecting African Americans in the transportation system and provides policy recommendations for how shared mobility, electric vehicles, and autonomous vehicles can equitably serve the Black community. These urgent policy recommendations are intended to ensure rapidly advancing mobility innovations move us towards an equity future.

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Man riding an electric scooter across a busy intersection in Atlanta, Georgia.

# TRANSPORTATION CHALLENGES FOR THE BLACK COMMUNITY

There are several pertinent challenges that merit consideration. This report focuses on issues related to access, sustainability, and safety. As previously mentioned, shared mobility and electric vehicles are penetrating the transportation sector, so this section also examines challenges with respect to these existing mobility options

## Access

*Access refers to peoples' ability to use mobility options and to reach goods and services.*

14% of Black households' pretax income is spent on transportation, on average.<sup>13</sup> This varies significantly by income. Low-income Black households spend a greater proportion of their pretax income on transportation (30%) compared with high-income Black households (10%).<sup>14</sup> Private vehicles are a large transportation expense. Note that there are racial disparities in the cost of owning a car. African Americans are charged higher markups on auto loans when purchasing vehicles than white buyers,<sup>15</sup> and African American neighborhoods pay higher auto insurance premiums.<sup>16</sup>

13. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2020). Consumer Expenditures in 2018. Retrieved from <https://www.bls.gov/opub/reports/consumer-expenditures/2018/home.htm>.

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## 20% of Black households do not have access to an automobile.<sup>17</sup>

This is the highest percentage among all races and ethnicities. Additionally, one-third of low-income African Americans live in a zero-vehicle household.<sup>18</sup> In an automobile-dominated transportation system, lack of automobile access hinders the ability to reach jobs, education, healthy food, and more.

## 24% of public transit riders are African American, the second largest group of riders, even though their US population is 12%.<sup>19</sup>

In contrast, transit users are 40% white, and they comprise 63% of the US population. Also, transit mode varies by race. While bus riders are 30% Black and 35% white, rail riders are 19% Black and 46% white.<sup>19</sup> Differential access to rail and higher rail fares likely influence mode differences.<sup>20</sup> More generally, underinvestment in public transportation has led to fare hikes, service cuts, and poor connectivity.

## 10% of African Americans rely on public transportation to get to their jobs.<sup>21</sup>

Black workers have the longest average public transit commute time.<sup>22</sup> During nights and weekends, there is lower access to public transportation. This impacts Black workers, who are most likely to work nonstandard hours.<sup>23</sup> Suburban and rural communities also lack access to public transportation.

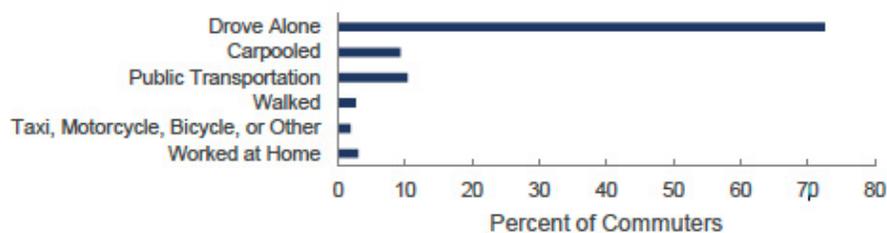


Figure 2. Transportation Mode to Work for African Americans

## 14% fewer jobs were located near Black residents in major metro areas between 2000 and 2012.<sup>24</sup>

The decline in job proximity is due to Black residents moving to the suburbs. Gentrification, rising housing costs, and decreasing affordable housing stocks are pushing African Americans out of cities and into the suburbs.<sup>25</sup>

As displaced residents live farther away from work, they are subjected to longer commutes, limited transportation options, and increased transportation costs.

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## **6% of all bike trips are made by African Americans.<sup>26</sup>**

While bike share has the potential to improve access to biking, studies around the US have shown that African Americans experience the largest disparities in bike share participation rates.<sup>27</sup> Station siting is a factor. When controlling for bike share proximity, African Americans still participate at lower rates. Some barriers to bike share use for African Americans are cost, limited information, and concerns about traffic safety and racial profiling by police. Similar disparities have been documented for car share.<sup>28</sup>

## **17% of Black households are unbanked and 30% underbanked.<sup>29</sup>**

In unbanked households, no one has a checking or savings account; underbanked households have an account but also use alternative financial services, such as check cashing or payday loans. Most shared mobility services require a debit or credit card.

## **25% of Black households do not have a smartphone.<sup>30</sup>**

Additionally, areas without high-speed broadband coverage are typically located in areas with higher poverty, lower population densities, and lower incomes.<sup>31</sup> This hinders the ability to access app-based shared mobility options.



Woman signals her ride-hail service in New York, New York with a smartphone in her hand. Shared mobility options largely serve urban areas, and require a debit/credit card and smartphone.

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## Sustainability

*Sustainability refers to impact on the environment and health.*

### **24% of African Americans live near highly trafficked roads.<sup>32</sup>**

African Americans are more likely to live in high traffic density areas than whites.<sup>33,34</sup> Furthermore, Black students are more likely to attend a school near a major roadway than white students.<sup>35</sup> This contributes to racial disparities in exposure to traffic-related air pollution, including fine particulate matter (PM<sub>2.5</sub>)<sup>36,37</sup> and nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>).<sup>38</sup>

### **9% of Black adults and 14% of Black children have asthma.<sup>39</sup>**

Exposure to traffic-related air pollution is associated with asthma and many other negative health effects, including lung and breast cancer, cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, and impacts on birth outcomes.<sup>40-42</sup> African-Americans have the highest rates of asthma morbidity and mortality,<sup>39,43</sup> with greater disparities for Black children.<sup>39,44</sup> African Americans also have greater cancer risk due to toxic air exposures from traffic.<sup>45</sup>



Heavy traffic in Los Angeles, California on a hazy day.

### **19% of total heat-related deaths from 2004–2018 were African American.<sup>46</sup>**

Transportation is a major contributor to climate change. Transportation accounts for the largest portion of greenhouse gas emissions in the US (28%), and the majority of transportation greenhouse gas emissions are from light-duty vehicles.<sup>47</sup> Climate change impacts are already being felt in the US.<sup>48,49</sup> The impacts and health risks of climate change disproportionately affect Black communities.<sup>48-51</sup>

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### **3% of hybrid vehicle buyers and 2% of plug-in electric vehicle buyers in California are African American.<sup>52</sup>**

For comparison, African Americans comprise roughly the same proportion of gasoline vehicle buyers (3%). California accounts for half of all electric vehicles in the US.<sup>53</sup>

## **Safety**

*Safety refers to traffic-related injuries and fatalities, as well as issues related to policing.*

### **18% of traffic-related pedestrian deaths are African American.<sup>54</sup>**

Black pedestrians and bicyclists are more likely to be hit and killed than white ones.<sup>54-56</sup> Unsafe street infrastructure, such as inadequate sidewalks, lighting, signage, and crosswalks, contribute to injuries and fatalities.<sup>57</sup> Relatedly, of all traffic-related deaths, Black men have the second highest death rate.<sup>58</sup>

### **Black drivers are 20% more likely to be stopped by police than white drivers, on average.<sup>59</sup>**

The most common police-initiated contact is the traffic stop.<sup>60</sup> Racial disparities in traffic stops are well documented.<sup>59-62</sup> Disparities vary greatly across states and cities. For instance, in Missouri, Black drivers are over 90% more likely to be stopped.<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, Black drivers are twice as likely to be searched during traffic stops than white drivers, yet less likely to have contraband.<sup>59,61</sup> A disproportionate share of people shot and killed by police at traffic stops are Black.<sup>64</sup>

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A shared autonomous vehicle operated as part of a pilot program at Texas Southern University in Houston, Texas.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Emerging mobility options offer an incredible opportunity to address specific transportation challenges in the Black community. However, actualizing this requires equity-driven policy and planning to ensure existing transportation inequities are not perpetuated.

### Access

#### *Shared Mobility*

##### **Integrate shared mobility services with public transportation.**

Bike share and scooter share docking stations, as well as car share, should co-locate at bus stops and rail stations to improve first and last mile connectivity. Docked bike share exists, and scooter share docking stations are in the pilot-phase in cities such as Austin, Texas.<sup>65</sup> Additionally, public transit agencies should partner with ride hailing services to expand public on-demand microtransit (or, shuttle) services to and from transit stations, particularly in Black communities. One example is the Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART) GoLink pilot program for the South Dallas/Fair Park neighborhood in Dallas, Texas, which is supplemented by Uber Pool.<sup>66</sup>

##### **Integrate public transit fare payment methods with shared mobility services.**

Currently, some bike share programs allow transit riders to unlock bikes using their transit card, such as Healthy Ride in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and Bay Wheels in the San Francisco Bay Area.<sup>67,68</sup> However, payment is deducted from the debit or credit card attached to the bike share account, not from the balance on the transit card. Shared mobility services, particularly bike share and scooter share, should accept transit card balances for payment.

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### **Expand shared mobility options in areas underserved by mass transit.**

Ride share, car share, and ride hailing services can increase access to critical destinations. These services would particularly benefit rural areas, where 9% of the Black population resides.<sup>69</sup> Ride share programs, such as fixed-route vanpooling, should be deployed between Black residential areas and locations like employment centers and grocery stores. Late-night and weekend service should be available.

### **Require shared mobility services to accept multiple payment options.**

To ensure access for unbanked and underbanked individuals, shared mobility services should accept alternative payments, such as transit cards or cash. One cash-payment option is to allow riders to purchase prepaid cards at participating stores that can be added to a user account. An example of a bike share program accepting prepaid cards is Bay Wheels, as part of its Bike Share for All program.<sup>70</sup>

### **Require shared mobility services to offer lower cost options.**

To improve affordability, options such as discounted fares and reduced monthly or annual fees should be available for low-income, transit, and student riders. For instance, RideKC Bike in Kansas City, Missouri offers a Bike Share for All program with lower annual membership fees, and a Bike + Bus Pass that provides unlimited 60-minute bike share trips at no additional cost to monthly bus pass holders.<sup>71</sup>

### **Require shared mobility services to provide non-app booking options.**

Shared mobility services should not require a smartphone for access. Alternative booking options include online, kiosks, or phone customer service.

### **Remove the scooter share requirement that users have a driver's license.**

Although scooter share apps do not require users to scan their driver's license, rules indicate that users must have one.<sup>72,73</sup> 42 states and Washington, DC, suspend, revoke, or prohibit renewal of licenses for unpaid fines and fees,<sup>74</sup> which disproportionately impacts African Americans due to racially discriminatory policing.<sup>75,76</sup>



Woman riding a Bay Wheels bike in Oakland, California. Photo courtesy of Ariel Ward.

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## *Autonomous Vehicles*

### **Prioritize deployment of autonomous vehicles as a public electric, shared mobility option over private ownership.**

In order to stop perpetuating access inequities caused by automobile-dominated transportation systems, fully accessible, high-occupancy autonomous vehicles should be incorporated into public transportation plans, particularly to fill mobility gaps in Black communities. One example is Smart Circuit, an ADA-accessible, electric, self-driving shuttle in Columbus, Ohio.<sup>77</sup> A new route in the predominantly Black neighborhood of Linden provides free rides between affordable housing, recreation, public transportation, and more. Smart Circuit was made possible by the Obama Administration's Smart Cities Challenge.<sup>78</sup> Greater federal investment in public transportation is required to expand transit and enable widespread adoption of advanced technologies. While the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act (FAST Act) increased public transportation funds to \$61.1 billion for 2016 – 2020,<sup>79</sup> federal funds support less than 10% of operating costs for public transportation and about 40% of capital costs.<sup>80</sup> The House recently passed the Moving Forward Act, which would increase public transportation funding.<sup>81</sup>

## **Sustainability**

### *Shared Mobility*

#### **Require zero-emission vehicle fleets.**

Immediate steps are reauthorizing California's vehicle emissions waiver<sup>82</sup> and restoring the Obama Administration's fuel standard that encouraged auto manufacturers to accelerate electric vehicle production.<sup>83</sup> Federal leadership is required to ramp up electric vehicles and the required charging infrastructure. The House Select Committee on the Climate Crisis recently released a Climate Crisis Action Plan, which includes comprehensive policies to advance electric vehicles.<sup>84</sup> The transition to electric vehicles will require additional state incentives<sup>85</sup> and cooperation,<sup>86</sup> as well as public-private partnerships. For example, Lyft recently announced its commitment to reach 100% electric vehicles on its platform by 2030.<sup>87</sup>

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## *Autonomous Vehicles*

### **Require zero-emission autonomous vehicle fleets that are largely deployed as a public shared mobility option.**

To ensure autonomous vehicles do not exacerbate pollution and health inequities, autonomous vehicles should be fully electric and operate as high-occupancy pooled services as opposed to privately owned, single-occupancy vehicles. Ride hailing companies are developing autonomous fleets.<sup>88-90</sup> An environmentally sustainable model relies on those fleets predominantly consisting of high-occupancy electric vehicles that supplement public transit.

## *Electric Vehicles*

**Require carbon-free energy sources of electricity generation.** The transition to electric vehicles will increase the electricity demand. Non-hydro renewable energy sources, such as solar and wind, must be expanded to meet demand. This requires divestment from fossil fuels.<sup>91</sup> Currently, 11% of US electricity generation comes from non-hydro renewable energy, while the largest sources are natural gas (38%) and coal (23%).<sup>92</sup> Powering electric vehicles with non-hydro renewable energy sources reduces toxic air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions. This benefits Black communities, which are disproportionately impacted by coal plants and oil and gas facilities.<sup>93,94</sup>

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## Require ethical and sustainable practices for the lifecycle of electric vehicle batteries.

First is the production of electric vehicle batteries.

Most of the cobalt in lithium-ion batteries comes from mines in the Democratic Republic of the Congo that use child labor,<sup>95</sup> and lithium extraction exploits and pollutes indigenous communities in the US and South America.<sup>96,97</sup>

It is imperative to find sustainable alternatives to lithium-ion batteries.<sup>98</sup> Additionally, cobalt and lithium are non-renewable sources. Recycling end-of-life lithium-ion batteries is essential to recover materials and divert landfill waste.<sup>99</sup> Recycling also reduces the energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions of battery production.<sup>100</sup>



Electric vehicle charging station in Baltimore, Maryland. For electric vehicles to truly be zero-emission vehicles, federal and state governments must commit to carbon-free sources of electricity.

## Restore the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

During the coronavirus pandemic, the Trump Administration weakened environmental review.<sup>101,102</sup> Environmental impact statements, particularly the examination of alternative actions and public comment, are instrumental in reducing adverse impacts of infrastructure projects. For example, communities used NEPA to reroute a highway in Oakland, California and halt a highway expansion in Los Angeles, California.<sup>103,104</sup> Restoring NEPA is vital for ensuring informed and inclusive decision-making.

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## Safety

*Fun Fact: Garrett Augustus Morgan, the son of former slaves, invented the modern traffic signal after witnessing a crash. He received a patent in 1923.<sup>105</sup>*

### **Fund safe street infrastructure projects to reduce pedestrian and bicyclist injuries and fatalities.**

This includes investing in Complete Streets and Safe Routes to Schools projects in Black communities,<sup>106,107</sup> as well as sidewalk and lighting improvement projects. The Moving Forward Act would allocate funds for such projects.<sup>108</sup>

Infrastructure investments should require local hiring and prioritize contracting with Disadvantaged Business Enterprises. Additionally, local governments must implement anti-displacement strategies to protect residents.<sup>109</sup>

### **Divest from police and invest in free public transit.**

Municipalities, particularly those with high proportions of African Americans, use traffic enforcement for revenue generation rather than traffic safety.<sup>110,111</sup> Fine revenue-generating practices contribute to the over-policing of Black communities. The consequence is not only “Driving While Black”; “Walking While Black” and “Biking While Black” are also experienced.<sup>112-114</sup> Relatedly, there is higher public transit fare enforcement in Black communities.<sup>115</sup> 42 states and Washington, DC, suspend driver’s licenses for unpaid fines and fees, and driving with a suspended license can result in arrest, more fines and fees, and misdemeanor or felony charges.<sup>116</sup> States must repeal failure to pay laws.

More importantly, federal, state, and local governments must divest from policing and surveillance.<sup>117,118</sup> Some of the funds should be reallocated to free public transit. Two recently introduced policies that spearhead this shift are: the Freedom to Move Act, which would provide grants to support fare-free transit and require grantees to decriminalize fare evasion;<sup>119</sup> and, the BREATHE Act, a suite of policies that would divest from policing and invest in community, including providing free public transit to students.<sup>120</sup> Such policies empower freedom of movement for Black communities.

### **Ensure artificial intelligence used in autonomous vehicles improves safety for African Americans.**

Measures must be in place to ensure autonomous vehicles do not perpetuate racial inequities.<sup>121</sup> Machine learning algorithms in autonomous vehicles should be trained on balanced datasets so they perform equitably with pedestrians of all skin tones.<sup>122</sup> Also, images captured by autonomous vehicle cameras during driving trips should not be used for surveillance.

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Fare-free streetcar in Kansas City, Missouri. The City voted for fare-free buses, which serve its Black neighborhoods.<sup>123</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Shared mobility, electric vehicles, and autonomous vehicles are rapidly changing our entire transportation system. Transportation policy and planning have historically left behind the Black community. The emerging mobility options offer a choice between a continued legacy of transportation inequity or a reimagined, equitable transportation system. This report identifies comprehensive policies that provide a pathway toward an equity future. Importantly, the policy recommendations must be adapted and tailored to the specific needs of local Black communities based on meaningful community engagement in the decision-making process.

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