

WORKING TOGETHER TO SUPPORT TRANSPORTATION EFFICIENT COMMUNITIES



WHAT IS A TRANSPORTATION EFFICIENT COMMUNITY?

Transportation efficient communities support health, prosperous economies, energy conservation and a sustainable environment by requiring less driving to meet daily needs.

How can cities and counties plan for equitable communities?



Kids playing together in a safe, clean maintained field in a redeveloped High Point neighborhood in Seattle, WA

Introduction

Transportation and land use policy has a significant impact on equity in a city. It is important to note that equity is different than equality. For example, some city streets have sidewalks and some don't. If the missing sidewalks are random, that is inequality. However, if the sidewalks are systematically less available to certain populations or areas of a city for a reason that is avoidable, unjust or unfair, that is inequity.

Inequities have shaped how our counties and cities look today. In the City of Seattle, for example, demographic profiles of some neighborhoods still reflect racist covenants from the 1930s. These persisted in some neighborhoods until the 1960s. One covenant from the Montlake neighborhood read "no part of the lands.....shall ever be used or occupied by or sold, conveyed, leased, rented or given to Negroes, or any person or persons of the Negro blood." Policies that institutionalized racism can leave a legacy of disparities and injustice stretching long into the future. Montlake remains over 80% white and life expectancies are as much as 10 years longer than nearby Squire Park that is 66% minority and had no racial covenants. These disparities can be explained by inequities in access to parks, healthcare, jobs, financial

services, and clean air and water. This is just one example of our social history of race and racism shaping the character of our cities and neighborhoods today.

Transportation planning and policy can create equity in our cities and counties in important ways. Transportation and land use planners have the opportunity to reconnect disenfranchised communities to the services necessary for a healthy, prosperous, and fulfilling life each time they create or update their plans. Examples like this are part of the reason why the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP) included social justice in their code of ethics: "We shall seek social justice by working to expand choice and opportunity for all persons, recognizing a special responsibility to plan for the needs of the disadvantaged and to promote racial and economic integration. We shall urge the alteration of policies, institutions, and decisions that oppose such needs."

Equity is tied directly to inclusive community engagement in planning and decision-making. All state agencies have policies that detail agency responsibilities. For example, see [WSDOT's Community Engagement Plan](#).

Key Takeaways

- Inequitable or racist land use and transportation policies from generations ago still impact community health and demographics today
- Equity is providing services that meet the need, not providing equal services
- There are seven primary strategies for building equitable communities:
 1. Facilitate Meaningful Community Engagement in Planning and Land Use Decisions
 2. Promote Public Health and a Clean and Safe Environment
 3. Strengthen Existing Communities
 4. Provide Housing Choices
 5. Provide Transportation Options
 6. Improve Access to Opportunities and Daily Necessities
 7. Preserve and Build on the Features That make a Community Distinctive
- Consistent assessment and empowerment is essential to better support equity through changes in traditional engagement.

It is essential that the needs of all members of the community and users of the transportation are equally considered and that proposed solutions and investments are allocated equitably. The departments of Transportation, Health, Ecology, and Commerce all value and promote equity, environmental justice, and social justice and act on that value through a variety of programs, policies, and projects.

Like any long range planning effort, planners can advance equity by making it an explicit objective and pursuing it through a series of small steps like intentional planning and representative community engagement. . The needs, concepts, and strategies for planning equitable communities will change over time; a tradition of engagement, consistent assessment, and empowerment is essential to adapting with these changes.



Mixed-income redevelopment in New Columbia apartments in Portland, OR helps to provide more affordable housing

What are the Characteristics of an Equitable Community?

Equitable communities are places where everyone has access to the same opportunities to live healthy, prosperous, and fulfilling lives. The routes and modes by which people move within and between communities fundamentally shape where those opportunities occur and how people access them. To realize equity, explicitly articulate equity as a value, incorporate it into community engagement and planning processes, and build it into places and transportation systems. To plan for an equitable community consider how different populations and neighborhoods need different amounts and kinds of support. For example, one Washington community may experience more serious and fatal crashes than average, but less than average serious and fatal crashes overall. Another community may have more pedestrian and bicycle crashes on average but fewer crashes involving young drivers. A third community may have higher than average crashes in all these categories. These communities need different types and amounts of support to achieve equity based on these transportation metrics.

How can Cities and Counties Plan for Equitable Communities where People Can Move Efficiently?

The following seven strategies were adapted from the Environmental Protection Agency 2013 Equitable Development Report. The strategies are summarized, include links to local data, and provide examples to

Tools and Resources:

- [EPA – Creating Equitable, Healthy, and Sustainable Communities](#)
- [Washington APA – Resource Guide for Healthy Community Planning](#)
- [American Planning Association – Healthy Community Design Toolkit](#)
- [PolicyLink – Equitable Development Toolkit](#)
- [Housing and Urban Development \(HUD\) – Location Affordability Index](#)
- [Washington State Department of Health - Washington Tracking Network](#)
- [Washington State Department of Health – Washington State Plan for Healthy Communities](#)
- [WSDOT Community Engagement Plan](#)
- [WSDOT Environmental Justice Website](#)
- [National Equity Atlas – Equity profiles of other cities and counties plus data summaries for your area](#)
- [Urban Sustainability Directors Network](#)
- [The Department of Housing and Urban Development – Ensuring Equitable Neighborhood Change: Gentrification Pressure on Affordable Housing](#)
- [Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction \(OSPI\) – World Languages in Washington State](#)
- [Federal Highway Administration](#)

Examples:

- [High Point Redevelopment, Seattle](#)
In April 2009, construction on the rental housing concluded in the High Point community with the completion of 256 affordable units. These units have integrated state-of-the-art energy efficiency measures to reduce utility costs and conserve resources.
- [New Columbia: Portland, OR](#)
The mixed-income redevelopment almost doubled the amount of housing in the neighborhood. The streets were reconnected with the surrounding neighborhood grid and designed to capture and infiltrate almost all of the development's stormwater, requiring 80 percent less underground stormwater piping. This stormwater management system protects water quality and saves money.
- [City of Lynnwood Healthy Communities Action Plan](#)

For More Information

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help illustrate communities' unique populations, assets, and challenges:

1. Facilitate Meaningful Community Engagement in Planning and Land Use Decisions

Planners must work hard to reach out to their communities and engage them in land use decisions in a proactive and culturally humble way. It is important to understand the languages spoken by the community as you conduct outreach. Learn about the languages spoken in your community on the Washington Tracking Network's Limited English Proficiency topic page. You can learn about what languages are spoken in each census tract and how many people speak them. For example, in Northeast Olympia the most common languages other than English are Vietnamese and Navajo. In Yakima County, it is common for more than a quarter of residents to have limited English proficiency. Open a discussion with your colleagues and other service providers about how to engage with these groups. Other planners have had success engaging with leaders in these communities or found innovative ways to reach non-English speakers as well as other residents who don't traditionally participate.

Planners should consider explicitly addressing equity in their community planning and visioning workshops and using the feedback to assess how they will measure equity in their communities. This outreach should occur early enough in the planning process for communities to meaningfully change and guide planning choices throughout the process. The goal is to hear all voices and represent the needs of all users equitably.

2. Promote Public Health and a Clean and Safe Environment

Many planning documents focus on parks and food environments when discussing public health, and these are important components of a healthy community. However, it is also important for planners to look at the public health benefits of transportation, housing, and place making efforts. Washingtonians get a substantial amount of exercise walking to and from transit stops or walking and cycling for pleasure or transportation. An average transit user meets two-thirds of the Center for Disease Controls' (CDC) physical activity recommendations just walking to and from their transit stop. However, there are disparities in physical activity opportunities in some communities related to access to safe, clean, and connected amenities like trails, playgrounds, sidewalks, and public transit. Planners can take concrete action to improve equity in a community by identifying areas where disinvestment has occurred and prioritizing future investment.

You can use data from the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey to look at physical activity levels in your county. Placemaking efforts create destinations for enjoyable, productive walking and cycling trips. Affordable housing and housing options provide access to healthier neighborhoods. Both can dramatically improve an individual's health. The inside of the home matters as well. Homes with lead-based paint, mold, dust, and safety hazards (like a missing railing or faulty stairway) can cause negative health outcomes. Planning for energy and water efficiencies and redundancies in housing and community structures may help to buffer potential price shocks for these utility services during times of scarcity or disruption.

3. Strengthen Existing Communities

Revitalization of older, established communities - city centers, older suburban neighborhoods, and rural villages - can improve quality of life and bring economic opportunities for longtime residents. One strategy for revitalization is taking a "Fix-it-First" approach - that is, prioritizing repair over new construction on undeveloped land. Another is reusing vacant and abandoned properties, considering them in the context of neighborhood plans, and supporting local community members' repairs and property investments with low-interest loans, grants, and technical assistance. A third strategy is to redevelop older commercial corridors, using zoning and complete streets tools to convert blight-prone strip malls to more attractive shopping corridors that encourage multiple transportation modes, including transit, walking, and biking. Revitalization, redevelopment, and demographic shifts toward cities can displace existing communities and lead to gentrification. The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) reviews the causes and effects of gentrification and strategies to plan for development without these negative impacts in their white paper "Ensuring Equitable Change" linked to in the resources section below.



Housing options in the redeveloped High Point neighborhood in Seattle, WA

4. Provide Housing Choices

An equitable community provides housing for people with a variety of incomes and age. Residents in areas with few housing types may struggle to find appropriate and affordable housing at different life stages. To minimize displacement when housing values and rents rise it is important to plan for varied housing choices to make your communities resilient. Limited housing options can make the community inaccessible to people who are vital to the city's function but who live on modest wages. Planning for an adequate mix of housing types can insulate cities from this type of effect.

The University of Washington developed the [Self-Sufficiency standard](#) to measure the true cost of living in different areas. To address housing and affordability issues consider using and promoting federal low income housing programs through HUD and Washington State's Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) housing assistance program.

5. Provide Transportation Options

Equity in public investment helps build and maintain vibrant, healthy and culturally diverse communities. By considering demographics and other readily available information, planners can look for differences in mobility, accessibility, or quality of services and flag these for strategic improvements. In addition to being the least efficient form of transportation, driving alone is also the least enjoyable according to surveys comparing it to walking, carpooling, using transit, or cycling. Using transit, cycling, and walking are all ways to incorporate exercise into people's daily routines and also produce less air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions. Air pollution, obesity, and chronic disease are often worse in lower income parts of a city. Providing transportation options in areas that lack them or need more or better transportation options will incentivize exercise, reduce air pollution, and make a city more equitable. Data on percentage of people driving alone and pedestrian and bicycle crashes are available on the Washington Tracking Network.



New Columbia apartments in Portland, OR are located near clean, safe transit stops.

6. Improve Access to Opportunities and Daily Necessities

The distance, time, and expense of accessing resources like jobs, schools, parks, transit, and healthy food can impact people's ability or likelihood of accessing those resources. Lower income individuals and communities may feel those impacts to a greater extent than the rest of the population because they have more restraints and competing priorities for the use of the resources. Data on the location of schools, daycares, the Women, Infants, and Children Nutrition Program (WIC) clinics, and WIC retailers are available on the Washington Tracking Network. You can see how these resources relate to access to private vehicles and public transit use to help you answer questions about how accessible they are.

Many of the most walkable neighborhoods were built before 1950 when dense, grid pattern communities

were the norm. Gridded streets put more city surface area within a short walking distance of housing. The disconnected street structure that is common in more modern developments can be costly and logistically infeasible to connect, making walkability improvements difficult. Investing in schools, transit, and affordable housing in existing neighborhoods uses the history and inherent walkability of older neighborhoods to make vibrant, walkable, and more equitable places. Investing in existing communities can also reduce sprawl and make services more accessible and less expensive to provide.

7. Preserve and Build on the Features that Make a Community Distinctive

Authentically preserving and celebrating the landmarks, skills, industries, and people that make communities great can link the future of the community to the past while honoring the people who live, work and play there. This can mean preserving historic areas and buildings or planning land use that strengthens the local culture.