



Virginia Transit Association's Transit Equity Toolkit Project

Introduction – 2021

Transit Through the Decades

The experiences of 2020 and 2021 – the pandemic and its economic blows, the George Floyd tragedy, the November elections, and environmental and social justice movements – have moved the needle dramatically for those of us in the business of public transportation. No service is more critical than transportation to our underserved populations yet our industry has long been influenced by inherited, structural racism.

“We have a legacy of investment happening at the expense of communities of color.” – U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg

“Public transportation’s history mirrors that of our nation, the heroic and the regrettable... In too many places there are two public transportation systems with different standards for riders who choose to use transit and those who are dependent on it.” – APTA President and CEO Paul Skoutelas

“Public transportation funding decisions are a direct reflection of who we value in society...who we believe is worth investing in.” – Dorval Carter, President of the Chicago Transit Authority

President Joe Biden and Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg are promoting “Building Back Better” policies that tie equity to mobility. The Congress has had important infrastructure and surface transportation reauthorization legislation that impacts public transit before it for consideration. Vice-President Kamala Harris has even recorded a [video defining equity](#) that emphasizes the need to get everybody to the finish line even if they start in different places. Transit can take them there!

Virginia

Virginia is also stepping forward to identify and implement some new studies and programs that advance equity goals across the Commonwealth.

Several bills during the 2021 General Assembly session focused on equity. Delegate Delores McQuinn’s [HJ542](#) directs DRPT to conduct a 2-year study with the cooperation of all transit agencies that will emphasize transit services and engagement opportunities for underserved and underrepresented communities.

Delegate Alex Askew’s [HB 1993](#) calls for all state agencies to establish a comprehensive diversity, equity, and inclusion strategic plan in coordination with the Governor’s DEI

(Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) Director. This now codifies Governor Northam's [ONE Virginia plan](#).

Local Initiatives

The positive state measures in addition to some local government equity resolutions like that of the [City of Alexandria's](#) will have significant impacts on public transit systems and services. Several systems are already recognizing the need to shift to zero fare policies to that mobility is not contingent on ability to pay. Other systems are examining how they can shift more car trips to transit to contribute to a cleaner environment especially in areas affected by income inequities, chronic disease, and limited opportunity. Some have even adopted plans for a totally electric zero-emission fleet in the next decade.

VTA

VTA's goal is to prepare our transit members to embrace calls for equity with confidence and proactive strategies. Our Transit Equity Toolkit Project, on which we are partnering with DRPT and a dedicated core group of transit CEOs and managers, will culminate with a toolkit of resources for transit agencies, their governance boards, and the communities they serve.

Core Group Members:

- William Harrell, HRT
- Jamie Jackson, FRED
- Bob Schneider, OmniRide
- Julie Timm, GRTC
- Von Tisdale, Ridefinders
- Garland Williams, CAT
- Grant Sparks, DRPT
- Andy Wright, DRPT

Examples of the various resources contained in the toolkit:

- Historical background including a glossary of terms, and a resource bibliography of transit equity efforts across the country
- Human Resources: Guidance to develop policies, practices, and procedures using an "equity lens" using their own "employee resource advisory groups"
- Citizen and community engagement: Models and suggestions for community mapping and creation of citizen advisory panels that would provide authentic feedback to inform the transit agency's strategic plans while providing support for transit improvement and expansion in the community
- Equity Indicator examples and metrics
- Identification of anticipatory goals and objectives for future capital needs and planning that can create a lifeline to jobs, training opportunities, healthcare, and affordable housing
- Communications messaging, templates and ideas

Transit Justice Principles

According to TransitCenter, Americans need transit that is...

EQUITABLE: America's car-based transportation system erects barriers to mobility that reinforce long-term social inequities. Transit investment must remove these barriers and prioritize the needs of Black, brown, and low-income people who stand to gain the most from better service.

SUSTAINABLE: To avert severe climate change, models consistently show that some car trips must shift to transit. Transit investment must expand access to good bus and train service so transit ridership increases as a share of total travel.

ECONOMICALLY PRODUCTIVE: Better transit expands worker access to jobs, employer access to the workforce, customer access to businesses, and business access to a customer base. Transit investment must make service more abundant, frequent, fast, and reliable to increase economic opportunity and productivity. Investing in better transit should also generate more good-paying jobs operating, maintaining, and supplying transit systems.

SAFE & ACCESSIBLE: Many factors in addition to scarce service limit access to transit including dangerous streets, discriminatory policing, and the lack of elevators at stations. Transit investment should eliminate the full range of limitations and achieve broad-based safety and universal access.

AFFORDABLE: Access to transit should never be contingent on one's ability to pay. Transit investment should establish programs that provide fare relief for everyone who needs it.

A. Introduction Links

A4. WHAT IS TRANSIT EQUITY?

GARE Advancing Racial Equity and Transforming Government

https://racialequityalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/GARE-Resource_Guide.pdf

GARE Racial Equity Toolkit

<https://www.racialequityalliance.org/resources/racial-equity-toolkit-opportunity-operationalize-equity/>

National League of Cities

<https://www.nlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Real-Equity-Resolution-Talking-Points.pdf>

Transit Center Equity in Practice

<https://transitcenter.org/publication/equity-in-practice-a-guidebook-for-transit-agencies/>

Transit Center Equity Archives

<https://transitcenter.org/tag/equity/>