

## Transit Equity Lens

From the inception of our country, government at all levels has played a role in creating and maintaining racial inequities as well as discrimination among other marginalized groups. We must go beyond closing the racial disparity gaps to focusing on those community members who are faring the worst. Transit Agencies, federal, state, and local, need to articulate their vision for transit equity and focus on strategies to change policy and institutional strategies that create and maintain inequities.

VTA and its members can either respond to this historic moment of racial and social conscience or react to each situation with ambiguity at its core. You have critical partners, e.g., DRPT, DEI consultants, community action groups, etc., to build the capacity to transform attitudes, interests, opinions, and values to embrace equity inside your Agency and in your community. “Tools” must be used to change the policies, procedures, practices, programs, and services that perpetuate inequities for those served by your Agency.

Two critical tools are (1) collect and use transit-related data to ensure good information on which to inform decisions and (2) ask the right people the right questions. As leaders, be reminded that employees usually tell their supervisor(s) what they want to hear and that leaders/managers have to dig deeper, at least three questions deep if not five, to get good information in order to make good decisions.

“Racial inequities are neither natural nor random—they have been created and sustained over time... Racial equity means that we no longer see disparities based on race and we improve results for *all* groups.” (GARE, 5) Being “transportation vulnerable” has shortened the life span for marginalized people by as many as ten years and is a primary barrier to people escaping poverty. Public transit is a civil right. (Modus blog)

Only through the use of a structured process will we achieve transformative results, shifting the very foundation of the institution we seek to change. By developing a clear racial equity lens first, we provide a foundation for racial equity centered change. GARE recommends a Results Based Accountability\* process to facilitate improved results.

### FIRST THINGS FIRST...ALL ABOUT YOU:

- When was the last time I checked my lens about race and equity? Can I articulate my views on race and equity? Do colleagues know my thinking on racial equity? Can I engage colleagues in discussions about race and equity? Do I know what questions to ask and what questions not to ask?
- Do I know what I need to know to address the role of race and ethnicity in problem solving? What strategies do I use to improve the quality of work and services by increased diversity? What do I need to learn and what data would help sharpen my perspective and leadership? (GM, 28). How am I perceived by my governing board, my managerial team and line employees, and the community?

## Viewing Federal Transportation Policy through an Equity Lens:

### Who Benefits? Who Pays? Who Decides

[Source: Victor Rubin, Policy Link, All Aboard! (2009) pp. 20-28] *Please note 2009 date.* Only highlighted copy provided. You are encouraged to read the full document.

#### Who Benefits?

- Motorists have been the primary beneficiaries of federal and state transportation investment.
- Suburban and rural areas also receive far more state and federal transportation funding per capita than metropolitan areas, where the majority of the U.S. population lives and works.
- Consolidation of the transportation system's numerous "siloes" programs is critically important to address the nation's infrastructure challenges.
- To distribute benefits equitably, the federal government must provide the same ratio of matching funds to states and regions regardless of the mode of transportation.
- The authorization should re-establish federal support for public transit operating costs to better balance funding between modes.
- To promote equity, priority should be given to the needs of disadvantaged communities when funding capital expansion grants to public transit.

#### Who Pays?

- A number of alternate or additional funding mechanisms are being proposed...for funding the nation's transportation system.
- Mileage-based (VMT) fees
- Public-Private Partnerships
- User fees...must be increased or expanded to include congestion pricing or alternative fees
- Carbon Tax or Cap and Trade Agreement would charge companies for polluting emissions with portion of funding to transportation

#### Who Decides?

State departments of transportation (DOTs) and regional metropolitan organizations (MPOs) decide which transportation projects will be funded.

- The process by which MPOs and state DOTs identify and prioritize potential projects often lacks transparency and accountability and decision makers are overwhelmingly unrepresentative of the populations they serve with respect to race, ethnicity, gender, and geography.
- Transparency and accountability are currently lacking in many project selection processes.
- To increase meaningful engagement of residents and community leaders in transportation planning, more effective actions must be taken to involve the public in decision making and allow them to contribute their opinions and concerns.

## *Transit Equity Lens*

### *What is a Transit Equity Lens?*

Transit leaders face a political reality through governance structures and diversity on governing bodies served that makes equity even more difficult to discuss.

Transit “Equity Lens involves many components, including:

- Analyzing data and information about race/ethnicity and other social groups
- Understanding disparities—and learning why they exist
- Looking at problems and their root causes from a structural standpoint
- Naming race and or differences explicitly when talking about problems and solutions” (GM, 3)

### *How a Transit Equity Lens Works*

Where does an equity lens need to be put to use in Transit service? Everywhere!

Equity Lens help Transit Leaders analyze old problems to find new solutions. The “Lens”

- Sharpens the focus on outcomes.
- Uncovers patterns of inequity. (GM, 4)
- Offers opportunity to scan the racial and social landscape.
- Gets people talking about race and equity. (GM, 9)
- Encourages new approaches to age-old race-based and emerging social problems.
- Helps find the voices of and give voice to BIPOC and other social groups. (GM, 10)
- Encourages genuine “objective” criteria to overcome deep seated racialized and other discriminatory standards of service.
- Helps to trace the impact of Transit service on the total community, including unserved and underserved community members in need of service.
- Invigorates people’s willingness to attack the racial and social divide in transit service to provide an affordable and equitable ride to all people. (GM, 12)

### *Implementing Commitment to Transit Equity: Policies, Practices, & Procedures*

Transit Leaders, this is where the “rubber meets the road!” You are *the Leader!* The question is simple and complex: are you willing to lead a transit (including intense racial) equity focus on all Policies, Practices, Procedures, Programs, and Services? Or do you want to dodge the race topic and stay “safe” until one of the race-based organizations or LGBTQIA+ groups (or disabled or AARP or religious groups) takes you on? You may not know it, but the conversation is already going on within your Agency and within your service area. Sorry!

“Equity acknowledges that racism, classism, and other injustices have created barriers that make it hard for some people to access a system, and it corrects by committing extra resources to marginalized groups so they can fully participate. Acknowledging how

disinvestment in public transit parallels the disinvestment BIPOC communities have long faced is key to rectifying an inequitable public transit system. Title VI includes ‘a weak mandate that limits inequitable outcomes but is not meant to advance equity’.” (TransitCenter) Title VI is law and bureaucratic hiding place...until...!

Where do you start? Everywhere! Race is pervasive and engulfs everything you do. Starting small communicates lack of commitment to racial equity. Good data needs to be the starting point after you first, and your governing body, have expressed your commitment to equity across your Agency. You need to collect good, relevant data that empowers your Agency to clearly define its transit equity initiative. Your Agency needs an Equity Statement.

The role of identifying, collecting, and using data to develop an action plan needs to be expanded beyond the staff and partners working behind the scene to be shared and owned by community leaders and early adopters within staff. Usefulness hinges on transparent, proactive data analysis becoming part of the Agency culture, which may differ from compliance structures often required in funding reports. Are decisions being made in a transparent, open, and accountable manner? (Policy Link, p. 20) “The use and analysis of data are about empowering you to make good decisions—and to advance transit equity.” (GARE, 6)

Every activity you pursue should be Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Timely. (GARE, 7) “How does your thinking about equity inform how you develop and implement programs?” (GM, 17) The reallocation of human and financial resources is at the heart of equity as well as anticipatory goals in your strategic plan. See GARE, Racial Equity: Getting to Results, for \*Results Based Accountability.

### *“The Promise of Transit Equity”*

Public transit plays a vital role in the overall health of communities. Benefits of mass transit include the following:

1. Community health & wellness
2. Fighting climate change
3. Public safety
4. Physical health
5. Improved access to education and employment
6. Economic opportunity
7. Access to social, cultural, and recreational activities
8. Boost to personal finances

(Wilderness Society, Sharon Musa, “The Promise of Transit Equity,” February 4, 2021 <https://www.wilderness.org/articles/blog/promise-transit-equity>)

## ***“The 7 Principles of Transit Equity”***

Everyone has a right to a public mass transit system that includes:

1. Safe, reliable, environmentally-sustainable and affordable transit that is accessible to all, regardless of income, national origin, race, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, religion, or ability.
2. An affordable public transit system that reliably connect people in all communities to places we need to travel: home, work, school, places of worship, shopping, health, and recreation, in as efficient, and timely a manner as possible. We must ensure that all communities have access to transit; no community should be left behind. Public transit in rural, densely populated communities should be provided in any master transportation plan despite the challenges that may present.
3. Living wages, benefits, safe working conditions, and union rights for transit workers, including those who manufacture transit equipment, and access to family-sustaining transit jobs and training opportunities for people of underserved communities.
4. A just transition for workers and communities who are dependent on our current automobile and highway-centered transportation system, to ensure that no one is left behind as we transition to a more public, accessible, and cleaner transit-based system.
5. Rapid transition of our transit systems to electrified, non-polluting transit powered by electricity from renewables. The transition should be made for school buses also.
6. Safe, health and livable neighborhoods that are connected by public transportation and by bicycle pathways and sidewalks, and that are planned to expand safe access to transit and reduce single occupancy vehicle miles traveled.
7. Dedicated and sustainable public funding for public transit.

(Modus, Leslie Neal, “The 7 Principles of Transit Equity,” February 4, 2021

<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/7-principles-transit-equity-leslie-neal/?trackingId=fe%2B35CfHrb%2B9INcxkPwoAA%3D%3D>)

## *Questions to Ask Inside Your Agency*

### **ASK ABOUT YOUR TRANSIT POLICIES, PROCEDURES, PRACTICES, PROGRAMS, & SERVICES**

- **What is the purpose of the policy you are making/revising and or implementing? What quantitative and qualitative evidence suggests inequity that this policy is intended to address? (GI, 7) What are known racial inequities in our Agency?**
- **How is a commitment to equity reflected in our mission, vision, core values, goals, and workplans? What racial equity indicators are most important to our Agency?**
- **How diverse is our staff? Executive leadership and Board? Are we doing enough to establish and maintain diversity of voices within the Agency?**
- **Is our staff experienced in talking about race? If not, what internal staff development might strengthen our ability to discuss issues of race and act on racial inequalities?**
- **What do we know about the racial and ethnic diversity of our contractors and suppliers? Do those relationships reflect our commitment to racial equity?**
- **How can we ensure that we stay open to new ideas and diverse voices? Do we have protocol and policies in place that may be barriers to POC?**
- **How should our commitment to racial equity be reflected in our performance measures? What should the Agency be held accountable for?**
- **How does the Agency connect with and celebrate POC?**
- **How are our practices responsive to changes in our communities?**
- **Are we consciously asking if there are racial disparities in the communities we serve? If so, why do they exist? Are our strategies addressing right disparities? (GM, 27)**
- **Who do you serve? Community groups? Stakeholders such as elected officials, board members, or internal staff? Does the community trust government and you?**
- **Who are the stakeholders (including community groups and various racial/ethnic groups) that may be positively or negatively affected by this policy? How can we best inform them? Which stakeholders are missing from the discussion and how can we engage them? (G, 7, 8)**
- **What is an action's intended impact? Is anyone better off? Is it culturally relevant? Does it take into account community values? Does it get at root causes of racial inequity? How would different racial and ethnic groups be impacted by this policy?**
- **What unintended consequences or barriers might prevent individuals in certain racial/ethnic groups from benefitting fully by this policy? How would different racial and ethnic groups be impacted by this policy? (Consider language, gender, socio-economic, digital inequality, LGBTQ status, (dis)ability, employment status, immigration status, educational level, geography, environment, religious beliefs, culture, history of incarceration, etc.) (G, 9, 10)**
- **Do you learn the lessons of experience? Have you thought about what works in other parts of the community and in other communities?**
- **Are there ways to maximize equitable outcomes? What other information is missing? Are there clear markers of short-term and long-term success as well as timelines for meeting markers of success? Is this policy adequately funded to achieve its designed goals and provisions for accountability? (G, 11, 12, 13)**

## Sources

### Governmental Alliance on Race and Equity

- Racial Equity: Getting to Results
- Additional GARE Resources:
  - Racial Equity Toolkit
  - Racial Equity Action Plans: A How-to Manual

Grantcraft.org in Partnership with Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity, Grant Making with a Racial Equity Lens

Greenlining.org, Adrian Sanchez & Carla Saporta, Racial Equity Toolkit: Implementing Greenlining's Racial Equity Framework

Modus/LinkedIn Blog Post, Leslie Neal, "The 7 Principles of Transit Equity," February 4, 2021

Policy Link, Victor Rubin, All Aboard! Making Equity and Inclusion Central to Federal Transportation Policy (2009)

TransitCenter.org Blog Post, Mary Buchanan and Natalee Rivera, "What Transit Agencies Get Wrong About Equity, and How to Get It Right," September 9, 2020

Wilderness Society, Sharon Musa, "The Promise of Transit Equity," February 4, 2021

Salesforce.com, <https://www.salesforce.com/company/equality/>

## **5 Equity Lens Questions:**

- 1. Who do you serve?**
- 2. Are Policies and Services fair and equitable?**
- 3. What is the intended impact?**
- 4. Who do you “listen to?” Hear?**
- 5. Do your employees view riders as customers? Just riders?**