



Where We Need to Go: A Civil Rights Roadmap for Transportation Equity

*“Where We Need to Go: A Civil Rights Roadmap for Transportation Equity,” is the first in a series of reports by The Leadership Conference Education Fund examining the key roles transportation and mobility play in the struggle for civil rights and equal opportunity. The reports highlight critical issues and make recommendations for policymakers as they draft a reauthorization of the nation’s surface transportation programs, which will allocate hundreds of billions of federal dollars for transportation projects that will have a profound impact on every person in our country. **To read the reports:** www.civilrights.org/transportation*

What is transportation equity?

It means a transportation system that works for everyone. At present, the promise of our civil rights laws to open doors to opportunity rings hollow for people who are physically isolated from jobs, schools, good housing, stores that sell healthy food, and health care providers. **As we consider how to rebuild and rethink our transportation policies, we must make decisions with civil and human rights considerations in mind.**

As policymakers discuss such important issues as how best to rebuild and repair our nation’s roads, bridges, railways and ports, and where and how to prioritize investments in public transportation and in creating good jobs, it is vital that they take into consideration the needs of underserved communities and populations.

Transportation investment to date has often excluded or inadequately addressed the needs of low-income people, people of color, people with disabilities, seniors, and many people in rural areas. The cost of car ownership, underinvestment in public transportation, and a paucity of pedestrian and bicycle-accessible thoroughfares have isolated urban and low-income people from jobs and services. Similarly, seniors, people with disabilities, and people in rural areas often have limited transportation choices.

Low-income Americans spend about 42 percent of their total annual incomes on transportation, compared to 22 percent of middle-income Americans. And racial minorities are four times more likely than Whites to rely on public transportation for their work commute.

Why is transportation policy important?

Decisions about transportation policy and investment affect:

Access to Health Care—Inadequate access to affordable transportation exacerbates health disparities, forcing

patients to miss medical appointments and denying them access to nutritious food. Our transportation policy also generates public health problems that disproportionately affect low-income communities and communities of color, exposing them to greater risk of high concentrations of poor air quality, asthma, pedestrian fatalities, and obesity.

Access to Economic Opportunities—Current transportation policy fails to bridge the growing distance between many Americans and job opportunities. While jobs are increasingly moving to suburbs and remote exurbs, transportation options to and within these areas have not increased. And while transportation construction itself can provide good-paying jobs, many job sites in growing metropolitan and suburban areas are inaccessible to low-income urban minority and rural workers who face challenges getting to those jobs. Though historically, transportation construction workforce jobs have disproportionately been occupied by White males, the number of construction job openings is growing, presenting more opportunities for disadvantaged groups to obtain good jobs without displacing current workers.

Access to Affordable Housing—Transit decisions often contribute to economic and racial segregation. When a segment of a metro area lacks public transportation or safe walking/biking alternatives, people who cannot afford automobiles or lack the ability to drive cannot live there—even if their housing costs are within their means.

What would transportation equity look like?

Transportation equity provides people with multiple transportation options; promotes equal employment opportunities; requires equal decision-making power; promotes healthy and sustainable communities; and requires meaningful civil rights protections. **Given what’s at stake, advocates must mobilize to educate and advocate for a shared vision of transportation equity.**

To learn more and to take action: www.civilrights.org/transportation.