REPORT SUMMARY

FTA Report No. 0249
July 2023

FTA RESEARCH
FEDERAL TRANSIT ADMINISTRATION

PRACTICAL MEASURES FOR ADVANCING PUBLIC TRANSIT EQUITY AND ACCESS

Background

In partnership with the Federal Transit Administration, researchers at the University of Texas at Austin, Arizona State University, and Dunbar Transportation Consulting, LLC, identified a set of replicable measures that public transportation providers and their partners can use to advance equity for those who have been historically underserved, marginalized, and adversely affected by persistent poverty and/or inequality. These include practical strategies such as advisory committees and intergovernmental partnerships as well as analytical techniques that quantify how public transit links people to opportunities. This project seeks to implement Executive Order 13985: Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government and the U.S. Department of Transportation's Equity and Access Policy Statement.

Objectives

The purpose of the project was to provide decision-makers in planning organizations and public transportation agencies, as well as other stakeholders and the public, with step-by-step methods and examples that illustrate how equity can be prioritized and assessed in decision-making processes. The measures target equity practices and spatial analysis of public transportation system performance.

The research team solicited input and shared progress with key stakeholders throughout the course of the project. Several public transportation providers and one community-based organization provided interviews, data, and analytical feedback that form that basis of the highlighted case studies. In addition, the project team regularly consulted both a Technical Advisory Group and a Community Advisory Group, each comprising expert practitioners from public, private, and academic sectors over the course of the project.

Findings and Conclusions

Transit agencies seeking to create more equitable public transit systems must be willing to make equity an overarching, system-wide goal that is pursued on multiple fronts using multiple approaches, both quantitative and planning-oriented.

- While most organizations would agree that advancing transportation equity is important, there are a variety of approaches for its achievement and few systematic reviews that seek to understand just how effective different measures are at advancing equity goals.
- How a community defines, develops, and applies data can shed light on existing conditions and promote progress toward a desired future state. The data that organizations collect, and the structure of various analyses, have a major influence on our understanding of who uses public transportation services and how those individuals might be impacted by changes to those services, especially people who depend on public transportation services.

- Collecting local ridership data through survey tools is the best method for considering demand for public transit and the demographics of existing transit users in data analyses. The existing Title VI ridership survey requirement is an ideal platform for developing better local data about the people who already rely on public transportation services.
- There is a lack of data related to the continuity and quality of sidewalk infrastructure, especially at a level of detail to reveal its usability for those traveling with mobility devices, including wheelchairs. These data are essential, as navigable sidewalks are critical for accessing public transportation services and achieving complete trips. This lack of data warrants further attention.
- Strong partnerships between local organizations and transportation planners and providers can inform the understanding of community goals and needs, shape data collection and analysis, and in turn inform plans, programs, projects, and services. Ongoing dialogue is critical for developing, interpreting, and applying what the data reveals.
- Agencies regularly conduct quantitative spatial analyses to comply with equity requirements. For these analyses to move the needle on key equity outcomes, they must be paired with broader institutional practices rather than stand on their own.
- In cooperation with Houston Metro and FTA, the project team evaluated Houston Metro's System Reimagining for the spatial analysis case study. The team piloted the use of FTA's Simplified Trips-on-Project Software (STOPS) model for calculating user benefits based on logsums.

Benefits

The report describes nine strategies that planning organizations, public transportation providers, and partners can pursue to advance equity objectives, including: advisory committees, fare policies, intergovernmental partnerships, leadership champions, advocacy partnerships, regional planning, capital planning, ride-hailing and microtransit, and creating an equity culture. Additionally, the report demonstrates the application of five quantitative spatial measures for evaluating public transportation system performance, including: population counts/shares; access to opportunities; trip characteristics using census data; trip characteristics using transit rider surveys; and user benefits based on logsums. The measures are calculated using open-source and/or freely available methods and data.

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Project Information

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