



# Defining the Transportation Planning Problem

and Doing Things Differently

## GUIDEBOOK 1

VERSION 2

## *Guidebook 1: Defining the Transportation Planning Problem and Doing Things Differently*

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The full series of *Transportation Equity Toolkit* resources is available online at:

*Suggested Practices for the Transportation Planning Community*

<https://placeandhealthwv.com/transportation/suggested-practices-for-the-transportation-planning-community/>

The *Transportation Equity Toolkit* is a component of:

*Place & Health in West Virginia and underrepresented populations:*

<https://placeandhealthwv.com>

The website and its contents seek to reframe the way West Virginians think about and address population health less automatically as individual responsibility shaped by access to healthcare and more as the outcome of intentional policy decisions that leaders make about the places where people live, work, and play.

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# Guidebook 1: Defining the Transportation Planning Problem and Doing Things Differently



## Introduction to *Guidebook 1: Defining the Transportation Planning Problem and Doing Things Differently*

*Guidebook 1* provides information about the equity problem in transportation planning resulting from the lack of input from underrepresented citizens during the planning and decision making processes. Underrepresented citizens include low-income, minority, senior, disabled and homeless people. Failure to ensure their participation contributes to the inequities in transportation amenities and services for this population and can lead to exacerbated rates of traffic injury and death, poor health, poverty, food insecurity, and economic challenges.

*Guidebook 1* stresses the importance of underrepresented citizens' engagement in transportation planning and decision making. It offers suggestions for moving beyond traditional public input strategies and doing things differently to help ensure more meaningful participation.

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## Defining the Transportation Planning Problem



West Virginia’s underrepresented citizens—including seniors, low-wealth, minority, disabled, and the homeless—suffer poor health, poverty, food insecurity and economic challenges that are aggravated by insufficient access to affordable, reliable transportation services. While deficient transportation infrastructure and difficult-to-access transportation services are not the only basic amenities impacting underrepresented citizens, West Virginia’s lack of roads, transit, and pedestrian infrastructure exacerbates the community’s rate of food insecurity, poor nutrition, obesity, diabetes, traffic injuries and death.

For example, roads, sidewalks and bike lanes in disadvantaged communities are often inferior or non-existent as compared to those in higher-income communities. People who live in disadvantaged areas are more likely to walk or bike because they do not own or have access to a vehicle. As a result, these citizens have more exposure to unsafe roadways, sidewalks, and traffic, resulting in more accidents. <sup>1</sup>

Engaging underrepresented groups in transportation decision making is critical to addressing these issues. Low income, vulnerable populations are perhaps most affected by the transportation planning process and governing bodies’ decisions, but are much less likely to be able to participate in the process. As a result, their needs are often not addressed in long-range transportation plans produced for the communities where they live.



The way that transportation planning occurs creates several tensions resulting in the needs of underserved groups being absent from transportation planning.

- 1.** It is long-range planning while people— especially vulnerable groups— have immediate needs that determine their ability to survive day-to-day.
- 2.** It can be difficult to understand the tools used in the transportation planning process.
- 3.** The interests of the business sector and local industries are typically louder, more insistent, and overshadow other citizen groups and underserved populations in the transportation planning process.
- 4.** Structural barriers, time, place, and manner make it difficult for underserved groups to get involved in the transportation planning process.
- 5.** It is difficult to determine who is responsible for including the underserved in transportation planning.



West Virginia’s transportation planning agencies strive to meaningfully engage underrepresented citizens in planning efforts. However, in addition to the tensions mentioned above, these citizens can be hard-to-reach and may be navigating day-to-day struggles that make their participation in civic activities difficult. They may not realize the importance of their input to transportation planning or understand how their input can help improve the quality of their lives and neighborhoods.

At the same time, transportation planners, usually engineers and other professionals primarily focused on technical, regulatory, or financial matters, may lack experience or understand strategies for reaching and engaging underrepresented community members. These strategies can include:

- effective communication techniques;
- in-depth and consistent outreach to underrepresented citizens;
- formal and informal mechanisms for obtaining input into transportation planning;
- working with and through underrepresented citizens’ trusted allies;
- teaching underrepresented citizens how transportation planning works in Morgantown and Monongalia County and why their involvement is important.

Transportation equity refers to the fairness with which impacts, such as benefits and costs, are distributed as a result of transportation decisions.



Transportation equity problems can arise from these tensions and the lack of underrepresented voices in transportation decision-making. Transportation equity refers to the fairness with which impacts, such as benefits, costs, and services are distributed as a result of transportation decisions. Transportation equity means distributing transportation resources to people and communities based upon their needs.

For example, people experience different levels of income, ability, mobility, and other factors. Equity calls for adjusting the level and types of resources to provide solutions that meet varying needs and preferences.

Equity differs from equality. Equality means distributing resources or services equally or evenly, giving the same thing to all people, regardless of individual or group needs. Equity instead focuses on giving people what they need—people who need more receive more, people who need less receive less.

Moving beyond traditional public input and involvement approaches to address transportation equity problems can open pathways for meaningful understanding, engagement, and discussion between transportation planners and underrepresented populations.

## Doing Things Differently to Address the Transportation Planning Problem



Conventional approaches for reaching citizens, such as posting announcements on an agency's website, placing classified ads in the local newspaper, and holding public meetings in a city building during evening hours have had minimum success engaging underrepresented populations. Doing things differently by taking a more proactive approach, meeting people where they are, developing allies and building relationships, and adding a variety of options for interaction and information sharing can lead to more consistent and meaningful public involvement.

To help move transportation planning practices towards addressing transportation equity, this project offers a series of resources and training materials designed to bridge the gap between transportation planners and underrepresented citizens in Morgantown and Monongalia County. Bridging this gap involves gaining a truer and more accurate understanding of the transportation challenges underrepresented citizens face, which can be very different than challenges faced by the general population.



One new approach, creative placemaking, offers transportation planners a unique opportunity to establish a dialogue with underserved groups, understand their needs, and include those needs in the planning process and subsequent long-range plans.

Creative placemaking tools and activities rely on arts and culture approaches such as photovoice narratives, storytelling, role-playing, game playing, and drawing/painting. These activities can help convey technical transportation issues in nontechnical ways that community members can understand. They also provide creative ways for citizens to identify their own transportation needs and communicate them to transportation officials.

Creative placemaking tools can act as a bridge between transportation planners and underrepresented groups by providing new ways for expressing lived experiences and needs. These visual, auditory, and hands-on strategies also address literacy and comprehension challenges. Creative placemaking can be instrumental in achieving transportation planning that is community driven, rooted in public participation, and embraces the community in its entirety.



A few examples of Creative Placemaking approaches are provided below:

### Photovoice Interviews with Morgantown & Monongalia County Residents

<https://placeandhealthwv.com/transportation/photovoice/>

Photovoice narratives were gathered from local Bartlett Housing Solutions Clients and the Client Services Manager. The narratives include photos illustrating the clients “lived experiences” along with their own descriptions of those experiences. <sup>2</sup>

### Community Voices & Lived Experiences in Morgantown & Monongalia County

<https://placeandhealthwv.com/transportation/transportation-community-voices-lived-experiences/>

This initiative offers stories of individuals living in Morgantown and Mon County who have little or no access to private transportation. People share stories of getting to dialysis appointments, grocery shopping, walking to work, working while homeless, and being a single mom without a car. <sup>3</sup>

### Southeast Michigan: Creative Placemaking and Transit

<http://creativeplacemaking.t4america.org/our-eight-approaches/incorporate-arts-public-advisory-meetings/local-examples>

Officials in Southeast Michigan held “Creative Community Conversations” using new partners and inventive approaches to determine the daily lived experiences of transit users. Citizens were able to showcase their experiences through artistic final products such as videos, photos, or books. Community leaders and members left the meeting not only with “pages full of notes, but with a deeper understanding of one another and a personal experience of how creative processes help build trust and understanding...As the community groups benefit from capturing the story of the work that needs to be done in their communities, [local leaders] also benefit from a better understanding of local transportation needs to inform their policies and plans for the region.” <sup>4</sup>



Social service personnel are interested and willing to connect and/or serve as liaisons between transportation planners and their underrepresented clients.

Another approach involves developing relationships and working through the many local social service agencies, social workers, and other “trusted allies and advocates” who already interact with underrepresented citizens. Research conducted for this project indicates that social service personnel are willing and interested in facilitating and/or serving as liaisons between transportation planners and their underrepresented clients.

Social service personnel identify transportation, including transit and infrastructure such as sidewalks and safe roadways, as critical for their clients to meet basic, daily needs. They confirm that adequate and accessible transportation amenities are foundational to obtaining food, medicine, health care, jobs, and education.

Developing working partnerships with social service personnel offers transportation planners a promising opportunity to engage with underrepresented citizens. Social service providers already work with clients who navigate transportation challenges, they have developed trusting relationships, can offer a meeting environment where underrepresented clients already visit and feel comfortable, and can help bridge connection and communication gaps.

Other materials in this *Transportation Equity Toolkit* offer more in-depth information about creative placemaking strategies and working with trusted allies and advocates.



In addition to this *Guidebook 1: Defining the Transportation Planning Problem and Doing Things Differently*, the toolkit developed for the *Transportation Equity Project* provides a series of guidebooks and training materials for transportation planners and others who want to learn more about transportation equity, transportation planning, and engaging underrepresented citizens in the process. These resources include:

- *Guidebook 2: A Review of Transportation Planning Principles, Public Involvement, and Environmental Justice*
- *Guidebook 3: Who are the Underrepresented Citizens We Hope to Engage in Transportation Planning*
- *Guidebook 4: Who Can Use the Transportation Equity Project Training Materials and How to Teach Using Lesson Plans*
- *Guidebook 5: Reaching and Engaging Underrepresented Citizens Though Their Trusted Allies and Advocates*
- *Guidebook 6: Advertising to Reach Underrepresented Citizens—Determining the Message and Communication Strategies*
- *Guidebook 7: Benefits and Disadvantages of Communication Venues for Underrepresented Citizens*
- *Guidebook 8: Convening Public and Other Transportation Meetings with Underrepresented Citizens*
- *Training Module for Teaching the Transportation Planning Process to Underrepresented Citizens: “Why Getting Involved in Transportation Planning is So Important”*
- *PowerPoint Presentation to accompany the Training Module*



*Guidebook 1: Defining the Transportation Planning Problem and Doing Things Differently* describes the lack of equity in local transportation planning efforts, defines equity, and suggests that transportation planners do things differently to more meaningfully engage underrepresented citizens in transportation planning. Note that more detailed information for doing things differently is provided in this *Transportation Equity Toolkit's* series of Guidebooks.

Transportation equity refers to the fairness with which impacts, such as benefits, costs, and services are distributed as a result of transportation decisions. Equity calls for distributing transportation resources to people and communities based on their needs. Transportation equity differs from equality, which means distributing resources or services equally or evenly, regardless of need.

Two key strategies for doing things differently are (1) creative placemaking and (2) working with and through underrepresented citizens' trusted allies and advocates in order to reach them. Creative placemaking uses arts- and culture-based tools and activities such as photovoice narratives, storytelling, role-playing, game playing, and drawing/painting to help bridge communication and interaction gaps between technically-oriented transportation planners and lay audiences including underrepresented citizens. Creative placemaking can be instrumental in achieving transportation planning that is community driven, rooted in public participation, and embraces the community in its entirety. *Guidebook 1* offers several creative placemaking examples, including two efforts undertaken in Morgantown and Monongalia County for this *Transportation Equity Project*.

Working with underrepresented citizens' trusted allies and advocates involves developing relationships and working with the many local social service agency personnel, social workers, and others who work with these audiences to connect with their underrepresented clients. Social service personnel interviewed for this *Transportation Equity Project* stressed the importance of transportation to their clients and expressed genuine interest in working with transportation planners to facilitate these connections. *Guidebook 5: Reaching and Engaging Underrepresented Citizens Through Their Trusted Allies and Advocates* offers detailed suggestions for doing so.

Ultimately, transportation planning will achieve its important goal of serving the needs of citizens and the community by incorporating equity practices and ensuring that all members of the community, including underrepresented citizen who are typically left out of the process, have a voice and a seat at the planning table.

## References



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