



**A Review of Transportation Planning  
Principles, Public Involvement, and  
Environmental Justice**

**GUIDEBOOK 2**

**VERSION 2**

*Guidebook 2: A Review of Transportation Planning Principles, Public Involvement and Environmental Justice*

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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 2: A Review of Transportation Planning Principles, Public Involvement, and Environmental Justice

## Introduction to *Guidebook 2: A Review of Transportation Planning Principles, Public Involvement, and Environmental Justice*

*Guidebook 2* offers a brief overview of “transportation planning in service to the community,” briefly discusses key public input and environmental justice requirements for transportation projects, and encourages a transportation planner to consider his or her own reasons for wanting to engage underrepresented citizens in the transportation planning process.

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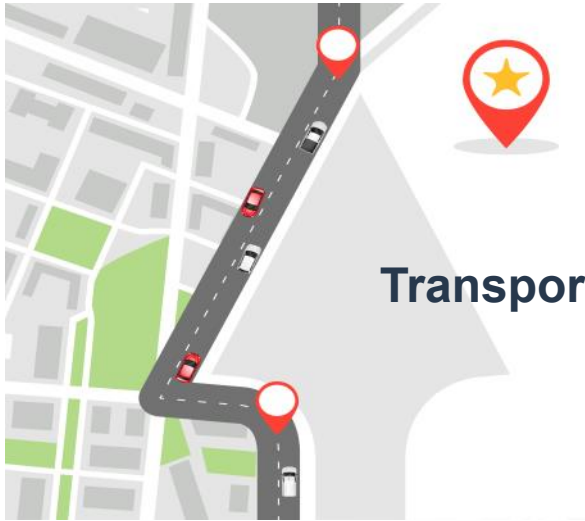


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The community's needs, goals and vision should drive the transportation planning process. What often happens in practice, however, is a focus on the technical aspects of transportation. That can include, for example, attention to roads and cars, moving more cars through roadways or intersections, and prioritizing which projects serve the highest number people or are most likely to receive state funding.

Transportation planners, drawing upon their own technical background and expertise, may assume they know which transportation solutions are best for a community. However, this type of expertise is only one component of a larger process. It is advisable to avoid making assumptions about a community's vision and goals unless and until a comprehensive planning process takes place. Truly identifying a community's vision and goals requires considering a broad range of needs and concerns, and requires including all voices in the process, including underrepresented voices.



## Transportation Planning Goals

It may be worth a quick mention of transportation planning goals put forth by key organizations in the transportation planning sector. The Institute of Transportation Engineers, the U.S. Federal Highway Administration, as well as the Morgantown Monongalia Metropolitan Planning Organization (MMMPO) (in its guidebook, Long Range Transportation Plan, 2013-2040) offer perspectives on transportation planning and community engagement:

- One overarching recommendation is to first “establish goals and objectives relating to community development and transportation service.” This implies understanding all goals and objectives, i.e. thinking beyond building or fixing roadways and moving more cars. Instead, seek to also understand pedestrian, bicycle (nonmotorized vehicles), transit, micro-transit, and other underrepresented citizens’ transportation service needs.
- Other guiding principles include considering Regional Vision & Goals, Alternate Improvement Strategies, and Evaluation & Prioritization of Strategies. These suggest, again, seeking the public’s input to identify a full and inclusive regional vision and goals, a wide variety of alternate improvement strategies, and priority strategies for meeting the broader community vision.<sup>1, 2</sup>



### Key Federal Laws and Requirements Addressing Public Involvement and Environmental Justice

**B**efore teaching or engaging underrepresented citizens about transportation planning and the need for their involvement, it may be helpful to review a few of the federal laws and requirements addressing public involvement and environmental justice.

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#### Key Federal Laws and Requirements Addressing Public Involvement and Environmental Justice

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- The National Environmental Policy Act (1970)
- Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964
- Executive Order 12898, Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations (1994)
- Executive Order 13166, Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency (2000)
- The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504), and the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1998 (Section 508)
- The Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990



## **Public Input Mandate**

The key law mandating public input is called the National Environmental Policy Act, or NEPA. NEPA is an environmental law that identifies the decision-making processes federal agencies must follow before designing and building transportation projects that require federal approval or use federal funding.

The federal government is interested in making transportation decisions that are in the public interest, reflect the community's desires, and protect both the human and natural environment. NEPA's public input requirements help achieve these goals by calling for people affected by or interested in a project to provide comments and feedback before transportation decisions are made.<sup>3</sup>

## **Environmental Justice Requirements**

Another requirement transportation projects must follow is Environmental Justice Executive Order 12898 signed by President Bill Clinton in 1994. Executive Order 12898 is part of the federal government's Environmental Justice initiative that requires every federal agency to treat minority and low-income populations fairly, and prevent adverse effects of its programs and activities on those populations so they do not suffer harm or undue burdens.

Environmental Justice helps ensure all citizens' fair and meaningful participation in transportation decision-making, which in turn helps to ensure the equitable distribution of benefits and burdens of transportation projects. In other words, no citizens should be forced to shoulder a disproportionate share of negative environmental impacts due to a lack of political power, influence, money or other factors. At the same time, no citizens should receive a disproportionate share of the benefits.<sup>4</sup>



The U.S. Department of Transportation and its Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the federal regulatory agency that oversees the MMMPO, recognizes three fundamental environmental justice principles:

- “To avoid, minimize, or mitigate disproportionately high and adverse human health and environmental effects, including social and economic effects, on minority populations and low-income populations.
- To ensure the full and fair participation by all potentially affected communities in the transportation decision making process.
- To prevent denial of, reduction in, or significant delay in the receipt of benefits by minority and low-income populations.”<sup>5</sup>

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 is one of the key laws environmental justice communities turn to as a means to address racial discrimination in certain instances:

“No person in the United States shall, on the grounds of race, color, or national origin be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.”

## Why is Environmental Justice Important?



According to the U.S. Department of Transportation, the agency that oversees the FHWA and federal transportation issues in the country, “Environmental Justice (EJ) is important because it helps to ensure full and fair participation by potentially affected communities in every phase of the transportation decision-making process. When this is accomplished, the development, construction, operation and maintenance of transportation projects should reflect an equitable distribution of benefits and burdens.”<sup>6</sup>

## Some Historical Context for Public Involvement and Environmental Justice Requirements



Obtaining public input in the transportation planning process was not always a requirement or priority for federal and state governments. As recently as the 1960s, low-income and minority communities' needs were often overlooked or ignored. In fact, people were sometimes uprooted against their will and forced to move so new highways could be built through their homes and towns.



It's because of these past injustices that the federal government now requires public agencies such as the MMMPO to follow federal laws and other requirements for including public input in transportation planning. According to the MMMPO's Public Involvement Policy, this means the MMMPO "is committed to providing a proactive, open and transparent public involvement process that actively seeks engagement from stakeholders and the public at large" and that "all public involvement activities should strive to engage underrepresented communities and stakeholders..."

For more information about the Morgantown Monongalia Metropolitan Planning Organization's (MMMPO) Public Involvement Policy that outlines its plan for engaging citizens, including underrepresented populations, in transportation planning see:

[docs.wixstatic.com/  
ugd/613794\\_c3788df06bd843418832522dce6ec9e6.pdf](https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/613794_c3788df06bd843418832522dce6ec9e6.pdf)

MMMPO is Monongalia County's federally appointed transportation planning agency.



Engaging underrepresented citizens in the transportation planning process remains a challenge.

Despite the federal requirements for public involvement and environmental justice, and the MMMPO's commitment to public involvement and environmental justice, engaging underrepresented citizens in the transportation planning process remains a challenge.

Most agencies, including the MMMPO, generally struggle to engage citizens from any walk of life, and underserved citizens particularly.

Many of the materials provided in this *Transportation Equity Toolkit* offer ideas for bridging the gap between transportation planners and underrepresented citizens--to help ensure they are included in transportation planning.

## Reasons Local Transportation Planners Want Input from Underrepresented Citizens



Transportation officials and planners in Monongalia County and the state of West Virginia were interviewed for this *Transportation Equity Project*. Many underscored the need for more input from underrepresented citizens and identified challenges they've encountered identifying and reaching these populations. Some readily admit they need to do a better job engaging them.

Transportation officials' and planners' comments below may help spur some ideas as you consider your own viewpoints about engaging underrepresented citizens in transportation planning:

- Officials may not be aware of underrepresented citizens' concerns and challenges.
- Officials often don't know or realize who is not participating in transportation planning...they need to know who underrepresented citizens are and how to get them involved.
- Officials cannot address a problem if they don't know about it.
- If we never hear from underrepresented communities, we won't know there is support for public transit, bike and pedestrian projects.
- We want to get the most information we can about transportation issues...we may not even know about some of the issues out there... we need as much input and feedback as we can get.
- Agencies know about main roads, but know less about backroads so public input on these areas is helpful.
- Ideally, citizens' concerns should drive the process (although they are often weighed against the political realities).

## Exercise: Identify Reasons You Value Underrepresented Citizens' Input in Transportation Planning



The goal of this exercise is to help a transportation planner (or anyone who facilitates transportation planning) reflect on the reasons underrepresented citizens' input is important in your work. When you're interacting with or teaching underrepresented citizens, explaining why you want their input could be very instructive to them.

Participants will also want to know how you would use their input. Sharing your thoughts about these issues can help set the stage for a more open discussion, especially if participants know that you are fully committed to engaging and getting their input.



## Identify Reasons You Value Underrepresented Citizens' Input in Transportation Planning

Consider the reasons you value underrepresented citizens' input and write your answers to the following questions:

1. How would underrepresented citizens' participation help your planning, as a transportation planner, to be better and different?

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Why do you want to know about underrepresented citizen's transportation concerns, challenges, ideas? What would this information help you understand or achieve?

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. Give some examples of how you would take underrepresented community members' input into account in your decision-making?

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

4. Why is transportation equity important to you? in your job? as a community member?

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



*Guidebook 2: A Review of Transportation Planning Principles, Public Involvement, and Environmental Justice* offers a brief overview of some key requirements and suggested practices for transportation planning Administration, and the Morgantown Monongalia Metropolitan Planning agencies from the Institute of Transportation Engineers, the U.S. Federal Highway Organization. The discussion addresses:

- the fundamental principles of “transportation planning in service to the community” and “in the public interest;”
- requirements related to environmental justice that ensure minority and low-income people and communities are treated fairly and suffer no adverse effects or undue harms or burdens.

*Guidebook 2* covers the importance of maintaining a focus on the needs of people and the community during transportation planning. This can encompass multi-modal considerations including pedestrian, biking, and public transit needs, rather than prioritizing the movement of cars, as often happens in many places across the country.

*Guidebook 2* also offers input from local and state transportation planners and officials gathered through research for this *Transportation Equity Project*. Their input identifies reasons why they value engaging underrepresented citizens in transportation planning. An Exercise is provided which is designed to help readers consider their own reasons why input from underrepresented citizens is important to their work.



## References



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