TPM Webinar 11 – TPM and Equity

Breakout Group Notes

Each group contained individuals from State DOTs, FHWA, other government agencies, and transportation firms. The notes include all comments compiled from the three groups under each topic area.

# Communications

## Q1. How do we define equity?

* There was concern that people with the best of intentions often use words like equity, equality, justice, inclusion, and diversity interchangeably. There is a need to continue to start off these conversations by sharing what it means to the presenter or how they look at it. The simpler, the better.
* Equity is providing the tools or materials that meets the needs of a particular person/groups for that moment/time
* It is giving everyone an equal opportunity to communicate to their level of comfort
* And it is ensuring the benefits and burdens of transportation systems, services and investments are fair and just. Ensure the people of historically underserved communities share in the power of decision-making.
* Not entirely sure that equity has a single, clear definition. There is a Title 6 program that may have a definition.
* Several competing definitions exist. From different units within different agencies. There are ongoing conversations within agencies about coming up with a shared definition.
* Equity includes elements of:
  + Remediate past harms
  + Prevent future disparities and harms
  + Fairness
  + Fair treatment of all people
  + Fair access
  + Fair distribution of resources
* Inclusion is a strategic goal of many agencies
  + Inclusion at WSDOT – Strengthen commitment to diversity and engagement in all business processes, functions and services to ensure every voice is heard.
  + After George Floyd, had a lot of discussions across the agency and realized that inclusion was not well addressed - working on ways to do better
* In UK equity is early stage as well
* In simple terms, equity in our industry is accessible and affordable transportation for the community

## Q2. How do we communicate why it is important?

* For FHWA this is an emerging issue and equity is a top priority. They are looking to DOTs to engage and support this. Internally, it is driving funding choices.
* This is difficult, some people may not want to engage in discussion, nor do they want their investments to consider equity
  + Approach with the wider the input the more beneficial the project will be over the long horizon of time; government spending money more wisely (build trust with wide consultation base)
* Need a good sense of why DEI is important on a global scale; need to embrace everyone to bring in opinions and impacts

## Q3. How do we promote equity through internal and external communications?

* By recognizing that there are varying levels of maturity in these conversations, from teams to organization and from neighborhoods to nation. Education and engaging in at-times difficult conversations is part of the process.
* Informal book clubs can be used to engage in these difficult internal conversations.
* Scenario planning that includes maps and data to encourage local input in decision-making process – what transportation tool do they need in their community? Example, TIS System as a visual tool with a history of success. Ground-truthing.
* Equity Diversity and Inclusion Task Force (develop PowerPoints and train staff)
* Trying to reach diverse communities to engage the communities (surveys, presentations, focus groups, discussions/opinions). Reaching disadvantaged communities. Dealing with a viaduct that will separate the community.
* Know that there are historic actions that have harmed disadvantaged people. They are working with legislation to remediate and take actions to improve.
* There is no one solution that works for everyone so they are grappling with how many solutions and find the unique situations that need equity-oriented actions/mitigations

## Q4. How can communication be a catalyst for change?

* The act of communicating can be a catalyst because it explores how other people receive information; to have a conversation with a diverse group in different ways generates different ideas
* Use care to ensure communication is effective (binary); if an idea is communicated well, its like a sunshine day where you can see clearly a great distance; if communication is poor, it can cloud the discussion and distort your field of view. To be a catalyst, communication needs to be clear to be effective.

## Q5. Discuss research gaps, develop a starting point for research problem statements, capture existing resources.

* What are other DOTs doing to ensure that everyone is engaged in public outreach efforts. What are best practices of other DOTs in virtual and hybrid spaces?
* Balancing the principles of asset management with integrating equity in investment decision-making
* Trainings are needed (we need our engineers to look through an equity lens). Need people to understand the legacy issues.
* More direct funding from feds to address equity better. Help with projects as well as the engagement needs.
* Equity clearinghouse (different equity statements, different plans, tools, etc.)
* How can we imbed equity in all things we do (equity practices in all phases of planning, design, delivery, etc.) (practices by phase)
* IIJA/BIL resources, including guidance

## Other. Does anyone have an equity strategic plan or other high-level policy documents?

* WSDOT: <https://wsdot.wa.gov/about/secretary-transportation/our-strategic-plan>
* Caltrans Equity Statement: <https://dot.ca.gov/about-caltrans/equity-statement>
* Caltrans (2024 Strategic Plan, has an equity goal in it): the public can download the Caltrans Strategic Plan at <https://dot.ca.gov/>

# Data

## Q1. Are there authoritative data sets we can use for equity?

* FHWA - Leading and Lagging Indicators. Contains lit review on mobility, equity, accessibility data. Lit review exposed that there was very limited national data.
* EPA EJ Screen Tool - analysis tool - may not be source of data: <https://www.epa.gov/ejscreen>
* And new CEQ Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool
* Census data - CTPP
* Transit - has more community/customer info.
* SoVi - University of South Carolina
* US Census data and associated datasets (ACS, etc.)
* CTTP datasets
* Other federal datasets, but quality of data may mismatch local geography or user groups.
* Datasets on broadband access
* Flood risk tools
* Believe “authoritative” can lead discussion in wrong direction. Need to look at “non-traditional” data sources. Examples: Distribution of calls into call center, relating to demographic other data.
* Integrate qualitative & quantitative data, provide understanding and context
* Infrastructure condition. HPMS --> Question of how this can inform equity analysis. This is a “Future Opportunity”.
* American Community Survey can provide data on low-income populations/areas
* Project data from project sponsors can impact share of safety projects (for example)

## Q2. What insights can the data bring to investment decision-making concerning equity?

* Make us more proactive in the process - especially downstream.
* Helps quantify goals. One goal of a DOT is to provide access to the community.
* Data drives investments - if we have an equity layer that we can look at with other data sets, we can optimize our investment decisions.
* Ability to use equity data in project selection. for example: underserved communities would be negatively impacted if there are multiple projects restricting access to their neighborhoods at the same time. Or, considering gaps in the pedestrian system so some may not have access to needs
* Data brings awareness for what is currently/not working and where to allocate more investments.
* Workforce alignment, match transportation to needs. Match skills with businesses with people.
* Improve transit routes to match where people live, work, and places they want to go.
* LCC analysis/Asset investment – Opportunity but few or no examples
* CDOT - looking prospectively
* WSDOT - developing tools and associated best practices for equity analysis - integrating into planning, assessing impacts, communicating results
* TDOT - focus is on DBE and understanding and developing solid goals and ensuring attainment. Developing enhancements and extending

## Q3. What additional data or analytical approaches are needed to move us forward?

* No national dataset(s) - makes it difficult for consistency in data collection and standards.
* Data that is objective - needed to use in allocation.
* Qualitative data/measures.
* Tools that help reduce bias, know and understand the context of the data, and appropriate uses of data.
* Need to develop new ways to pull data from public meetings. Transportation practitioners may talk past the public, boards, elected officials, and others. How to make sure that useful information is pulled from
* Match contracts to contractors. Sometimes FHWA rules do not allow for meeting internal targets for letting contracts to American-owned minority contractors.
* WSDOT tools - example of borrowing and will be made available
* Diversity dashboard: data warehouse (1FTE) clearinghouse for equity data. Dashboard is fed by existing data, making accessible.
* Tagging GIS data to make it easier to break down populations relevant to equity analysis
* For LRP, challenge integrating qualitative data with planning & programing processes. Finding a defensible methodology is a real challenge

## Q4. Discuss research gaps, develop a starting point for research problem statements, capture existing resources.

* Understanding how decisions are influenced by public opinion - how do we use the voices of others in investment decision making.
* Data collection - good practices for collecting TPM specific data and information from communities. Note - how to get specifics (not - “roads stink”)
* Case studies - with an equity focus on longitudinal impact.
* Examples of success - where have equity consideration been used to drive TPM related investment decisions?
* Are there international good practices?
* Benefit Cost - are there good practices to equity in the quantification of benefits.
* Some issues with Census data: "self-reporting," differential privacy
* Other research needs: existing measures of accessibility to jobs don't really "match" jobs to the workers' expertise

## Additional Links

* FHWA TCPB: <https://www.planning.dot.gov/planning/topic_transportationequity.aspx>
* AASHTO CTPP: <https://ctpp.transportation.org/equity-analysis-with-ctpp-data/>
* Equity Planning Guide: <https://www.nap.edu/catalog/25860/equity-analysis-in-regional-transportation-planning-processes-volume-1-guide>

# Organizational Management

## Q1. How does agency culture impact how we think about equity?

* In NJ, it comes from the top, from the governor, it’s a priority of their administration
  + EJ law passed, look at how investments are linked to EJ
  + Grant programs also incorporate equity
  + SHSP – added an emphasis area on equity
* Delaware planning office responsible for the STIP and project ranking – recently adopted a new prioritization process – includes EJ criteria, work with public health department to develop factor – called social and health element – percentile of low income people – in GIS layer
  + The planning department proposed it and leadership blessed it
* How will senior leadership embrace – how will they use it

## Q2. What strategies can be used to consider equity better?

* Some agencies are looking at how to incorporate into existing documents – such as the Department’s strategic plan also includes equity for short term goals
  + Performance measures are limited
  + Looking about boundaries on maps is good place to start

## Q3. Where does equity live in your agency, and is it internally or externally focused?

* Outcomes don't manifest themselves for a long time (pavement condition) - people have to live with these things for a long time - communicating and giving some weight to the short term needs
* At many DOTs, it matters if you're looking external or internally
  + Internally - its HR, seeks to promote a diverse workforce
  + Externally - split Environmental (public involvement); and policy &planning (as it relates to projects and studies)

## Q4. How do we promote equity in our decision-making processes?

* [No notes were captured for this question.]

## Q5. Discuss research gaps, develop a starting point for research problem statements, capture existing resources.

* Need to consider both qualitative and quantitative, can’t have 100% quantitative, but more than this, how do we maintain a high level of quality for our system. Balancing consideration for equity and the performance of the asset needs to be looked at - i.e. how do we keep the quality of our highway projects high, if we let non-asset related aspects of projects influence the decision on how to invest.
* We use a composite equity map – to score things – have trouble creating scores that capture the wide range of equity considerations