

B.4. Equity Goal

SUMMARY

- Thurston Regional Planning Council (TRPC) identified integrating equity into the project selection criteria as a goal.

BACKGROUND

Integrating equity into transportation decision-making has been identified as a Council priority. A recent study by Williams et al., 2019 entitled “Integrating Equity into MPO Project Prioritization,” explored documents from 35 Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) across the county to gain insight into their project prioritization process. Their primary findings:

- Prioritization practices vary significantly between MPOs.
- The broader local context and the MPO’s unique planning environment and role influence the approaches used.
- Public involvement is imperative during these processes.

A study by Wennink, A. and Krapp, A., 2020, titled Equity-Oriented Performance Measures in Transportation Planning, stresses that *“it is important to have a clear understanding of what is meant by transportation equity.”*

Understanding the Definition of Equity in the Thurston Region

TRPC staff developed a transportation priorities survey to collect direct public input from the community. We conducted the survey in a manner that invited participation from all members of the Thurston region. The survey included demographic questions so that respondents’ answers can be correlated to various demographic characteristics, including:

- Household income
- Race and ethnicity
- Whether a person has a disability affecting their mobility
- Whether a person has trouble finding a job or a better paying job due to their transportation barriers (job barriers)
- Whether a person has trouble getting to the places they need to go (transportation barriers)

From June through November 2021, TRPC conducted the survey. Postcard notifications were distributed to every household in Thurston County. TRPC conducted more intensive follow up activities to reach those who do not traditionally participate in planning projects. We also provided a Spanish version of the survey.

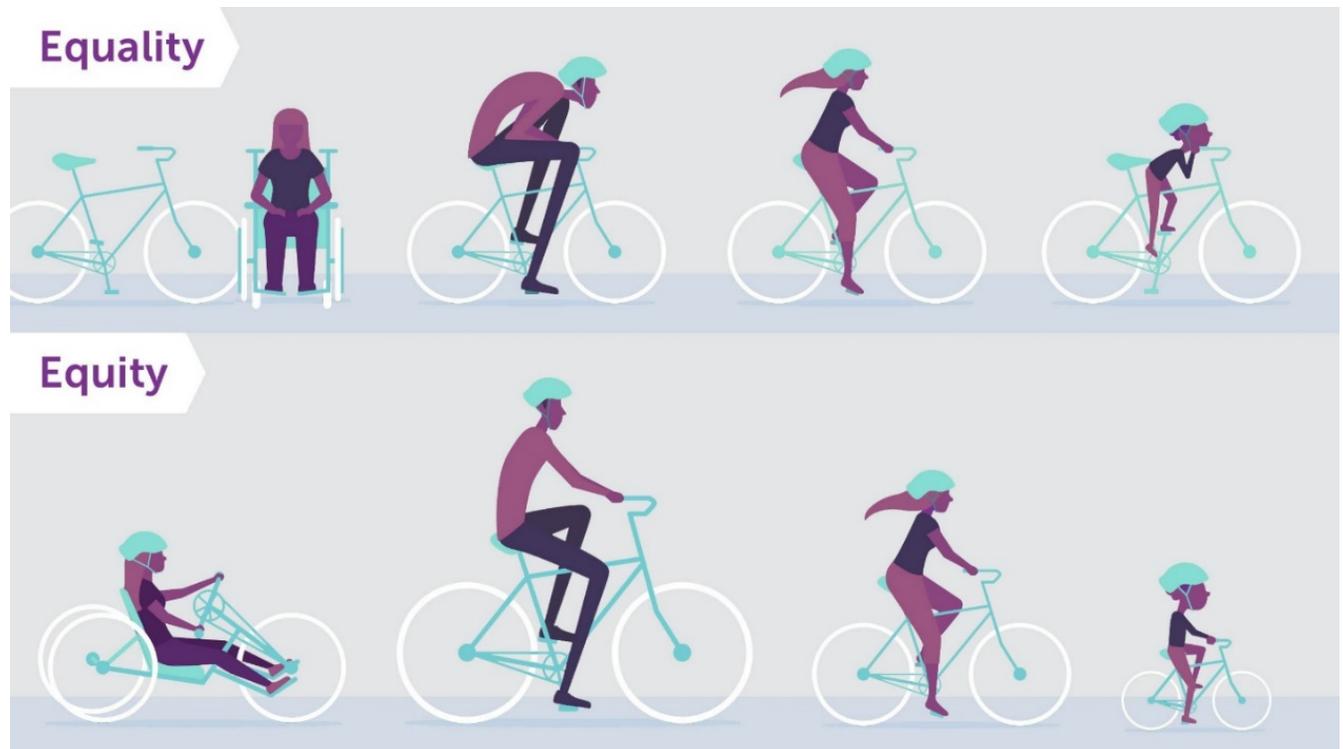
To further our region’s efforts on equity, TRPC’s Transportation Priorities community survey provided a definition of equity to the community and solicited input on an equity goal.

Equity definition provided on the survey:

Everyone has their own idea of what equity means to them. Sometimes, equity can be confused with equality. Here's what we mean when we use those words:

Equality means each individual or group of people is given the same resources or opportunities.

*Equity recognizes that each person has different circumstances and allocates the resources and opportunities needed to reach an *equal* outcome.*



Note: This graphic was created by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (@RWJF)

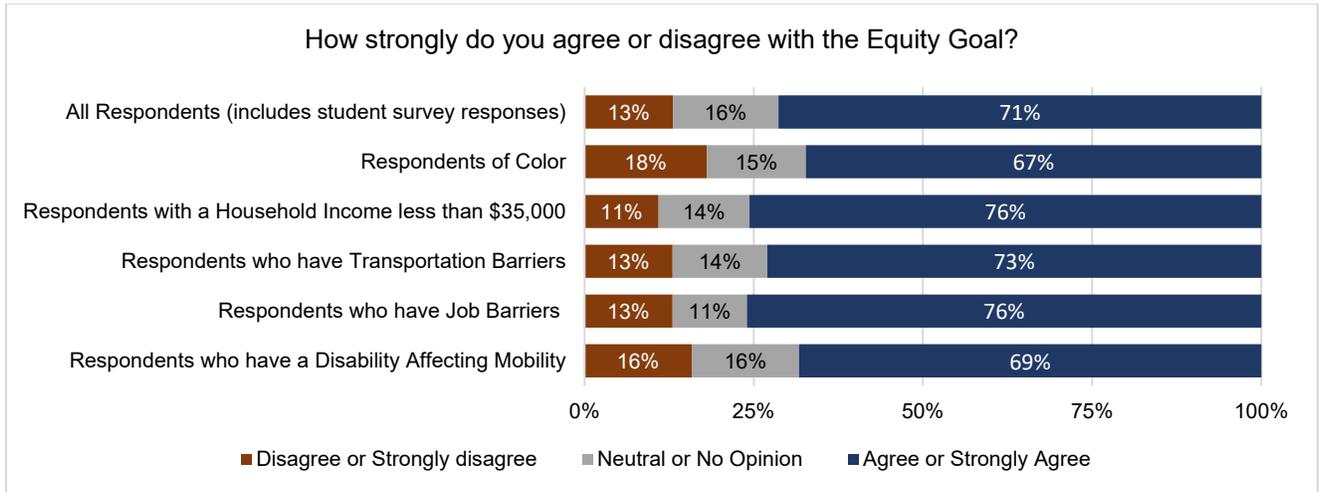
Equity Goal:

The Transportation Priorities survey included the following question:

“TRPC would like to set a goal for making equity a greater part of transportation planning. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following goal?”

Provide equitable transportation access and service for people of all ages, races and ethnicities, incomes, abilities, English language proficiencies, or other demographic characteristics as appropriate for the community’s land use characteristics (urban, suburban, and rural).”

Survey Results



In general, survey respondents supported the Equity Goal across all demographics. The highest support was from households with incomes less than \$35,000, and residents who have barriers to jobs.

Types of Equity

The Wennick and Krapp study also summarized that *“The most common definitions equate transportation equity with the fair distribution of benefits and burdens of transportation projects, plans, policies, and processes.”* They further state that transportation equity can be classified into three different types based on how fairness is assessed:

- Procedural equity, which is focused on the degree of involvement of diverse public stakeholders in the processes by which transportation decisions are made.
- Geographic equity, which is focused on the distribution of impacts across geography and space.
- Social equity, which is focused on the distribution across population groups that can be equal or differ by income, social class, and mobility ability.

Increasing Procedural Equity:

To increase public involvement in TRPC’s project selection process, TRPC’s Transportation Priorities community survey asked the question:

“Thurston Regional Planning Council distributes money from the federal government through grants for transportation studies, projects, and programs. Because of federal rules, this money can only be used in certain ways. Please mark how important the following types of studies, projects, and programs are to you.”

Survey Results

Public input was sought on a wide range of project types, grouped into Project Priority categories, as shown in Table 7. TRPC analyzed survey results based on demographic information to identify traditionally underserved populations, using the definition:

Underserved population – “Underserved population” or “traditionally underserved population” generally refers to a broad category that includes:

- minority populations; and
- low-income populations

But may also include many other demographic categories that face challenges engaging with the transportation process and reaping equitable benefits, such as children, older adults, and persons with disabilities.

The survey finds that results for underserved populations are very similar to results for all respondents, suggesting that priorities do not greatly vary among different demographic groups within the Thurston Region.

Table 7¹. Survey Results for Underserved Populations on Project Priorities.

Project	Respondents of Color	Respondents with a Household Income less than \$35,000	Respondents who have Transportation Barriers	Respondents who have Job Barriers	Respondents who have a Disability Affecting Mobility	All Respondents
Percentages are based on the percent of respondents who indicated a project was "Somewhat Important" or "Very Important"						
Blue = Top 5 Projects						
Planning and Studies						
Conduct planning studies, with public involvement, that address current and future transportation challenges	93%	95%	96%	97%	96%	95%
Safety						
Make intersections safer	96%	93%	96%	94%	96%	97%
Make crossing the street safer	95%	94%	96%	93%	96%	96%
Make bus stops more convenient and safe for bus riders, especially for people with disabilities	93%	94%	97%	96%	94%	93%
Efficiency						
Add turning lanes or center lanes	88%	86%	83%	77%	89%	89%
Invest in new transportation technologies (improved traffic signals, real-time travel information)	88%	88%	86%	84%	89%	90%
Invest in projects that reduce the need to travel, such as encouraging working from home	79%	83%	80%	84%	79%	81%
Maintenance						
Increase road maintenance (fix pavement/potholes)	94%	96%	94%	90%	97%	97%
Replace transit vehicles or bus stop shelters	78%	87%	87%	87%	83%	80%

¹ Note – table numbers start at 7 as this document is an excerpt from the Call for Projects documentation.

Percentages are based on the percent of respondents who indicated a project was "Somewhat Important" or "Very Important"	Respondents of Color	Respondents with a Household Income less than \$35,000	Respondents who have Transportation Barriers	Respondents who have Job Barriers	Respondents who have a Disability Affecting Mobility	All Respondents
Blue = Top 5 Projects						
Project						
Resiliency						
Improve roads that are detour routes to Interstate 5 (I-5)	91%	88%	86%	85%	93%	91%
Improve roads that are more likely to be impacted by hazards such as flooding or landslides	92%	93%	92%	87%	94%	93%
Complete missing roads/street connections	86%	84%	86%	84%	87%	83%
Help improve water quality and/or fish habitat by fixing places where roads and bridges impact natural areas	91%	96%	95%	95%	92%	93%
Active Transportation						
Add sidewalks and safe street crossings to existing streets	93%	96%	96%	95%	95%	95%
Add bike lanes to existing streets	78%	88%	87%	86%	78%	83%
Complete the regional trail network	82%	87%	86%	90%	82%	87%
Invest in school/public awareness programs to reduce travel trips and increase safety	78%	87%	84%	80%	79%	80%

Although there is generally strong support for all project types funded by TRPC, the following project types rank in the top 5 for 3 or more underserved population groups:

- Planning and Studies with public involvement
- Safety
 - Make intersections safer
 - Make crossing the street safer
 - Make bus stops more convenient and safe for bus riders, especially for people with disabilities
- Maintenance
 - Increase road maintenance (fix pavement/potholes)
- Active Transportation
 - Add sidewalks and safe street crossings to existing streets

Geographic Equity: Distributing Funding Across the region

TRPC has a long-standing practice of distributing funding for transportation projects to all communities in the Thurston Region. Examples of this include specific funding targets for rural and urban communities and fostering partnerships with Thurston County and the smaller south county cities and towns and Tribal partners.

Social Equity: Understanding Project Benefits and Burdens

Another aspect to integrating equity into project prioritization is to evaluate the benefits and burdens of projects to marginalized populations. Table 8 supplies some examples of those transportation project benefits and burdens.

Table 8. Examples of Transportation Benefits and Burdens

Transportation Benefits	Transportation Burdens
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased access to social, educational, and economic opportunities • Increased access to high-quality mobility options • Travel time savings • Cost savings • Congestion mitigation • Reduction of pollution • Improved connectivity within communities • Opportunities for physical activity through active transportation modes • Reduction in traffic injuries and fatalities • Local hiring and job training for jobs in construction, maintenance, and operation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced access to essential opportunities and services • Restricted or no access to high quality transportation • Long/increased travel times • Financial burdens • Traffic congestion • Increased pollution • Physical division of communities • Creation of barriers to bicycling and walking • Exposure to traffic-related safety risks • Vulnerability to climate impacts • Inequitable enforcement

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EQUITY CRITERIA

Staff are suggesting a three-tiered approach to integrate equity into the Call for Projects update process.

1. Public Involvement Score
 - a. Projects that rank in the top 5 for 3 or more underserved population groups, 1 point
 - b. All other projects, 0 points
2. Geographic Equity Score – geographic equity will be achieved through funding minimums and caps.
3. Social Equity Score
 - a. Projects that have a demonstrated benefit for an underserved population, either by geographic proximity (for example a school route sidewalk project for a school with a high proportion of students receiving free and reduced lunch), or a targeted program (for example dial-a-lift vehicles), Additional 1 point
 - b. Projects that place a disproportionate burden on an underserved population, -1. Examples can be found in Table 8.

Proposed Ranking*

Tables 9 shows how proposals submitted to TRPC will be evaluated and ranked under the proposed criteria.

Table 9: Proposed Project Criteria Ranking for Equity.

Base Points			Bonus Point **
Disproportionate Burden	All other Projects	Projects Ranking in Top 5 for 3 or more Underserved Populations	Bonus Point: Demonstrated Benefit
-1 Point	0 Points	1 Point	+1 Point
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Projects that have a disproportionate burden on an underserved population, regardless of project type 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Efficiency <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Add turning lanes or center lanes Invest in new transportation technologies (improved traffic signals, real-time travel information) Invest in projects that reduce the need to travel, such as encouraging working from home Maintenance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Replace transit vehicles or bus stop shelters Resiliency <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve roads that are detour routes to Interstate 5 (I-5) Improve roads that are more likely to be impacted by hazards such as flooding or landslides Complete missing roads/street connections Help improve water quality and/or fish habitat by fixing places where roads and bridges impact natural areas Active Transportation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Add bike lanes to existing streets Complete the regional trail network Invest in school/public awareness programs to reduce travel trips and increase safety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planning and Studies with public involvement Safety <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make intersections safer Make crossing the street safer Make bus stops more convenient and safe for bus riders, especially for people with disabilities Maintenance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase road maintenance (fix pavement/potholes) Active Transportation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Add sidewalks and safe street crossings to existing streets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Projects that have a demonstrated benefit for an underserved population

* Other projects not listed in this table will be evaluated at time of review

** Bonus point can be applied to any project type. A maximum of two points is possible.

References:

Wennick, A., and Krapp, A., 2020. *Equity-Oriented Performance Measures in Transportation Planning*. American Planning Association. [https://planning-org-uploaded-media.s3.amazonaws.com/publication/download_pdf/PAS-MEMO-2020-03-04-rev.pdf]

Williams, K.M., Kramer, J., Keita, Y, Enomah, L.D., and Boyd, T., 2019. *Integrating Equity into MPO Prioritization*. Center for Transportation, Equity, Decisions, and Dollars (CTEED). [https://ctedd.uta.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/kris_final.pdf].