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Transportation Equity Toolkit

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Executive Summary:

Transportation equity is a representation of fairness in the distribution of benefits and burdens. Increasingly, metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) and local governments are evaluating transportation plans and projects from an equity perspective. However, needs identification frequently focuses on system deficiencies and can overlook the needs of specific populations. Furthermore, approaches used to identify and prioritize projects of benefit to disadvantaged populations vary in scope and effectiveness. These gaps in current practice contribute to inequities in the transportation system for traditionally underserved communities.

The Transportation Equity Toolkit is designed to fill these gaps. The toolkit will serve as a resource for MPOs, transportation agencies, and communities as they work to advance equity in traditionally underserved communities. It provides a framework for a transportation equity needs assessment and an equity-based project identification and prioritization process. A variety of tools and methods are provided for these frameworks, including the following:

- **Transportation Equity Audit Tool:** a survey-based tool designed for use by agency staff, community organizers, and community members in identifying community transportation needs from an equity perspective; and
- **Transportation Equity Scorecard Tool:** a spreadsheet tool to assist the staff of MPOs and other transportation planning agencies in prioritizing projects that advance equity.

The toolkit is supplemented by a guidance document that contains further information on methods and applications. The [Transportation Equity Scorecard User Guide](#) provides detailed guidance and illustrative examples of project screening and prioritization using the scorecard tool. The *Transportation Equity Scorecard* is a spreadsheet tool and is available as a separate downloadable Excel file.

Scope of Problem:

While all community needs are important in transportation planning, the needs of some communities have traditionally been underserved. Failure to meet the needs of these communities causes inherent inequities in the transportation system and results in disproportionate adverse impacts on disadvantaged populations.

Needs identification frequently focuses on system deficiencies and can overlook the needs of specific populations. Furthermore, approaches used to identify and prioritize projects of benefit to disadvantaged populations vary in scope and effectiveness. These gaps in current practice contribute to inequities in the transportation system for traditionally underserved communities.

Policy Alternatives:

An equity approach to transportation needs assessments and project screening and prioritization processes can address inequities in the transportation system. Previous foundational research conducted for the Toolkit (Williams et al., 2019, "Integrating Equity into MPO Project Prioritization," CTEDD) found that MPOs that include equity as a vision and explicit goal are more likely to ensure that the planning process addresses the needs of disadvantaged populations. Systematically identifying the needs of and prioritizing projects for underserved communities and considering user benefits of projects specific to these populations (regardless of project type or mode) are important in selecting projects that benefit the target communities. Having an effective process to engage underserved communities during both needs assessment and project prioritization is critical to understand actual versus perceived community needs. Larger MPOs and those with more resources should consider dedicating a certain amount of funding for the purpose of increasing equity in project prioritization. Transparency of efforts to advance equity in project prioritization and planning is important to public trust and awareness and MPOs should ensure that equity strategies are obvious in all stages of the planning and programming process. Finally, equity should be evaluated from multiple perspectives and from an access to opportunity standpoint.

Policy Recommendations:

To increase attention to equity in planning, transportation agencies should:

- a) include equity in their vision statements and as an explicit goal and evaluate it from multiple perspectives;
- b) integrate equity considerations into transportation needs assessments and project screening and priority setting;
- c) involve underserved communities in transportation needs assessment and project identification and selection to build their capacity to guide and influence the transportation decision-making process; and
- d) dedicate a certain amount of funding to directly advance equity, including project identification and construction in underserved communities.

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