

EVOLUTION OF SOCIETAL RELATIONS TO FEDERAL ACTIONS

History of Equity in Transportation

IPATH Conference - September 28, 2023

PRESENTATION OBJECTIVES

- To engage professionals in critical thinking around equity
- To understand how equity has evolved, or not, when it comes to federal Actions
- To suggest other ways to think of and incorporate equity
- To provide tools and resources to further equity understanding and implementation



EVOLUTION OF FEDERAL ACTIONS TO IDENTIFY INEQUALITY

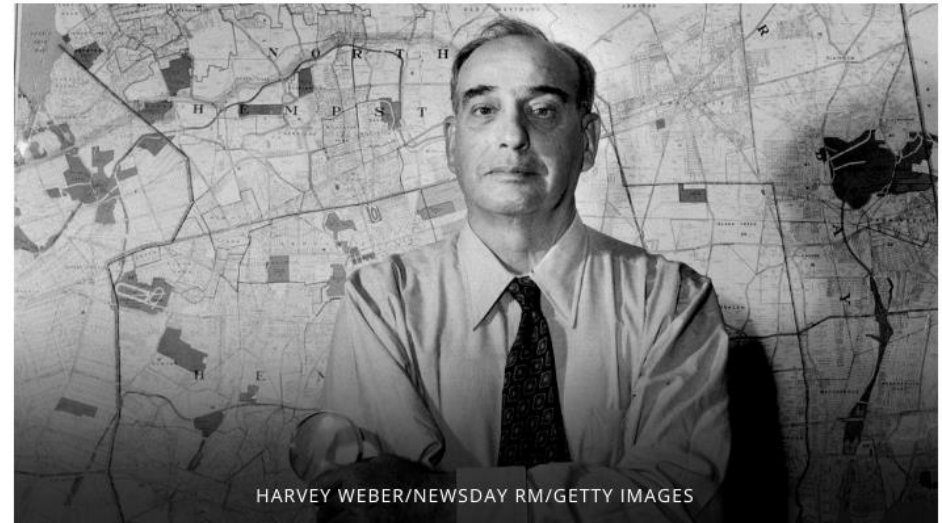
- Impacts of poor ventilation, exposure to dust, chemicals and other health hazards on workers gain visibility
- States begin leading the charge to understand and improve working conditions
- States enact various laws to inspect factories and improve conditions
- Unions were created and federal laws to improve conditions were implemented over time – Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, National Environmental Policy Act, founding of the Environmental Protection Agency, Civil Rights Act, others.
- The stage was set...



GROWING AWARENESS OF INEQUALITY SPURS RISE IN ACTIVISM

- National Highway Act implemented in 1956
- The cost to some communities was extreme
- Activism and freeway revolts emerge as a response
- Highway construction as an alternative to redlining

Robert Moses: 'Go Right Through Cities and Not Around Them'



PLANNER ROBERT MOSES STANDING IN FRONT OF MAP OF LONG ISLAND, NEW YORK, C. 1954.&NBSP;

FEDERAL RESPONSES TO APPARENT INJUSTICES

- Title VI of the Civil Rights Act (1964) and Executive Order 12898 (1994)
- They outline a process to determine disparate or disproportionately high impacts on specific populations
- Essentially, Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, and the National Environmental Policy Act are all reactive to federally-supported Actions from a cultural and societal source that does not necessarily align with specific demographic segments



“Clean air, clean water, open spaces—these should once again be the birthright of every American. If we act now, they can be.

We still think of air as free. But clean air is not free, and neither is clean water. The price tag on pollution control is high. Through our years of past carelessness we incurred a debt to nature, and now that debt is being called.”

Richard Nixon 1970



PUT ANOTHER WAY

- Even with federal laws, EOs, and environmental policy in place, diverse populations can only influence an Action slightly.
- The Action, the core to the project development process, does not represent a diverse societal structure.
- Input from all populations protected by laws is potentially rooted in risk.



MANY LAWS INTEND TO PROTECT SOCIETY FROM ITSELF

- They all usually react to an Action rooted in a societal belief system.
 - The basic, all-important question...is Equity supposed to be something more than a manifestation of EO 12898 and/or Title VI of the CRA?
 - Is the intention behind Equity to move it from a reactive response to a proactive driver to define the Action?

WHAT IS EQUITY?

- The definition seems to be evolutionary, dynamic, changing.
 - The quality of being fair, impartial, and just
 - Recognizing we do not all start from the same place
 - Agreeing adjustments to imbalances must be made
 - Ensuring accessible and affordable transportation for everyone in the community resulting in fair distribution of transportation resources, benefits, costs, programs and services based upon differences in income, ability and other factors affecting transportation choice and mobility.
 - In transportation, seeking fairness in mobility and accessibility to meet the needs of all community members.

- Not unlike the changing definitions of sustainability or streamlining

What is equity?

Equity is defined as “the state, quality or ideal of being just, impartial and fair.” The concept of equity is synonymous with fairness and justice. To be achieved and sustained, equity needs to be thought of as a structural and systemic concept.

How is equity different from equality?

Equity involves trying to understand and give people what they need to enjoy full, healthy lives. Equality, in contrast, aims to ensure that everyone gets the same things in order to enjoy full, healthy lives.

WHAT IS CAUSING THE REACTIVE NATURE OF SOCIETAL LAW?

- America's transportation system is rooted in Eurasian evolution of the movements of good and services
- It's designed to deliver western society's domestic and foreign policy rooted in economic advancement
- It has evolved into a consumptive internal combustion engine focus
- Perhaps it's rooted in a Have-Not Hierarchy?



ARE THERE OTHER DEFINITIONS OF TRANSPORTATION DELIVERY?

- Do today's transportation ideas rooted in a clear history of prioritization make some “solutions” more important than others?
 - Federal dollars historically focused on the automobile
 - Agencies and the generations of profit have grown around this priority



- **Does Equity play a key role in proactively defining Actions moving forward?**

FOR EQUITY TO TRULY AFFECT TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

- Equity must proactively mold Proposed Actions
- Equity must proactively alter transportation planning
- Equity must proactively modify transportation agency mandates
- Equity must proactively change the world view of what transportation is supposed to be



FORMERLY CODIFY EQUITY

- Codify is something different than EO 12898 or Title VI; something that is proactive and not reactive
- Engage different opinions, different perspectives about what the Proposed Action should be – *before* the Action is defined
- Change NEPA need, as one DOT emphasized, from solving a transportation problem (most often quantified for moving vehicles) to one focused on moving people



EXAMPLES

- A traffic interchange reconstruction
- Non-vehicular traffic as most prominent (i.e., e-bikes)
- Active transportation becomes prominent
- AT will never reveal a ROI as strong as vehicular enhancements...*because it doesn't have the history of constant improvement*
- Instead of design road features and then “shoe-horning” in bicycle trails, design the trails first or at the same time with the same focus as the roadway improvements

CASE STUDIES

- Michigan DOT I-375
Reconstruction EA Project





What We Heard

from the COMMUNITY CONVERSATION on the I-375 IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

I-375 was built as a gateway to Downtown Detroit in 1964. After 50 years of use, it needs to be reconstructed. **MDOT is deciding what to do with the corridor.**

A Community Conversation on the future of the I-375 corridor was held on May 17, 2017 at Eastern Market. 84 people who live, work, and are otherwise invested in the corridor attended.

TRAFFIC CONGESTION SAFETY DEVELOPMENT MULTIMODAL CONNECTIVITY NEIGHBORHOODS PEDESTRIAN HISTORY

TRAFFIC & CONGESTION

No alternative will relieve existing congestion within the corridor

- Mitigate traffic coming from the highway, especially if the freeway is brought to grade
- Look to incorporate surrounding streets like Mack Avenue into the study

MULTIMODAL

Many people are interested in making the corridor safer and more accessible to people walking and riding bikes

- Allow for more non-motorized options to access the corridor
- Create safer interactions between different modes of travel

PEDESTRIANS

Many people cross I-375 on foot and call the experience "poor", "dangerous", and a "death trap"

- Focus on safety, access, and amenities for pedestrians
- Improve pedestrian access with sidewalks, signals, and better separation from traffic

CONNECTIVITY

Many people cross I-375 to get to/from downtown Detroit and Lafayette Park

- Preserve the existing access and improve connectivity between the two sides of the corridor
- Provide additional connectivity to the riverfront

SAFETY

Traveling the corridor is confusing and dangerous for all users

- Put the safety of people walking and riding bikes over moving cars
- Improve crosswalks and fix crumbling sidewalks
- Reduce automobile accidents caused by unsafe merging, weaving, and backups

DEVELOPMENT

New development should match the existing character of the area

- Establish a sense of place for the surrounding neighborhoods
- Create opportunities for minority businesses

PROTECT NEIGHBORHOODS

Preserve the character of the existing neighborhoods

- Provide a buffer to Lafayette Park from downtown and the corridor
- Protect the integrity and stability of the surrounding neighborhoods

HISTORY

I-375 was placed through the historic Paradise Valley and Black Bottom neighborhoods

- Acknowledge and memorialize the history of the corridor and surrounding areas
- Retain the quality of life in Lafayette Park as a historically significant neighborhood

CONTACT US

MDOT-I-375corridor@michigan.gov

VISIT OUR WEBSITE

www.michigan.gov/i375study



WHAT'S NEXT

The Community Conversation was just the beginning of the process. Here's what's coming next and how you can learn more.



BENEFITS OF PROACTIVELY BUILDING EQUITY INTO ACTIONS

- Better societal alignment on proposed Actions
- Less push back from stakeholders
- Faster regulatory agency response time
- Less change in the proposed Action
- Reduced levels of re-work and cost
- Improved public trust and project buy-in
- More informed consent and reduced opposition
- Improved outcomes for communities impacted by Proposed Actions



Resources

- EO 13985 Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government (2021)
- EO 14091 Further Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government (2023)
- USDOT Equity Action Plan
- White House Council on Environmental Quality
- NAEP Leadership Blog: Part 20: Earth's Natural Limits
- National Civic League
- International Association of Public Participation (IAP2)



Questions?



Thank You!



Ron Deverman
STV, Inc.
312-533-148-1484
Ron.Deverman@stvinc.com



Stacey Adams
Avenue Consultants
801-918-6765
sadams@avenueconsultants.com

