



Caltrans Division of Research,
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Research



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Project Title:
Mobility, Accessibility and
Disadvantaged Neighborhoods:
Assessing Diversity in Transportation-
Related Needs and Opportunities

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Mobility, Accessibility and Disadvantaged Neighborhoods: Assessing Diversity in Transportation- Related Needs and Opportunities

Assessing diversity in transportation-related needs and opportunities

WHAT IS THE NEED?

The state has made a commitment to equity as a part of its ambitious climate-change initiative (e.g., SB 535 and AB 617). Transportation is a key element, but according to the California Environmental Justice Alliance, the state has been slow to implement policies and programs to improve the quality of life, public health, and economic opportunities in marginalized communities.

To address the paucity of data, the research team will generate California-specific mobility information on how disadvantaged neighborhoods differ along urban-rural, suburb-exurb, ethnic-racial and other dimensions. The project will provide useful insights into the underlying diversity that has real and profound implications on how best to close the mobility gap.

WHAT ARE WE DOING?

The researchers will generate geographically detailed and timely indicators using information from multiple data sources. The information will be available at the census tract level, which typically contains about 3,000 to 6,000 persons. They will measure the availability of transportation resources and accessibility to economic, educational and other opportunities. They will use data from the US Census Bureau, the California Air Resource Board and other state agencies, and specialized data vendors. This step requires extracting, assessing, cleaning, reconciling and merging the information.



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California's transportation system

After assembling the required dataset, the research team will examine how transportation disparities systematically vary across neighborhoods, with a focus on the differences between disadvantaged and advantaged communities. The project will test whether differences are statistically significant, and estimate the magnitude of the differences.

WHAT IS OUR GOAL?

The research analysts will produce a technical report for Caltrans documenting the work, dataset and findings. The project will also produce a brief that will be more accessible to a general public, and make a dataset available to stakeholders interested in examining more detailed information. Both products will help readers better understand the nature, pattern, and magnitude of transportation disparities across neighborhoods.

WHAT IS THE BENEFIT?

The findings from the research project will help Caltrans to improve the allocation and targeting of transportation and other public investments to benefit disadvantaged neighborhoods. The products will also help other stakeholders to be better informed, thus be more effective in contributing to the development of equitable policies, plans and programs.

While the project focuses on only two counties (Los Angeles as an urban county and San Joaquin as a relatively more rural county), the methodological approach and some results are applicable to other parts of California. Moreover, this project can serve as a model that Caltrans can later scale up to cover other regions.

WHAT IS THE PROGRESS TO DATE?

October 2020 - The research team will continue to download and assemble key datasets and construct indicators. Given the challenge with getting access to Google Transit API data, they will need to come up with an alternative approach to construct the various measures on access to opportunities by transit.

The researchers are meeting with members of the Reinvent South Stockton Coalition (RSSC), a community organization in Stockton that focuses on issues of safety, education, housing, jobs, and health, at the end of October. They will gauge their interest in providing input and feedback on the report's research findings.