Developing Metrics to Measure Equity in Transit or Rail Projects

Developing measurable equity metrics in transit and rail projects allowing Caltrans to better expand mobility and job opportunities to disadvantaged communities.

WHAT IS THE NEED?

Transportation policy is tied to social policy, with transit investment decisions playing an important role in determining equity outcomes. Projects that benefit high-income, single-occupancy automobile drivers may harm lower-income transit riders as well as pedestrians and bicyclists. Transit planning, policy, and operational decisions can also affect an array of equity outcomes, each of which may be useful to measure.

WHAT ARE WE DOING?

This study provides Caltrans with a clear definition of equity in transportation planning, and more specifically, in transit planning and operations, including developing a set of equity measures. Metrics for consideration include (but not limited to) Capital and Programmatic Investment Equity, Transit Supply Equity, Transit Accessibility for Disadvantaged Groups, Transportation Health Environmental and Health Impacts Equity, Transit System Performance for Disadvantaged Groups, Transit Connectivity for Disadvantaged Groups, Transit Affordability for Disadvantaged Groups, Demographics, and Public Participation in Transit Decision-Making.

Furthermore, the research team assesses the current state of transportation and transit equity measurement in California. They will perform analysis of case studies using selected metrics. Case studies and metrics will be selected in consultation with Caltrans to test the potential usefulness of the metrics for real-world applications. For example, case study testing could be done using existing Regional Transportation Plan / Transportation Improvement Plans data to evaluate their equity impacts.
WHAT IS OUR GOAL?

The research team will recommend changes to policy, such as how capital and operating funds are allocated. They will also recommend process changes, such as how decision makers at transit agencies, metropolitan planning organizations, cities and counties, and the State of California should consider equity in management and operations decisions, or how to ensure full public input is part of the decision process for funding capital and operations.

WHAT IS THE BENEFIT?

This research study can develop metrics that inform transportation decisionmakers about the impacts of transit and rail infrastructure investments. This research would therefore help make transit and rail improvements in communities that need it the most.

WHAT IS THE PROGRESS TO DATE?

The research team began work on May 1st starting with Task 1 “Literature and State of the Practice Review”. We have gathered around 100 professional and academic sources (articles, reports, and books) for review and analysis to determine the current state-of-the-practice in defining and measuring transit equity. They have also begun compiling a list of potential interview subjects from within Caltrans and from the larger transit academic and professional communities. The team has started working on Task 2 “Develop Study Methods”, by drafting an internal memorandum outlining the criteria for selecting transit equity metrics for further study in Task 3 “Develop and Evaluate Candidate Equity Measures/Policies”.

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