

Equity

In transportation planning, we need to consider equity both with respect to mode and ability. One area of particular concern for equity is with the road network. Currently, road construction projects use "level of service" as a metric, which solely considers speed of automobile travel without giving any consideration to other uses. This can be cited as a reason to not add infrastructure for other uses (such as bike lanes or sidewalks) or not slow down traffic to improve pedestrian safety, without even taking those users into account.

At the same time, we don't have a comparable requirement for non-motorized access – for instance, the Washtenaw/Pittsfield intersection requires pedestrians to cross 3 times to get from the bus stop on the south side of the street to the north side. Traffic signals can also have the effect of favoring vehicular travel when a button must be pressed to activate the pedestrian cycle, as frequently this requires the pedestrian to wait longer. Finally, during construction projects, pedestrian access is frequently closed in places where vehicular access is maintained.

Another area of particular concern comes with respect to land use policy. Outside of downtown, many developments are surrounded by surface parking. In most of these cases, these spots are necessary to fulfill parking minimums required by our zoning code. At the same time, we don't require/incentivize access for other modes of transportation (such as off-street bus stops located next to shopping centers, or bike parking) in the same way. Furthermore, businesses surrounded by parking with large setbacks can make pedestrian and other non-motorized access more difficult, particularly for persons with disabilities.

Equity can also be a concern from the standpoint of demographics. For one, if improvements are proposed to transportation infrastructure, we need to ensure that these are distributed equitably among different neighborhoods. Also, transportation needs to serve the needs of all such groups equitably. One area of concern in this respect is with respect to transit – currently, AAATA service (except for more expensive NightRide) does not serve those working late night or holiday shifts, and service is heavily oriented around downtown/UM Hospital with the hub/spoke service model. Also, traveling outside the service area can be difficult. While there are valid reasons for concentrating service on peak hours/destinations, more could be done to serve those who find themselves outside these.

To address these, there are a few actions we can take:

- Move to replace or augment level of service with a metric that is more neutral with respect to mode.
- Operate traffic signals in a way that ensures all modes are treated neutrally.
- Take steps to ensure access is maintained during construction projects on an equitable basis with respect to mode if at all possible.
- Revise zoning codes to not require parking, or to allow other transportation amenities to be substituted in place of parking. Also, require uses be separated in a way so as not to interfere with each other (ie place parking behind businesses rather than surrounding them).
- Implement policy to ensure transportation improvements are implemented equitably across all neighborhoods, and communicate with AAATA with respect to service improvements.

Implications for Transportation Plan Update

Performance measures used in the transportation plan update need take equity of mode/ability into account. Also, process needs to account for all demographics and socioeconomic groups equitably.

Outstanding questions:

Is the use of level of service as a metric required by law? If so, how much flexibility do we have to augment this with other metrics such that we don't privilege vehicular travel over other uses?

How do we determine the timing of traffic signals with respect to drivers/pedestrians (and how long each has to wait)? How does this vary based on intersection?

How do we decide where access is maintained during road construction projects, and for what modes?

Do we have any requirements as to where parking is located (to avoid interference with other modes)? Also, do we have any existing provisions in zoning code to incentivize non-motorized access?

Additional Resources:

https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/bicycle_pedestrian/resources/equity_paper/

<https://www.saferoutespartnership.org/blog/6-es-safe-routes-school-embracing-equity>

<https://planning-org-uploaded-media.s3.amazonaws.com/document/Bicycle-Equity-The-Equity-of-Access-to-Bicycle-Infrastructure.pdf>

<https://momentummag.com/bicycle-equity-fairness-justice-bicycle-planning-design/>

http://bikeleague.org/sites/default/files/bike_equity_index_final_web.pdf

<https://www.saferoutespartnership.org/resources/report/intersection-active-transportation-equity>

<https://www.saferoutespartnership.org/resources/research/role-equity-active-transpo>

<https://www.planetizen.com/node/87718/active-transport-walking-and-cycling-planning-equity>