Assessing the Impact of Equity Work in Transportation

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A Research Report from the Pacific Southwest Region University Transportation Center

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16. Abstract
This report assesses equity work within transportation in California by analyzing the expert perspectives of transportation professionals who also identify as Black or people of color. 28 professionals from across the state were interviewed. Many interviewees work on transportation equity as part of their central job function. Interviews were transcribed and coded for major themes. Key findings centered around a key distinction between "performative" equity work and "authentic" equity work. Performative equity work privileges the comfort and perspective of dominant groups, reinforces status quo, stays in the realm of rhetoric, and often results in superficial changes only. Authentic equity work centers the experience of Black people and people of color, embraces discomfort, transforms dominant culture, and results in measurable changes to the lives of those historically oppressed. Key recommendations include supporting action-oriented equity work, especially around resource allocation and redistribution of decision-making power to communities. The report includes case studies of how to apply findings to new mobilities and policing, as well as visions for more equitable transportation futures.

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About the Pacific Southwest Region University Transportation Center

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The Pacific Southwest Region UTC conducts an integrated, multidisciplinary program of research, education and technology transfer aimed at *improving the mobility of people and goods throughout the region.* Our program is organized around four themes: 1) technology to address transportation problems and improve mobility; 2) improving mobility for vulnerable populations; 3) Improving resilience and protecting the environment; and 4) managing mobility in high growth areas.

U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) and California Department of Transportation (CALTRANS) Disclaimer

Disclosure

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Abstract

This report assesses equity work within transportation in California by analyzing the expert perspectives of transportation professionals who also identify as Black or people of color. 28 professionals from across the state were interviewed. Many interviewees worked on transportation equity as part of their central job function. Interviews were transcribed and coded for major themes. Key findings centered around a key distinction between "performative" equity work and "authentic" equity work. Performative equity work privileges the comfort and perspective of dominant groups, reinforces status quo, stays in the realm of rhetoric, and often results in superficial changes only. Authentic equity work centers the experience of Black people and people of color, embraces discomfort, transforms dominant culture, and results in measurable changes to the lives of those historically oppressed. Key recommendations include supporting action-oriented equity work, especially around resource allocation and redistribution of decision-making power to communities. The report includes case studies of how to apply findings to new mobilities and policing, as well as visions for more equitable transportation futures.

Assessing the Impact of Equity Work in Transportation

Executive Summary

The goal of this report is to assess the status of transportation equity work in California by seeking the expert perspectives of transportation professionals who also identify as Black, Indigenous, or people of color. We recruited 28 interviewees through transportation planning professional networks and referrals. Of those interviewed, 36% identify as Latinx, 21% identify as Black, 14% identify as Asian or Pacific Islander, 25% identify as mixed race, and 3% identify as Middle Eastern. Interviewees were asked questions about their career trajectory and their understanding of equity within transportation with specific questions on new mobilities. With the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic and uprisings after the murder of George Floyd, we adjusted the script to ask about the impact of these phenomena on transportation equity work.

Participants spoke of the need to create a consensus around a definition of equity. Without a clear, shared definition, they noted that it was difficult for organizations to do meaningful equity work. Participants offered definitions of equity that included a redistribution of resources and decision-making power to historically disinvested communities. They saw the goal of equity to be achieving parity between residents of disinvested community and privileged communities. Overall, they sought a transportation system that asserts dignity for people's humanity as a core value. They saw this definition of equity as foundational to informing goals and actions that are targeted, transparent, and measurable.

A lack of clarity around equity definition and goals can lead to a phenomenon known as "performative equity work." Performative equity work describes practices that reinforce root systems of dominance and status quo, while claiming to promote inclusion. Characteristics of performative equity work on the individual level include defensiveness and an unwillingness to be uncomfortable. In the workplace, this can manifest as tokenism, which places an emphasis on hiring diverse applicants without considering what changes must take place in the organization to create a good working environment. Many professionals shared experiences of having their professional expertise disregarded because it upset assumptions and norms among their colleagues or leadership. They critiqued situations when equity was downscaled to only mean "outreach" to communities or added as a last-minute consideration, something often called "retrofitting." They found organizations are often under-investing in equity and failing to diversify leadership roles.

They wished to see more "authentic" equity work. On the individual level, they wished to see greater transparency and honesty about past and ongoing discriminatory practices in the field and in society. While this may lead to uncomfortable conversations, they hoped that the result could be collective support toward improving transportation and working conditions. They wished to see workplaces put more effort into retention of their BPOC employees. This could be done by create an organizational culture that amplifies the voices of BPOC professionals

rather than tacitly or overtly silencing them. They wished for their colleagues to understand identity as intersectional and complex. Most of all, they wished to work in organizations that fundamentally respected the dignity of their BPOC employees. Finally, they wished to see transportation organizations recognize that equity work would be a long-term engagement, and let their agendas be guided by equity goals. Doing so would produce equity efforts that are both well-resourced and community-led with diverse leadership.

Examinations of micromobilities and policing offer case studies in how transportation work can be rethought from an authentic equity lens. In both cases, developing stronger relationships with communities offers innovative solutions to transportation challenges. Closing future visions offer ideas for how to create transportation systems that are people-centric. They offer suggestions for how transportation organizations can work in alignment with other fields struggling to account for historic injustices such as housing, environmental justice, and labor. The report concludes with suggestions for new research areas to explore.

Introduction

Land and history acknowledgement

The state of California is home to nearly 40 million people speaking over 200 different languages and with roots from around the globe. California is also the ancestral home of indigenous peoples, including 110 recognized tribes and 81 groups seeking recognition. The movement of colonizers from Spain, other European nations, and then the newly formed United States wiped out many of the native people by disease, war, and enslavement. This violence, driven by the desire for land and resources, was facilitated by systems of transportation. Networks of roads connected cities and eventually the transcontinental railroad connected California with the Eastern coast, embodying the spirit of Manifest Destiny that destroyed indigenous communities and exploited laborers such as Chinese migrants who built the railroad. Along the rail corridor, land values rose. In the post-World-War II era, transportation systems contributed to racial segregation and the disempowerment of low-income communities and communities of color (*1*). Highways built to service suburban housing for predominantly white populations were built over or through historically Black and Latino communities in many cities (*2*–*4*). These injuries were exacerbated by redlining, which kept Black and Brown communities in separate, often more exposed, geographic areas (*5*). More recently, these same communities are undergoing gentrification and displacement as city centers become popular again. This frequently results in longtime residents finding themselves pushed out just as their neighborhoods are enjoying infrastructural improvements (*6*–*8*). And finally, technology-based new mobilities, a potentially revolutionary shift toward sustainability, need to be more strongly connected to community-derived solutions, equity, and racial justice (*9, 10*). These historical and researched realities are the context for this report. They ground an understanding of California's transportation networks as rooted in systems of oppression, racial injustice, extractive capitalism, and white supremacy.

Context of report

The goal of this report is to assess the status of transportation equity work in California by seeking the expert perspectives of transportation professionals who also identify as Black, Indigenous, or people of color. We recruited 28 interviewees through transportation planning professional networks and referrals. Respondents were recruited through listservs for transportation professionals, state agencies such as Caltrans, and through referrals. Of those interviewed, 36% identify as Latinx, 21% identify as Black, 14% identify as Asian or Pacific Islander, 25% identify as mixed race, and 3% identify as Middle Eastern. While we strived to recruit Indigenous planners into the study, we were not successful. Thus, throughout the study we will refer to planners who identify as Black or people of color (BPOC). This is not meant to be exclusionary of the indigenous community, but to acknowledge the limitation of the study. Regarding gender, 64% identify as female, 25% identify as male, and 11% identify as non-binary. Those interviewed skewed young, with 85% of interviewees being under 40. 42% of

those surveyed work in advocacy, 25% in policy, 25% in government or planning, and 7% in research or education.

This study is based on the presumption that the life experiences of being Black, Indigenous or a Person of Color (BIPOC) combined with expertise as transportation professionals gives them a unique and highly valuable lens through which to assess what aspects of equity work are most impactful and where shortcomings exist. This theory draws upon a long and rich history of critical race theory and feminist research that describes a sort of "double vision" that is necessary to survive living in oppressive social conditions due to racism and sexism (*11*, *12*). When one's life experience challenges traditional assumptions, particularly when those experiences arise from suffering from the impacts of bias and oppression, a person can become more attuned to their operation in others and oneself. In keeping with this insight, this study values the framework of mobility justice forwarded by the Untokening Collective and articulated in the Principles of Mobility Justice (*13*). Mobility justice envisions a world where BIack communities, communities of color, people with disabilities, immigrants, trans people, queer people, women, and youth can move freely and without fear of violence. In the workplace, mobility justice strives for working environments where professionals can contribute from their full knowledge and experience without fear of retribution. In communities, mobility justice visions that longtime residents can afford to stay in place as their community receives long-overdue infrastructural improvements, and communities are equal partners in creating infrastructural changes. This study also draws insight from the fields of disability justice and design justice (*14, 15*), which highlight the importance of attending to how design processes and systems unequally distribute risks, harms, and benefits, and call for more participatory processes in decision-making that integrate community-based traditions, knowledges, and practices (*15*).

Interviewees were asked questions about their career trajectory, their understanding of equity within transportation with specific questions on new mobilities. With the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic and uprisings after the murder of George Floyd, we adjusted the script to ask about the impact of these phenomena on transportation equity work. Interviews lasted from 1-2 hours. They were recorded, transcribed, and coded based on a mix of pre-established and emerging themes. Their answers were then contextualized within existing literature on transportation equity, which is reflected in the themes and findings described in this report.

Researching Equity in Times of COVID-19 and Police Violence

During this research project, two major events occurred: the COVID-19 pandemic and the murder of George Floyd. The latter, along with numerous other deaths of Black people at the hands of law enforcement, led to mass protests and demands for systemic change. COVID-19 and movements against police violence have produced a moment of reckoning for many, which changed the context of this study. In a sense, we were assessing equity efforts at the same time as the nation was assessing equity. This has resulted in an elevated focus on racial, economic, and environmental justice, including in transportation planning and policy spaces. In California, organizations seeking to embrace equity, diversity, and inclusion are beginning to understand that there must also be a shift towards recognizing the role of racial justice within these efforts. These events had a major impact on transportation systems, workplace dynamics, and how the transportation field approaches equity. The interviews captured three major stages in the changing work environment: (1) initial response to the pandemic, (2) impact of racial uprisings, and (3) establishing a "new normal."

Initial response to the pandemic

Interviews for this project, which began in late March 2020, captured the moment that large-scale work from home orders shifted many workers to remote participation. Priorities pivoted in funding, job functions, project timelines, and program priorities. Early on, interviewees expressed understanding that existing inequities would be exacerbated by the global pandemic, a prediction that has been borne out (*16–22*). One interviewee stated: "…the pandemic is pointing out that people who had…low-level social determinants of health… access to clinics, access to good water, access to good food, are the ones who are disproportionately being killed by the virus…we're talking about black folks… indigenous folks and immigrants..."

In response, advocates found ways to remotely support policy initiatives, direct service requests, and mutual aid for communities they serve. Many of the interviewees in this study found themselves focused on supporting access to basic community needs including cash, food, and housing. Engagement became more complicated, as limitations on in-person gatherings made traditional models impossible. One respondent reflected on their experience engaging with their community through Zoom: "The process itself of having our community meetings… has been a total shift... Definitely relying a lot more on calling and texting. Some of us are more successful than others at Zoom meetings because some communities … have a lot easier access and are familiar with it." Monique Lopez, Founder of Pueblo Planning, reflected on how their organization is responding to the shift brought on by the pandemic: "Even though a lot of things have shifted in terms of being able to physically be in space, our ethos hasn't shifted. Our ethos is still to engage those individuals and do it in a way that is in partnership with organizations that have already developed those relationships with those individuals."

Impact of uprisings for Black lives

As spring turned in to early summer, tensions exploded when the murders of several Black individuals were publicly displayed to an increasingly polarized nation. Protests in response to the murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and too many others sparked a national emergency and a moment of deep reckoning with the dangers of systematically entrenched white supremacist policies. The uprisings of the summer of 2020, coupled with the devastating effects of the global pandemic and unprecedented statewide devastation caused by wildfires, resulted in a renewed sense of urgency in support of Black lives and marginalized peoples. Again, this research project pivoted to capture how the work of its participants to uplift equity and justice was being thrust into the national spotlight. Some faced an inability to continue working in a space that was becoming increasingly hostile, while others were finally being recognized and sought out for their expertise in developing these policies and programs. The pace of work quickened, even as the emotional toll of equity work increased.

Municipal and state transportation agencies throughout California published commitments in support of equity and diversity, and many called for the acknowledgement of past and current harms caused by policies and infrastructure projects. Participants in this project recognize and appreciate many of these public displays of support. At the same time, they wondered how much transportation and other sectors will retain this commitment. As one participant said:

> The urgency around some issues has changed, the ability to connect with residents has totally changed, and then the conversations about racial justice, which we were having obviously before this year and before George Floyd, are all of a sudden something that people seem to care about and something that agencies at the state seem to care about. Before George Floyd was murdered, I don't think that I heard anybody at the State talk about Black Lives Matter, white supremacy, or say the name of a black man who got murdered by the police or a trans woman or anybody. It was like, "What?" On the one hand I'm like, "Okay, great. This is great." And on the other hand, I'm like, "I don't trust you."

This quotation expresses the sentiment expressed by many BPOC professionals. While they appreciate the field's growing awareness of equity's importance, they worry that this will be a trend that is dropped when solutions do not come easily.

Establishing a "new normal"

Several interviewees detailed how smaller, more dynamic teams with expertise in equity and community engagement were needed within their organizations and institutions. Cities and counties throughout California began to adopt transportation planning policies, like parklets and car-free streets, that had been kept out of mainstream programs. These programs require dynamic, nimble coordination, which our BPOC interviewees are well versed in. One interviewee reflected that "... [COVID] has literally forced us to work together because all this has thrown our job descriptions up in the air." Several interviewees offered critiques of reactive

program implementation, showing how hastily enacted solutions can result in the exacerbation of inequities within the communities they are supposed to serve. Various participants shared that their work as equity champions within their organizations prepared them to not only offer more useful ways to design and implement Covid-19 safe transportation plans, but to also assess them from an equity perspective.

From Performative to Authentic Equity Work

Defining Equity

Particularly in the aftermath of 2020, transportation agencies are increasingly dedicating time and resources to hiring equity experts, including many who took part in this study. While this is a necessary first step, organizational structures or policies often become barriers to further movement. This can lead to a dynamic where equity is "performed" but meaningful action remains undone. This is often called "performative equity." Performative equity refers to actions, words, or gestures that claim to do equity work, but in practice do not improve matters for those historically oppressed. Authentic equity work stands in contrast to performative equity work. Participants often described authentic equity work as demonstrably improving the living conditions of historically oppressed communities. They repeatedly spoke of the following key goals when defining equity.

1. Redistribution of resources to the most under-invested and historically disinvested communities
2. Redistribution of decision-making power to the most under-invested and historically disinvested communities
3. Achieving parity in transportation access for the most under-invested and historically disinvested communities
4. Assertion of dignity for people's humanity as a core value.

These goals can inform actions that are targeted, transparent, and measurable. They point toward the need for change not just in rhetoric, but also policy and practice. Equity as defined by research participants requires systemic change and individual reflection at a deep level. This is well-illustrated by the contrast between performative equity work versus authentic equity work. Solutions require clearly defining the terms, scope, and vision for equity work. When there is not agreement about what constitutes good equity work, it can be hard to make meaningful progress. Thus, it is helpful to differentiate between performative work, which tends to degrade the humanity of those who have borne the brunt of oppressive systems, and authentic work, which elevates dignity for all people's humanity.

Performative Equity Work

Performative equity work describes practices that reinforce root systems of dominance and status quo, while claiming to promote inclusion. This is a known phenomenon within scholarship on equity, diversity, and inclusion (*23*, *24*). Sara Ahmed describes this phenomenon in depth in her book, *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (*25*). Performative equity work is not necessarily intentional or malicious on the part of those engaging in the performance. In fact, many times it results from good intentions that are not fully informed or reflective. Nonetheless, the impacts of performative equity work can be devastating and impede more authentic work.

As one participant said,

> There's the constant threat of equity washing, of people having these grand equity commitments but not having a process by which to execute their equity commitments. Not having accountability to meeting those equity goals, not having equity expertise...equity washing is something that we have labeled as one of the biggest issues that we're facing as a collective because it gives people the feeling of, yeah we're doing it. We hired so and so or we have this equity program but without doing the deeper work of looking inward. What are our practices like? Why are people leaving so often? Why can't we retain anyone? So, I think it's just going to take a lot more work on all of our ends to figure out how to walk the talk on equity.

Performative allyship, a related term, can be detrimental to the process of creating safe environments where individual and organizational growth may occur. Erskine and Bilimoria show how performative allyship occurs when "well-meaning people with power and privilege show interest in becoming an ally but do not engage in the ongoing emotional labor, self-reflection, continuous education, courage, commitment, and exchange of power inherent in true allyship". Performative allies may leverage their privilege to engage in "empty activism" with the purpose of gaining social capital or validation, without fully understanding the depth and breadth of the issue (*26*, *27*). Furthermore, performative allyship and inclusion refuses to sacrifice "personal or professional capital to challenge or transform systems that they benefit from, even unwittingly" (*28*). Spanierman and Smith add that these efforts may be received as "cosmetic, superficial, and transitory, rather than as facilitating structural change" (*29*). Performative allyship can result in repeating or creating new systems of oppression. Power as performance can contribute to further isolation and hopelessness for individuals or teams tasked with promoting equity.

Authentic Equity Work

Authentic equity work results in meaningful change to those most impacted by historical racism and oppression. The practice of authentic equitable planning and policy development requires a commitment to a long process of individual, interpersonal, cultural, and organizational reframing. Destiny Thomas, founder of Thrivance Institute, reminds practitioners that these processes "must be developed through a sustained examination of each of these institution's historic and ongoing racist legacies" (*30*). Valuing transportation equity requires considering culture and history when building new infrastructure or integrating new mobility technologies. Transportation agencies and practitioners can consider how they can atone for past harms done by their institution and profession. This is part of fostering dignity and humanizing "users." The following quote from an interviewee highlights the harmful effects of transportation policies when history and culture are not taken into consideration.

> People's histories are infused with how they've been mistreated by government and this was the time for government to actually own up to it. And so, I say that with tears because it's the lived experience of our communities that don't get elevated in

> conversations about billions and billions of dollars to do what? Right? And oftentimes transportation planning is very... It's acultural, or whatever. I don't even know what to call it. You are numbers, you are auto throughput, you are cars on the road, you are not a person with identity and history and culture.

Equity initiatives, when intertwined with a justice-based framework, strive to interrogate how past harms continue to affect people living within the communities they are designed to serve. By gaining this important historical context, these initiatives can then begin to seek to repair past harms by centering the experiences of those who have been historically marginalized when seeking future solutions.

An important aspect of authentic equity work is to think intersectionally. Legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality to describe the unique form of discrimination faced by Black women that is different than that experienced by "women" (for which the default was white women) and Black people (which defaulted as men) (*31*). Key to this approach is paying attention to how power operates across difference, and how discrimination is both overlapping and unique. Black feminist scholar Patricia Hill Collins describe how we live within a "matrix of domination" that requires us to think about power across three different levels: the personal/interpersonal level, the cultural/community level, and the institutional/ideological level (*32*). These work together to shape assumption and norms that can code bias and discrimination. One participant gave an example of this by discussing how they saw people using concerns around public safety to "hide their literal disgust with people who aren't housed." They argued that this concern acted to obfuscate racial discrimination. They went on to say, "If you were to replace the word unhoused with something else like a racial identifier, it would not be acceptable. But people see just houseless people as an acceptable way to get their opinions out." This points out how it's not enough to just focus on race, or gender, or class. All must be considered as important to maintaining the dignity of those who deserve to be served by transportation systems.

Table 1. Performative Equity versus Authentic Equity

Matrix of Domination Levels	Performative Equity	Authentic equity
Individual to Interpersonal	From…Defensiveness Guilt Comfort Emotional isolation	To…Collective Support Honesty Discomfort Collective support
Interpersonal to Cultural	From…Tokenism Hiring Voice disregarded Identity as reductionistic Position with no power	To…Dignity Retention Voice amplified Identity as intersectional Dignity-Infused workplace
Cultural to Institutional	From…Checklist Approach Retrofitting or downscaling equity Under-investment White-led	To…Long-Term Engagement Equity-led agendas Fully resourced Community-led

Table 1 describes the differences between performative equity work and authentic equity work that emerged in this study. These differentials are mapped in relationship to Patricia Hill Collins' Matrix of Domination, which demonstrates the necessity of equity interventions across various levels, from the individual to the interpersonal, to the cultural, to the institutional. These movements from performative to authentic equity work are described in detail in the following sections.

From Defensiveness to Collective Support

From Guilt to Honesty

On the individual level, research participants experienced colleagues reacting defensively in discussions of equity. This phenomenon is often referred to as white guilt or white fragility (*33*). Ethnic studies scholar George Lipsitz attributes this to a "possessive investment in whiteness." This describes the attachment many have to whiteness because of the structured advantages it provides--the unearned rewards and privileges that are experienced as a loss in the call to equity (*34*).

One participant shared, "I don't know that anything ever fully prepares you for the racism and fragility of white people." They went on to say,

> I believe that everyone who does transportation work is a good person. You don't get into this to make the big bucks, right? I literally think people who are in this industry do it because they want to help people and because they care and because they're

> passionate because they want to do the right thing…But then I think because people are so well meaning and are such good people and are so deeply rooted to that image of themselves, there's something particularly sensitive about them in this space that when you... It's not even push them. When you say, "Oh, really…," it is really tough for them.

By “Oh really…” they refer to challenges or critiques that in areas other than race are accepted or even expected as part of the professional workplace. However, when it came to issues of race, they experienced a sensitivity that shut down conversations. White professionals often experience situations where racism is pointed out as attacks, often attacks to their identity. This reaction can force an oppositional relationship, unless the person who raised the challenge (usually a BPOC professional) finds a way to assuage the white person’s feeling of hurt. Thus, the critique gets sidelined and the person who raised it becomes responsible for maintaining the peace, which ultimately also maintains the status quo.

As one participant put it, “I think that equity is transparent and honest…it starts with a transparent and honest reflection of where we’ve been as a field.” This means looking at the complicity of transportation in perpetuating systemic racism at the individual, interpersonal, and institutional levels (*32*). Further, it requires change at all levels of the matrix of domination. Knowing the histories of discrimination in planning, both nationally and locally, is highly recommended. In an informal poll of transportation researchers and professionals conducted by the author at a virtual professional conference, only 27% of 72 attendees reported knowing “a lot” about their local history of transportation and planning inequity (redlining, highway construction, etc.). Learning and reflecting on the ongoing impacts of these histories can better equip transportation planners to have honest and difficult conversations. Open curiosity and reflection on one’s own behavior can also create a mindset more receptive to critique. Cultivating this “learner’s mindset” sets the stage for honesty and transparency, a precondition for change.

From Comfort to Discomfort

Discussion of equity is a difficult process, which many participants acknowledged. They noted that the process will be uncomfortable and require rethinking assumptions and standard practices. As one professional consultant said, “This is going to get hard, and we’re going to want to quit. People might get offended, but we’re going to keep coming back…Sometimes being successful is not the same thing as being perfect.” When leadership take this attitude and embrace change, even when it is uncomfortable, they can make more space for BPOC professionals and community participation.

One way to address this is through affinity groups that allow white professionals to engage in the interpersonal work needed to address institutional racism. As one participant put it, “Unless you have a really nuanced understanding of racial equity, *and* yourself and your identity, you're not going to be able to implement that strategy with the fidelity to anti-racism like you should...It's all good when you can say that oh, it's institutional racism, it's nothing about me. But when you get to kind of the interpersonal stuff, people are like, "Whoa, I don't know. I'm a

nice person."" However, part of maintaining dignity for professionals and community members as whole people is acknowledging and working on one's limitations, including the ways that one may be complicit in ongoing acts of racism, even if unintentional. When this is accepted, one can make the changes necessary to engage in anti-racism work.

From Emotional Isolation to Collective Support

Many spoke of the mental and emotional stressors of the work. Some of this arose from the ongoing performative commitment to equity they felt from their workplace, as described above. Interviewees called for transportation agencies and organizations to do the internal work of creating a more equitable work environment. As one participant shared, "There's no reason in trying to go advocate to help out our communities…if we're not looking at our own racial dynamics." To do any authentic work with communities, this is crucial.

Many interviewees spoke of the emotional costs wrought upon BPOC by legacies and systems of oppression. These are wide-ranging, from intergenerational trauma and resilience borne from systems of racism to norms that are centered on whiteness to everyday acts of discrimination and microaggressions. Many professionals spoke of the toll of this emotional labor—from code-switching, to educating others, to attending to other's feelings at their own expense. Some wished that leadership would recognize this burden as part of the work they did and provide support. Adding to their emotional and mental burden is the fact that they may be doing this at the same time as they are hearing and witnessing impacts of transportation violence and transportation-related state-sanctioned violence (such as police shootings and ICE raids) within the communities they serve.

Efforts that assist with these challenges include but are not limited to the creation of affinity groups, elevating the voices of BPOC staff, and giving these staff more power and leadership. Good allyship may mean noticing the input and reactions of BPOC colleagues. One interviewee noted, "We'll have a tough meeting and then she'll text me afterwards and be like, "Hey, I noticed you didn't say a lot during that meeting. Am I missing something? Because your voice is the one I want to hear." This type of act, along with calling out interruptions or negation of someone's comments can all be helpful.

From Tokenism in Hiring to Dignity in Retention

Many participants spoke to the issue of retention within transportation planning, policy, and advocacy. They acknowledged and were pleased with greater efforts to recruit and hire a diverse workforce and grow staffing investments in diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. However, they felt that institutions were not grappling with the changes and considerations needed to retain these talented staff. One participant put it this way:

> Another thing that I'm seeing now in a lot of these Department of Transportation and transit agencies is they're hiring folks of color, which is awesome, but they are not creating the conditions nor the power-making authority to actually create a change that moves towards equity and social justice. So, what ends up happening now is you put this

> person there, and they get bombarded with the community getting frustrated that they can't make that decision, but the reality is they weren't actually given any real power. They're just a stand-in, so I think there's a lot to be said around the research about the racial dynamics within these organizations and the need to solve it.

The needed workplace cultural shift is best described as one moving from tokenism to dignity. Tokenism is a complex and well-researched phenomenon, which many research participants experienced in their work lives (*13*, *35–37*). Isolation, underinvestment, and a lack of institutional buy in can make it difficult for equity practitioners to incorporate strategies or policies.

"We want your brown body, but not your ideas"

A tokenistic work environment invites Black professionals and professionals of color into the conversation but rejects ideas that do not accord with the status quo (*38*). One person experienced the dynamic of tokenism as such: "Yes, it's a good initiative until it hurts my reality, and then I'm not going to listen." Other professionals felt that while their work was held up as important by the organization, they themselves were treated badly by their employer. This led some to quit and begin work as consultants. One person who followed this path shared, "The organization had no problem touting me as their equity planner and holding me and my work up as an example of how they were making advances in the realm of equity, but treating me very poorly. So they brought me in and had a really difficult conversation with me and basically said either stop talking so much or leave. So I chose to leave."

"Speak for *your people*"

Tokenism also reduces the complexity of difference and oppression. One research participant shared how they felt they were supposed to be "representing a vague non-group, a faceless group that is not connected to [the agency] in a way." This is the phenomenon of one Black person or person of color being asked to represent all people "like them." Others felt that they were asked to represent constituents that they could not ethically represent. Or, they felt that they were being asked to weigh in on matters that they could not speak to. This comes from a reductionistic approach to equity—that one person doing equity work or from a historically oppressed community can speak for all others. Such an attitude denies the importance of intersectionality. One participant noted that as a person from a working middle class background, they cannot represent all low-income folks. They may represent organizations who represent low-income members, but that is a key distinction. Another participant often found themselves asked questions in matters that others were more expert in. For example, they were asked to weigh in on matters that were better addressed by an environmental justice expert. Speaking to the person most expert is crucial for quality equity work, especially when the outcome may impact funding, policy, or programming. In this sense, some participants felt transportation could learn from other fields such as public health, environmental justice, and housing.

Position with No Power

A tokenistic attitude can result in under-staffing as equity is siloed within the organization. This often occurs when there is not widespread buy-in for equity work. In a moment when equity work is trending, one professional worried,

> I am concerned that as a band-aid, many of them will simply throw up a single position or hire a single individual, give them the responsibility of being responsible for making equity happen but not giving them any of the real decision making power or giving them access to the appropriate resources to actually manifest anything into reality and then a few years down the road, they all throw up their hands and say, Well, shoot, we can't figure this out, this whole equity thing, it doesn't make sense. So we're just not going to deal with it.

Relatedly, others described the stress of constantly having to educate others about equity and the importance of community-based planning. This was particularly harrowing if they were having to convince those above them in the organizational hierarchy. Sometimes equity professionals felt that they were being tasked to do work that they structurally could not do because they were not granted the decision-making power or leverage to realize the institution's stated goals. Thus, their job became mainly one of talking about equity and convincing others, rather than taking meaningful action.

A Dignity-Infused Workplace

The challenge of tokenism has been so pervasive than the planners of a gathering of active transportation professionals who identify as Black, Indigenous, or as people of color (BIPOC) or who work in these communities named the event "The Untokening." In this space, professionals experienced a level of dignity not felt in their daily work lives. This emphasis on dignity has been cultivated by the Thrivance Group, an organization working at the intersection of planning and transformative justice and People for Mobility Justice (*39*, *40*). Thrivance Group's Dignity-Infused Community Engagement and Planning (DICE) trainings offers bi-annual trainings to professionals interested in anti-racist praxis, robust community engagement, and justice-oriented practices. People for Mobility Justice, a grassroots organization in Los Angeles, offers a vision for transportation futures embedded in the "Five D's:" decolonize, decongest, decriminalize, dignify, and determination (*40*).

As one research participant put it, "Equity includes dignity. This means not having to explain or make anyone privy to my trauma in order to qualify for equity." Numerous participants pointed out how trauma, inflicted through everyday interactions and through major life events, should be a consideration in equity work. Doing so is crucial to respecting the dignity of people. It can be harmful when BIPOC individuals or communities are asked or forced to explain or perform their trauma to receive aid or attention. This reinforces a deficit model that imagines these communities as lacking, rather than attending to how they have built strength even in the face of disinvestment and oppression (*41*, *42*). At the same time, the impacts of trauma must be taken into account.

A participant who did extensive work with youth related how important it was that they learned how to work with young folks who had high rates of trauma. They learned that many of the youth they worked with were going through, “really heavy stuff…and we found a way to have the bikes be that therapy for them.” This shows how some professionals we interviewed saw transportation and the re-creation of built environment as part of a healing process. Authentic equity work can lead to healing, when all those involved are regarded with dignity (*43*).

From Checklists to Nuanced Engagement

Regarding the relationship between transportation planning and historically disinvested communities, participants experienced performative equity as demands for a checklist. That is, some felt that they were asked for prescription to cure inequity, as if histories of oppression were a simple problem to solve, and that all the answers were already predetermined. This was felt as a desire to quickly "solve" equity so that their colleagues could get on with the things they really cared about rather than acknowledging the need for a deep engagement with the long-term work needed. One participant defined performative allyship this way: "the approach to it is, "Tell me what we need to do, and I'll do it tomorrow and then I can wipe my hands and say, I did it."" Rather, those we interviewed pointed out that the work will be difficult and painful. Many spoke of how initial enthusiasm for equity work faded when it upset people's ideas. This rejection of real change was repeatedly listed as a challenge.

Equity requires a redistribution in who gets funded, more flexibility in how funds can be spent, and expanded opportunities for programmatic and “human infrastructure” (*44*). They noted that redistribution of funds is often met with resistance, even by those who say they support equity work. As one professional put it, “The moment you actually talk to people about what this would look like, I think there's a little bit of, "Oh, I didn't think you meant that far." Maybe we don't need to do 100% equity. Maybe we do 50% equity, because…I'm not willing to sacrifice what I want to give you what you deserve.” This often comes up in the NIMBY-ism of affordable housing. In transportation, one practitioner saw this in the form of broader community resistance to prioritizing paving projects in historically disinvested communities. They saw an attitude of, “I like the idea of repaving streets and low-income communities, but I still want mine to be repaved as well, understanding that there's a limited amount of funds. I still want the council to pay special attention to these issues, but why aren't they answering my phone calls as well? Why aren't they answering my emails as well?” The potential sacrifice that more privileged communities may have to make was not often accounted for.

Authentic solutions arise from ongoing community engagement with those communities who have been most neglected and residents who are most vulnerable. Creating and maintaining continuous relationships with historically neglected communities is a complex and resource-intensive process (*45*, *46*). And yet, it is requisite for equity work that addresses past injustices and creates more just futures.

From Retrofitting Equity to Equity-Led Agendas

Common performative gestures at the institutional level are retrofitting equity and downscaling equity efforts to just "outreach." These can effectively undermine equity by setting them up for failure before they even get started. As one participant put it, "There's still a ghettoization of diversity, equity and inclusion into outreach. And so people think if they can check an outreach box then they've done it. Then I think the second most common thing is that it's trying to be retrofitted. And so it's like, "We've already done this whole project, but we realized equity is a concern. Can we bring you in to tell us what you think after the fact that after all the decisions are made and you can't really impact much?"

One group in the Central Valley creates equity-led agendas at monthly meetings with community members. Their process works with residents to: "envision the community that residents want to live in. And then we work to get that vision represented and plans and policies. And then we organize and advocate to get the plans and policies implemented so that residents can benefit from the time that they spend sharing their feedback." While interviewees had much more to say about the need for quality community engagement, another recent study by the author provides guidelines for best practices in community engagement (*45*).

From Under-invested to Fully Resourced

As one participant noted, "People always underestimate time and resources needed to do things in an equitable way." This sub-par investment in equity allows an institution to say they tried and defer blame for the failure onto others.

Authentic equity work requires a significant change from status quo and a transfer of funding, time, resources, and energy. They require professionals and leaders to rescind power to communities very different from them, which is a complex process that requires recognizing differential expertise. These are the expertise of everyday lived reality that know the challenges of a place intimately. These are expertise that see innovative solutions that are often not recognized as such. They are expertise that adhere to alternative logics and value systems, that while different, are no less valid that those which traditionally dominate in transportation planning.

Accounting for histories of inequity requires investment. Another aspect of authentic equity work that surfaced in interviews was directing resources to historically under-invested communities that centers longtime community members and allows them to stay in the community. Residents of these communities continue to live with the legacies of disinvestment such as poor air quality, roads in disrepair, poor transit access, lack of updated infrastructure, etc. This directly impacts their daily lives and can limit access to jobs, healthcare, educational opportunities, commerce, and green spaces. One participant shares, "We're actually giving them access to greater resources to bring them to a level of parity with the rest of the

community." The Transformative Climate Communities program run by the Strategic Growth Council is one project that was cited repeatedly as a model for this form of investment (*47*).

Flexibility in how funds can be used was reiterated by many. They noted that grants often come with restrictions that prevent them from addressing community needs and engaging in community-drive solutions. Oftentimes, funders dictate what money can be used for rather than consulting with the community about where investments are most needed. While these restrictions may be based in best practices and research, they are not taking into account the needs of disinvested communities. Central to the need for flexibility is the need for more community control and a redistribution of power (*48–50*). As one professional who worked for a funding agency put it, "It's an outsider going in and telling people, "Hey, I have this money, but you have to do this with it." It's another power imbalance, right? Because I have this money. You might need it, and you have to do this with it." She related a story of how funding for increasing safety in a community could only fund infrastructure. This was not helpful for the community, because what they needed was peer patrolling. "That's what's going to get people out and walking. It's not closeness and connectivity to the park, it's like, our block is not safe. This is what we need the money for. But the money is limiting, and we're not allowed to do that." Fortunately, she was able to work with them to find another way to fund a peer patrolling program, which yielded the desired results. "We saw violent crime and nonviolent crime go significantly down. So you were seeing more people coming out. You were seeing more people." This example demonstrates that many communities know the solutions to the challenges they face—they need access to the resources to realize the solutions. The flexibility to spend funds not just on built infrastructure, but also on expertise, programming, and "human infrastructure" is needed (*38*).

From White-Led to Community-Led

As collective conversations within organizations shift to brainstorming ways to commit to systemic change, a recognition of the lack of racial diversity within organizational leadership and boards is a consistent challenge within transportation planning and policy (*51*). One participant, representing an advocacy organization, recognized that "our board has been historically wealthier, whiter", and that in order to support Black lives and racial justice initiatives, they needed to "adjust and compensate." "A truly equitable transportation system," added another participant, "would not only with different in the street, it would look different in the boardroom." Numerous participants noted the homogeneity of board rooms, commissions, and other decision-making bodies. One participant said, "Many of the people are older, able-bodied, straight white men. And so maybe the bigger problem there is just that the people that we're theoretically all serving are not the people leading those decisions."

Participants pointed out the importance of shifting power imbalances. While this takes many forms, one key intervention stated repeatedly was to increase the level of accountability to communities. This can look like conducting more rigorous community engagement that is led by community members as equal partners. It is bringing the process to those most impacted on

their terms and giving agency to them. It can also extend to letting the community define what the goals are in the first place. For example, one participant described this as “having the freedom to define what health and thriving is for you and your family.”

The following quote from an interviewee demonstrates how equitable processes involve not just inclusion, but a redistribution of power:

> Equity is being invited to the process or the process coming to you, but also there being a real sense of agency attached to your voice, not performative inclusion… I think equity, really equity in this field is going to have to mean intentionally removing power from where it is within transportation field and redistributing it or re-creating it collectively.

Equity Case Studies

What follows is two timely case studies that demonstrate how organizations and individuals can move from performative equity work to authentic equity work. The case studies examine new mobilities and policing. New mobilities addresses key equity issues emerging around micromobilities (bike share and scooter share) and new modes of automobility (shared, automation, and electrification). Policing engages in issues of race and state-sanctioned violence in transportation and mobility systems. Embedded in both is attention to the relationship between equity and community engagement (*45*).

New Mobilities

Conversations and rollout of new mobilities such as micromobilities (bike share and scooter share) and new modes of automobility (shared, automation, and electrification) offer a case study for considering the challenges raised when equity is "retrofitted" (*52*) These new technologies are created to address perceived challenges and generate new market opportunities. They also have the capacity to address equity issues. To address equity in an authentic way, the concerns of the most impacted and vulnerable populations must be well-integrated. As one well-respected expert in the field shared, "Any new technology can address equity in our cities. It just depends if the people driving it and the people who are decision makers care about equity and do what they can to make that possible." They noted how when equity concerns are raised about new technology, infrastructure, or policy, proponents often avoid addressing these concerns by implying that equity advocates are "against" the new innovation. Participants cited examples of this happening in conversations around Vision Zero, micromobilities, and (during COVID) open streets (*53–55*). In each case, when concerns were raised about impacts on historically neglected and under-resourced communities, some thought leaders in transportation framed these challenges as impediments to progress, rather than valid points that needed to be addressed. What equity advocates would like to see—at minimum—is more engagement about the rollout of these new innovations (*56*, *57*). They are concerned about how local communities are impacted, effects on those with disabilities, industry's tendency to "sidestep government and jurisdictions" and "prioritizing people who have credit cards." One interviewee shared this story about a bike share rollout in their neighborhood:

> …what we saw was people being frustrated and being like, 'yeah, I'm a storefront owner here for the last 20 years, and one day, I came to my shop, and it (bike share station) just was in front, and I didn't know.' It's like, 'Whoa, they did a terrible job outreaching. The people who have a station in front of their own storefront didn't even know.' That's a terrible sense of disempowerment.

This level of disconnect could have potentially been reduced by improving lines of communication between the sponsoring agency and the shop owner. The process of this project turned what could have been a potentially beneficial project into an instance of

decisions made outside of the community impacting those within the community, without their consent or voice.

Another, more specific issue raised around micromobilities is the influence of industry on transportation agencies. Research participants were concerned that this could lead to a consumer-based model of equity. In this model, equity is reduced to the equal opportunity to desire and use a product. This way of thinking is not based in community need or speaking to their concerns. One participant shared,

> Our public agencies are buying what the industry is selling and then trying to figure out why poor people aren't using the products that they've decided should be publicly available...I think that defining equity as marketing to communities of color, that a totally inequitable and unsustainable industry creates things and then [puts] them all over public space. They strong arms public agencies into setting up contracts for them and then says, "Why aren't poor people using our things? How can we make scooters a first last mile solution for these marginalized communities?"

This is a more specific example of how equity is seen as a retrofit, and in this case predetermined to only speak to issues of equal use for a product already deemed to be in the public's best interest without consulting with relevant publics.

These experiences led many interviewees to experience distrust in new projects that did not include equity experts and community input from the earliest stage. Many experienced a need for strong equity advocacy, sometimes in the face of opposition. Even when successful results were achieved, they remained skeptical. “I don't think without intervention, new technologies can provide for equity. I think there has to be a very strong framework, intention and regulation of these enterprises to accommodate what's necessary for making these equitable modes.” They went on to describe how when a bike share program was introduced to their city, there was a major push from community groups to make it accessible via reduced fee subscriptions. Once these were implemented, the success of the project grew.

Equity issues get more complicated in conversations around automated or electric passenger vehicles (*10*, *57*, *58*). Shifting from a bike share to owning their own bike is accessible to many people. Bike share can be a stepping stone toward private ownership, which can grant individuals more autonomy and control if they choose. This is not so easily done with vehicles. As one participant pointed out, “So it doesn't shift the mode, it just shifts the fact that now they're having to own a bike versus use the Bikeshare. But with other new mobility, I mean, who's going to be able to own their own automated vehicles? Very fluid folks.”

Many participants noted how conversations about new mobilities risked abandoning public transit—the backbone of transportation for many marginalized communities, including through the pandemic (*59*). As one transportation professional shared, “After three years of researching new mobility, autonomous vehicles, the equity impacts and policy responses, I think our main take away is that in urban areas, public transit has to be the core.” One transportation advocate

shared how focusing resources on current transit riders, who tended to be from low-income communities, grew transit use in a time when transit use was declining in most other cities. This was made possible through an explicit shift in policy from attempting to build ridership in communities not known to use transit (such as suburban enclaves) towards better accommodating existing users.

Policing

Interviewees discussed policing strategies and tactics as one of the highest priority areas in need of transformation. Transportation and policing is a crucial equity issue. The protests of the summer of 2020 brought increased awareness to streets as sites of injustice and inequity (*60*). Communities desire solutions beyond policing and acknowledge that increased policing and surveillance create unsafe conditions for marginalized groups including Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, women, trans and gender non-conforming people, and poor and undocumented individuals. Interviews supported research revealing that policing within transportation networks disproportionately targets BIPOC individuals, resulting in higher levels of arrests and police violence (*61–68*). Emphasizing enforcement to create safer streets has been thought to make streets safer (for some), though recent research reveals that traffic enforcement may have no impact on crashes (*69*). In this context, current standard policing practices bear re-examination, especially given a preponderance of qualitative evidence that increased police presence leads to decreased safety for Black communities, Indigenous people, and communities of color. Charles Brown calls this phenomenon "Arrested Mobility," highlighting how many people from the Black community are apprehended, accosted, injured, or killed simply for moving about public space (*61*). Research shows that Black, Indigenous and communities of color receive more citations and fines within transportation networks, which can be disastrous for poor and working class families living paycheck to paycheck (*66*, *67*, *70*).

Transportation equity practitioners are pushing the boundaries of the function and form of police and surveillance, stressing a need to emphasize safety as a core focus:

> … the police don't stop traffic crimes from happening…the infrastructure that we have in place can deter people from driving too fast. Everyone in [City] has really started to talk about what safety means for houseless people, and do we need police officers to keep us safe? Who are the ones that are keeping us safe? And if it is the police officers that keep us safe, why haven't they kept us safe since now then? Because there's crime increasing all the time, so are they really are keeping us safe?

Data challenging the efficacy of police to increase public safety confirms the lived experience of many Black people and communities of color, while often unsettling unquestioned beliefs of upper and middle-class white communities. Disconnects between professionals of color and

their white counterparts can make strategy implementation difficult. Reflecting on policing within transportation networks, one interviewee said:

> A lot of times transportation programs use community policing or policing as a way to enforce safe driving...to keep walkers and bikers safe. But in communities of color, people don't feel safe when police are around...You really have to target what you're doing and think about the people that you're impacting. People that aren't of color just have a really hard time doing that, and so when it comes time for implementing something, they don't get the nuance of what actually is healthy or safe...All those words are very subjective, and everybody has their own lens on that, and it's hard for people to think outside of the box when it comes to other populations.

Transportation professionals have the opportunity to decouple safety and policing. Doing so opens up space for impacted communities to decide for themselves what safety can and should look like.

Community-based solutions that value existing safety networks offer innovative solutions. Examples of this can include revising police budgets to pay for support service providers and professionals trained in de-escalation practices to monitor networks instead of police or security professionals. One interviewee described this dynamic well when they spoke of working from community solutions to safety rather than relying on traditional policing models to ensure safety. They shared, “They weren’t trying to say, “let’s increase police presence.” No, it was like, let’s increase our own presence and police ourselves. Just our presence alone will deter people from acting a fool.” This speaks to the importance of including community-based solutions that diverge from traditional practices. This is an area where quality community engagement is vital. Over-policed communities who experience high levels of crime and violence have innovative ideas to address the roots of the problem by including the voices of those who know the challenges firsthand. As one interviewee shared, “I think that in an ideal world, the transit, this new mobility system includes technical and decision-making staff that are from and represent and look like and think like the communities that they're impacting. I think there are no police there. I think there are no police. And I think there are resource navigators…social workers.” Interviewees also spoke to the need to decriminalize poverty. For example, one tangible solution that addresses the criminalization of poverty is to lower or eliminate transit fares. These sort of change-oriented proposals bear greater consideration and analysis.

Future vision

As the final part of the interview, participants were asked to envision an equitable and just transportation system. The individuals interviewed for this project are professionals and experts in the field, and their personal and professional insights into future visions for transportation systems represents dynamic and profound understanding. Much of their vision aligned with calls seen in other areas of transportation. They wanted to see walkable communities where people are not forced to drive, greater use of transit and trains, and more sustainable modes of transportation. They also wanted to see greater community engagement and an investment in community that went beyond transportation. Their visions extended to more parks and green space, more affordable living, and the development of local economies. They wanted safer roads, and extended safety to include not just traffic deaths but also police and other forms of state-sanctioned violence and harassment.

Participants desired transportation systems that alleviated the pressures and stress associated with everyday life. As on participant shared, to “be in community, in myself and with others that are like me and not like me,” comes down to being “able to do whatever I want without being scared that someone is going to come and say, "You can't use that," or "You can't be here," or call the police on me and my husband.” They continued, “It doesn't even seem a reality, and so I don't even know how to picture what that would be… But I would imagine it's joyful, right?” Below are a few cross-cutting themes of their visions for transportation futures that reflected the equity lens they bring to the work.

People-Centric Systems

Interviewees called for more people-centric systems that created vibrant communities, particularly in places that have been devastated by past transportation injustices. One interviewee summed this up well, sharing:

> I think my future transportation is people. And I think of people in the broadest sense, young people, old people, people in the variety of neighborhoods that exist. And just having whatever is their preferred mode, being able to afford whatever that is. And being able to get there, get to their destinations at times that are beneficial for them, whether you're a student trying to get to class on time, or a person trying to get to a medical appointment on time.

This resonates with the call for dignity discussed earlier that ran through many interviews and in emerging work (*39*, *43*). They were not thinking of people as users of a particular mode or as defined by the type of trips they were making. Rather, they centered their humanity and held the immense diversity of the human experience. They consciously thought about how their work would impact people different than themselves and welcomed ways to deepen their capacity to empathize with others. They saw transportation as part of a larger, more complex web that could create more livable realities and liberated lives.

Align with other movements

Participants linked their visions of the future of transportation to a vast array of other movements and social issues: workforce development, local economies, food systems, non-extractive practices, climate justice, housing. One participant saw a future in which the transportation sector "shifts the focus" and sees itself as a part of "women's rights and [the] reproductive justice movement… the #MeToo movement… immigrant rights…and all of the sectors that impact people's ability to move." Another participant called for the widespread adoption of universal design concepts, and the need to "keep disability at the forefront" to create a truly inclusive and equitable system. They added that "there's a lot of qualified people in the disability community that should be filling a lot of these roles, whether it's in government or for profit or nonprofit companies that can help spearhead a lot of this work that, for one reason or another, are not in those positions right now." Equitable solutions require true inclusion of historically excluded community members. Partnering with other fields and justice-oriented movements offered rich space to realize greater inclusion.

Interviewees imagined a system free of police and state-sanctioned violence. They saw the connections between poor infrastructure and violence, and sought solutions based in investment, not enforcement. One participant recalled, "Our neighborhood did not have sidewalks. We didn't have safe parks. We had a lot of gang violence. On the other side of town where some of my family lived were really nice homes and really nice sidewalks and parks you could just walk down to and not be worried about playing in." Once they became a transportation professional, they would visit disinvested neighborhoods and wonder, "Hey, this is how my community was growing up too. And yeah, that wasn't right and that wasn't safe, and we should have had more investments and why didn't we?" Transportation professionals who had a lived experience of growing up or living in disinvested communities bring a much-needed lens to their work. This led them to envision nuanced visions of more just transportation futures, as seen in this participant's words:

> My vision would be a network that's free from traffic violence where, walking to school isn't death-defying feet. Our families can grow up feeling safe with their kids riding bikes around the neighborhood. We have to talk about policing too, and expanding the definition of safety in a way that includes feeling safe around police…We have to talk about racial profiling and bias policing as well. And having transformative infrastructure. We need to stop freeway expansion and projects that cause harm.

Hiring within communities

They also acknowledged the need to hire people from within impacted communities. They saw transportation planning as a potential economic engine, which could employ people of all ages, from youth to elders in well-paying work. They advocated for hiring local teens and elders who have a unique and important perspective on the built environment. Youth have a knowledge of the hidden geographies of a city that may limit mobility, while elders often have deep historical and social knowledge of a neighborhood. One such program is the "Hood Planners" program organized by People for Mobility Justice, though they are not the only organization utilizing

training and employment to create a future pipeline to interest youth in future careers as transportation planners (*71*).

Participants also called for greater respect for drivers and front-line workers. This was forefront in their minds given the context of the global pandemic. They expressed concern for the working conditions of drivers and their safety. Of growing concern is the plight of workers in the transportation "gig economy." They worried about the role of rideshare services in exacerbating inequities. They also expressed concern about the working conditions of delivery workers (*72*). These labor issues were not separate from transportation planning, but an intricate thread of the complex web of creating more sustainable and equitable transportation futures.

New research needed

Participants were also asked about the role of research in their work. Two general trends emerged: the need to make research more applicable to their work and the need for greater value around qualitative research. Many participants experienced alienation from transportation research: "The norms of transportation researchers and the techniques that transportation researchers get taught as part of their education are so foreign to me. I think they are very impenetrable to people who are not taught in that field." This points toward an opportunity to consider how transportation researchers can translate and demystify their research processes. Doing so can create more transparency between researchers and the people their research impacts. This creates space for deeper and more meaningful dialogue between researchers, transportation practitioners, and communities.

Participants voiced a need for broader representation within the research community, specifically those from historically disinvested communities. As one participant said," I don't know if those of us who are historically oppressed have really snatched that tool [research] and been like, "Well, all right, we're going to use your research and even opened our mind to the possibility of what types of research questions you will want to look at and ask and answer."" They also pushed back on research that 'speaks for' a community. They posited, "Instead of you speaking and helping to speak on behalf of us is just have us speak for ourselves and just make space but then move over and have us take up that space." Through this project, we saw how BPOC practitioners are already creating their own spaces for robust dialogue about equity centered in different norms and assumptions than the dominant transportation profession. As one interviewee put it,

> Instead of being in other people's spaces and see if we're invited, we're just creating our own tables and we're telling folks to come to our tables. Instead of feeling that we must be invited, I'm like, "No. I need you to come to our table and we'll invite you and we'll facilitate that process, but we don't have the time to see and help people come along to understand what diversity, inclusion and equity means We're just going to do it."

This research report is an invitation to pull up a chair and listen to the knowledgeable transportation equity professionals in our midst.

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Data Management Plan

Products of Research

28 interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded.

Data Format and Content

Interviews are transcribed and anonymized. They are saved as .rtf files.

Data Access and Sharing

Those interested in accessing the data should contact the project PI.

Reuse and Redistribution

Data can be reused with permission of the PI.

Appendix A: Interview Script

Thank you for making the time to talk with me. I'll be recording this interview. If at any point, you do not wish to answer a question or you want to discontinue the interview, you are free to do so. I'll be asking you some demographic questions, followed by questions about your professional history and your experience in equity and diversity projects for transportation and related projects.

I'll start out by asking you some demographic questions. If you do not wish to answer any of these questions, that is fine. We're asking so that we can show identity sensitivity in the results.

1. How would you identify your gender? What are your pronouns?
2. How would you identify your race and ethnicity?
3. How old are you?
4. Are there any other aspects of your identity that you wish to share with me?

Now, I'll ask you some questions about your professional experiences and recent projects in which you have participated. We believe that personal experiences shape the way we do our work, and that a person's lived experience in relation to communities of color can provide a specific expertise with this work. We understand that you are in a unique position to help us assess these initiatives to help determine if they are successfully promoting what they are saying they will promote.

1. How are you involved in the planning or implementation of active and sustainable transportation projects?
    a. How does this work emphasize biking, shared mobility, automated vehicles, or electrification?
2. How do you define equity?
3. How are you directly involved in any diversity or equity and inclusion initiatives?
    a. Can you describe the goals of the initiatives and your involvement?
4. What communities do you serve, **OR** who are your major stakeholders?
5. Tell me about your career trajectory and involvement in transportation equity.
    a. Is this what you saw yourself doing growing up or during your schooling?
    b. What prepared you most for this work?
    c. Why did you become involved in projects relating to transportation equity?

Thanks for telling me about your professional background. Now, I'd like to ask you some questions about changing technologies, new mobilities and research.

1. How are you or your organization interfacing with changing technologies and 'new mobilities'? (New mobilities include bikeshare, ride hailing TNCs/app-based, scooters, transit, bus/transit system improvements, street planning/smart cities, freight if it comes up?)
    a. What shifts have you seen since the onset of the pandemic?
2. Do you feel that these new technologies can address equity issues in our cities?

    a. How do you see the field of active and sustainable transportation addressing equity issues that may arise from the adoption of new mobilities?
3. Do you feel that current research addresses the equity and diversity strategies or needs that you are focused on?
    a. What kind of research do you feel is needed?
    b. How has research impacted your practice?

Now I'll be asking you about sustainable and active transportation and equity and inclusion initiatives. I want to define how we use the term equity in our research. At the Feminist Research Institute, our definition of equity includes diversity, inclusion, and justice work. And, while we are speaking, I want to clarify that we are asking about your understanding of the field of diversity and equity in transportation as a whole, not just your specific organization.

1. How has your work shifted in response to the multiple pandemics?
2. How has this changed the status or reception of your work?
3. Can you give me an example of an equity focused project that you were involved with that was successful?
    a. How did you determine that the project was successful?
4. Can you give me an example of an equity focused project that you were involved with that was not successful?
    a. What prevented success? What were the challenges?
5. How integrated are diversity/equity/inclusion efforts into the field of sustainable and active transportation?
    a. What specific resources are being targeted to support these initiatives? What do they look like? (funding pots, offices, employees, research teams, etc.)
    b. What are the impacts?
    c. How have you seen the profession change regarding the recruitment and retention of experts in the field of diversity and inclusion?
6. What is your vision of what feels possible to you now? Does this feel different than what felt possible before?

Closing

Thank you very much for taking some time to speak with me today, I really appreciate and value your input. After we complete our interviews, we will reach out to you with our transcript to ensure that we accurately captured your perspective. The goal of this project is to compile it into a report and research paper that can be utilized by transportation professionals and researchers.

1. Is there anyone else you recommend I speak with?
2. Are there any other final comments you would like to share before we wrap up?

Thank you!