

TECHNICAL SUMMARY

Questions?

Contact research.dot@state.mn.us.

Technical Liaison:

Abdullahi Abdulle, MnDOT
Abdullahi.Abdulle@state.mn.us

Investigator:

Frank Douma, University of Minnesota

PROJECT COST:

\$115,000



Transportation resources should be accessible and inviting to everyone.

Transportation Equity Training for MnDOT Employees

What Was the Need?

Construction of freeways in the 1960s displaced thousands of homes and businesses as neighborhoods were cut in two or cleared. Primarily Black communities suffered significant economic burden and social impacts. Interstate 35W (I-35W), I-94 and State Highway 55, for example, cut through the Twin Cities in areas that were home to 82% of the city's Black population but only 27% of the white population. Today, communities of color and low-income communities are still more likely than the general population to live near a freeway, which results in a variety of economic, health and social impacts.

Due to varying assumptions and perspectives, agency employees across staff levels and disciplines—including policy, planning, programming, design, project delivery, maintenance and engineering—make decisions in managing the transportation network that may result in disparate impacts among people from a range of identity determinants, including race, gender, disability and age.

At MnDOT, transportation equity “ensures the benefits and burdens of transportation systems, services and spending are fair and just, which historically has not been the case. Transportation equity requires ensuring underserved communities, especially Black, Indigenous and People of Color, share in the power of decision-making.”

To ensure equitable outcomes for all Minnesota communities, equity concepts need to be well understood across the agency. MnDOT was interested in promoting common definitions, shared language and awareness among all employees. The agency also wanted to share guidance, strategies and other tools to address existing and reduce future disparate impacts from management of the transportation network.

What Was Our Goal?

The project's goal was to develop a training program to build the capacity of MnDOT employees involved in planning, programming, design and project development to advance transportation equity.

What Did We Do?

The project team, which included the MnDOT Technical Advisory Committee and representatives from varied academic and organizational backgrounds and perspectives, first focused on identifying relatable stories to illustrate and explain equity issues. A review of the literature on general equity studies; equity in planning; and disparate impacts on communities based on race, gender, income, disability and age provided background for developing a comprehensive equity training curriculum.

Based on a significant amount of previous research, a two-day training program was developed for MnDOT employees. The program included historic and foundational information, definitions and case studies about transportation equity from multiple perspectives, demonstrating how transportation decisions can result in disparate impacts across specific demographics, such as changes in travel choices or behaviors to loss of access, property and communities.

Some communities and demographics have been adversely impacted by transportation network decisions and implementation. New employee training resources will help improve understanding and build capacity to support MnDOT in advancing equity by addressing existing and reducing future disparate impacts.

“This training is an excellent start to helping MnDOT employees understand how their day-to-day decisions can have a lasting impact in communities and build their capacities for advancing an equitable transportation system.”

—**Abdullahi Abdulle**,
Transportation Equity
Planning Coordinator,
MnDOT Office of
Transportation System
Management

“The depth of material, guided small group discussions and time for reflection in the training help MnDOT employees understand equity concerns, why they matter and what employees can do.”

—**Frank Douma**,
Director, State and Local
Policy and Outreach,
University of Minnesota
Institute for Urban and
Regional Infrastructure
Finance

Produced by CTC & Associates for:

Minnesota Department
of Transportation
Office of Research & Innovation
MS 330, First Floor
395 John Ireland Blvd.
St. Paul, MN 55155-1899
651-366-3780
www.mndot.gov/research



Providing technical assistance and training to tribes for transportation projects within Indian country can help address disparities in education, employment and construction contracting.

A virtual pilot training offered to 38 participants and a second, abbreviated training session for 17 agency leaders produced feedback and suggestions to enhance the program. The team developed a training guide that included reference materials, presentations, an annotated agenda, materials to facilitate small group discussions, and guidance on logistics and personnel.

What Did We Learn?

MnDOT’s acknowledgment of historic inequities was included in the first slides of the training program:

[T]he transportation system and agency decisions have underserved, excluded, harmed and overburdened some communities. We understand some of our past decisions denied Black and Indigenous communities as well as people with disabilities the full participation of transportation benefits. These and other underserved communities have historically carried disproportionate burdens of transportation decisions.

The process of developing materials and an implementation guide for the two-day training curriculum emphasized the need for all employees to understand the value of making transportation decisions through an equity lens, from identifying a problem to implementing a solution. Presentations and discussions confirmed that paying attention to potential explicit and implicit biases at all levels throughout processes, projects or programs across the agency can help avoid disparate impacts.

The training curriculum, range of presenters and perspectives, and participant discussion emphasized that the breadth and differences among demographic groups prevent broad generalization about impacts or solutions. Another lesson learned was the need to diligently consider equity issues in all Minnesota communities, from urbanized areas to smaller rural communities.

In addition to the training materials, the team created a two-page handout on transportation equity, including historic drivers and descriptions of impacts of racial, geographic, disability and age inequities. The handout also describes MnDOT’s equity commitments through the Advancing Transportation Equity Initiative and Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan.

Finally, the team produced [MnDOT Transportation Equity](#), a publicly available summary video that highlights the issues and concepts discussed throughout the project from a variety of perspectives.

What’s Next?

This project reiterated for MnDOT that the agency does not only build highways and bridges but can also facilitate healthy communities. Advancing equity in all aspects of the transportation network by supporting employee understanding is crucial to fulfilling that role. After the success of the pilot training, MnDOT will consider how to replicate the training more widely across the agency.

This Technical Summary pertains to Project 2023-33, “Transportation Equity Training for MnDOT.” More information is available upon request from research.dot@state.mn.us.