

Recommendations for Increasing Transportation Equity in South Dallas

Christina Stacy, Karolina Ramos, Donovan Harvey, Sonia Torres Rodríguez, Jorge Morales-Burnett, and Sabina Morris

The US's long history of **exclusionary zoning and other segregationist policies**, combined with transportation investments that benefit suburban homeowners over urban renters, has contributed to not only the unequal cities that we have today, but racial gaps in wealth and access to opportunity more broadly. In Dallas and South Dallas, racial inequities in access to opportunity are **particularly pronounced**.

This case summary identifies potential structural solutions to transportation inequities in South Dallas (which are also applicable to other cities) based on case studies of four regions that have improved or intentionally sought to increase transportation equity: Columbus, Ohio; Las Vegas, Nevada; Portland, Oregon; and King County, Washington. The case studies show that in order to address structural inequities in transportation, local governments and transit agencies must go beyond individual programs and initiatives to change decisionmaking processes as a whole so that these processes include historically excluded voices and center equity in all decisions.

"I think from my perspective, structural change is not around a specific initiative. It's around changes in the approaches we take in doing our work overall." – Portland-area public sector interviewee

RECOMMENDATIONS

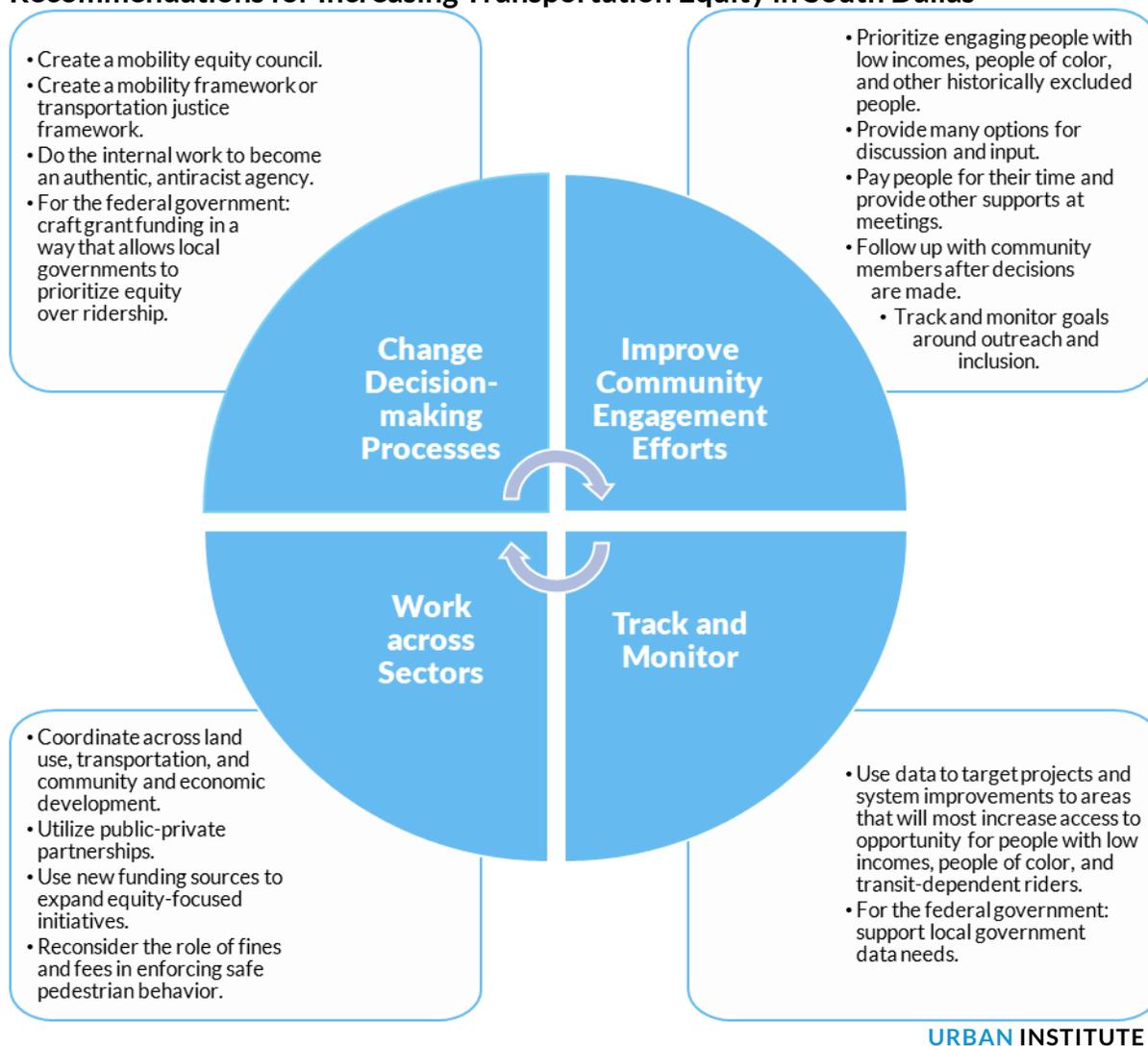
Our recommendations for Dallas and for other cities that wish to increase their transportation equity include the following (see also figure 1):

- **Create a mobility equity council**, like that of Portland's **Transit Equity Advisory Committee** or King County's **Mobility Equity Cabinet** in Washington, that consists of residents and community leaders from neighborhoods with low incomes and communities of color who have limited access to opportunity through transportation. Members should be given decisionmaking power and be paid for their time.

"A lot of the conversations or ideas that turn into policies very specific to transit equity go through that committee. All of our annual service plans goes through the committee, any service change, any fare policy. It's really the sounding board."
– Portland-area public sector interviewee, describing the Portland, Oregon Transit Equity Advisory Committee

FIGURE 1

Recommendations for Increasing Transportation Equity in South Dallas



Source: Framework developed by the authors.

- **Create a mobility framework or transportation justice framework led by the equity council.** A mobility or transportation justice framework, like the [Transportation Justice Framework](#) in Portland or the [Mobility Framework](#) in King County, is an internal framework for centering transportation justice and equity in everything an agency does. Mobility frameworks include major guiding policies for an agency, including for strategic plans, service guidelines, and climate action plans. Although Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART) has a strategic mobility plan, it is not focused on equity exclusively; rather, it covers mobility more broadly. The suggested frameworks would center equity in all work within DART, and expand upon the equity project evaluation criteria noted in the city’s 2021 strategic mobility plan.
- **Do the internal work to become an authentic, anti-racist agency.** Before going out into the community, DART and other transit agencies should reflect on how past efforts within its own agency and within other agencies and departments in the city and region have affected equity. It should then work to create a culture of equity and anti-racism within the agency by, for example, increasing the focus on equity in hiring and on the board, expanding the department of diversity and inclusion to focus on a broad mission of equity throughout the agency,

and centering equity in the overall strategic plan. They should also grow the agency's capacity to hear and receive feedback and acknowledge past harms.

- **Revamp the citizen's advisory committee (CAC) to be more representative of the community and linked to the equity council.** The CAC should include representation from the equity council, business leaders, community members, leaders from other parts of the region, and transportation experts to identify ways in which recommendations made by the equity council and other equity-focused initiatives could be put into practice on a larger scale and receive buy in from the greater community. The current CAC framing as a group representing interests of businesses, transit riders, homeowners, students, and the elderly could be broadened to explicitly include, for instance, renters as a core constituency. DART should also consider an open application process for new members of the CAC, rather than having members be board appointed, to broaden the pool of potential members beyond board members' contacts.
- **Improve community engagement efforts** by investing in deep engagement early on to understand the needs of communities long before solutions are proposed. DART should also conduct continued engagement as solutions are proposed and implemented.

"...as we were going through the public engagement process, I think we realized that we didn't have really any community trust built up, and so as a result, because we also hadn't talked about equity and how important that was, what I think is still a very good transit system redesign fell very flat with the very riders that we needed to convince [it] was going to be a good system for them and focused on their needs." – Dallas-area public sector interviewee

Specific ways in which DART could improve community engagement efforts include:

- » **Prioritize engaging people with low incomes, people of color, and other historically excluded people.** This engagement can be done by hosting events in locations that these individuals regularly visit (such as rec centers, schools, and service locations) or partnering with grassroots or community-based organizations that regularly serve or interact with these populations. Hiring local residents to conduct outreach with communities of color and communities with low incomes is another way to increase inclusion for community engagement.
- » **Provide many options for discussion and input.** Online participation in community engagement can be skewed toward people with higher incomes and people who are white and exclude people who do not have access to computers or broadband. But, it can also provide an opportunity for input for people who are unable to travel to in-person meetings due to a lack of access to transportation, child care duties, or compromised immune systems. Therefore, providing both in-person and online engagement options can help increase the likelihood that everyone is able to participate. Moreover, providing several discussion opportunities, including small sessions for people with similar backgrounds (e.g., people who all speak a language other than English), can help increase the likelihood that participants feel comfortable engaging.
- » **Pay people for their time and provide other supports at meetings.** Although paying everyone who participates in community meetings is likely financially prohibitive, compensating participants when feasible can help increase inclusion and lets residents know that their expertise and time are valued. In particular, DART should compensate residents in key leadership roles, such as committee members and leaders, and advertise these roles to people who have not typically been well represented in community engagement. Localities can also help increase regular participation by providing travel vouchers, child care, and food at meetings.
- » **Follow up with community members.** After input has been analyzed and decisions have been made, follow up with community members in person and online about those decisions, next steps, and their experiences with the engagement process. A lack of transparency about what happens after engagement can erode any trust that was developed during the input process. Building long-term

trust and increasing transparency with community members requires that they have a clear understanding of next steps, including how their input will be acted on and what the timeline is for implementation.

- » **Track and monitor goals around outreach and inclusion.** DART should track and monitor in real time how inclusive their community engagement processes are. For example, they should collect data on the demographics of participants (such as their race and income level) to see whether each group represents the population as a whole, or even better, overrepresents groups of people that have been historically marginalized and excluded from decisionmaking. They should also host in-depth discussions and focus groups with community members to better understand which parts of the process worked and which could be improved.
- **Coordinate across land use, transportation, and community and economic development** to create a land use structure that supports a robust transit infrastructure, and to increase access to opportunity in South Dallas by bringing jobs that residents want to the region. All of these decisionmaking bodies should integrate community voice in the process, just as we recommend here for transportation.
- **Use new funding sources to expand equity-focused initiatives.** These could include passing a fuel revenue indexing measure similar to that of Nevada’s, a per square foot and per employee tax on participating employers for free transit passes similar to the funding mechanism in Columbus, or taking advantage of new federal grant opportunities like the Reconnecting Communities Pilot Program, which allows local governments and partners to integrate transportation, land use, and community engagement into the transportation planning process.
- **Use data to target projects and system improvements** to areas that will most increase access to opportunity for people with low incomes, people of color, and transit dependent riders. This targeting means directing investments not only to areas where these people live, but also to areas where they need to go for work, shopping, healthcare, and community activities.
- **Consider decriminalizing jaywalking and reconsider the role of fines and fees in enforcing safe pedestrian behavior.** Jaywalking fees and police enforcement have been shown to disproportionately target Black and Latinx residents, building on the racist history of using municipal fines and fees to attempt to control the behavior of Black laborers in the postemancipation era. Therefore, local (and state) leaders should consider reducing or eliminating jaywalking fees, and could use Nevada as a model: the state changed jaywalking from a criminal offense, punishable by up to six months of jail time and up to a \$1,000 fine, to a civil penalty with no more than a \$100 fee.
- **In addition to these structural changes, DART and other leaders in the region could consider implementing the following individual initiatives and programs:**
 - » Increase the frequency of bus lines in areas that have a large number of transit-dependent riders to increase ridership and grow the network, similar to the [frequency increases that Las Vegas undertook](#).
 - » Consider a pass system similar to the [Downtown C-Pass](#) program in Columbus, in which employees at participating downtown businesses are eligible for a free monthly transit pass (mentioned briefly above). The program is partially funded by a per square foot and per employee tax on participating employers, which a COTA employee described as a “first of its kind [partnership] with building owners to help pay for part of the transit pass.” DART could partner with employers in areas where South Dallas residents work to provide free passes for residents who use transit to get to their place of employment.
 - » Implement a long-term mobility initiative similar to [LinkUS in Columbus](#), which is a collaboration between the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission, the Central Ohio Transit Authority, and the City of Columbus. The long-term mobility initiative takes a corridor-based approach to planning for future population growth in the Columbus metropolitan area, centers equity in the process, and includes a robust and ongoing stakeholder-engagement process.

- » Undertake targeted safety-improvement programs, such as [Portland's Outer Division Safety Project](#), which is targeted at a street in East Portland that experiences high crash and mortality rates. For this project, PBOT has installed a variety of features including lower speed limits, landscaping to replace the middle turn lane, protected bike lanes, and improved public lighting. Or, DART could consider implementing something similar to King County's [Safety, Security, and Fare Enforcement \(SaFE\) Reform](#), which is intended to address the effects of systemic racism through decriminalizing fare evasion and centering people of color in community engagement efforts.
- » Consider implementing a program similar to the [Community Connections program](#) in King County, which addresses the limited resources in communities surrounding Seattle that do not have the resources for traditional transit options like buses, including areas with high numbers of manufacturing and warehouse workers. The Community Connections program connects Metro officials with local governments to develop transportation solutions suited for their communities.

State governments and the federal government can also support increased transportation equity at the local level by crafting grant funding in a way that allows local governments to prioritize equity over ridership, and by providing the data and/or capacity needed at the local level to make equity-focused decisions. A key challenge that remains is producing and accessing the data that will help measure progress toward equitable outcomes. As one PBOT interviewee shared, "We want to make data-driven decisions. We want to center racial equity. We have struggled to really have the datasets that allow us to do that."

A PIVOTAL MOMENT FOR STRUCTURAL CHANGE

This is a pivotal moment for equity in South Dallas. Leaders in the Dallas region have the opportunity to dismantle racist infrastructure systems and restructure in a way that increases inclusion and access to opportunity for historically oppressed residents. Restructuring the ways in which decisions are made to center the voices of transit-dependent riders and people of color and to center equity in all decisions will create flexible systems that can evolve to address the needs of residents as they arise. Individual policies and programs can help to address short term inequities, but to fix the structural problems that created these inequities in the first place, the region needs to change the structure within which decisions are made.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Christina Plerhoples Stacy is a principal research associate in the Metropolitan Housing and Communities Policy Center at the Urban Institute where she specializes in urban economics, equity, and inclusion.

Karolina Ramos is a policy associate in the Research to Action Lab at the Urban Institute, where she works on topics related to inclusive economic recoveries and equity-driven policymaking in communities.

Donovan Harvey is a research analyst in the Metropolitan Housing and Communities Policy Center where he works on urban mobility, governance, and housing, with focuses on social and cooperatively owned housing.

Sonia Torres Rodriguez is a research analyst in the Metropolitan Housing and Communities Policy Center at the Urban Institute where they apply quantitative and qualitative approaches to the study of policies and programs related to labor and housing markets.

Jorge Morales-Burnett is a research analyst in the Metropolitan Housing and Communities Policy Center at the Urban Institute whose research focuses on urban resilience, governance, and transportation.

Sabina Morris is a former research assistant in the Metropolitan Housing and Communities Policy Center at the Urban Institute.



ADDITIONAL READING

HISTORY OF SEGREGATION AND INCLUSION

The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America

Richard Rothstein <https://www.epi.org/publication/the-color-of-law-a-forgotten-history-of-how-our-government-segregated-america>

Measuring Inclusion in America's Cities: Dallas, TX

Urban Institute https://apps.urban.org/features/inclusion/index.html?city=dallas_TX

EQUITY COUNCILS

Join Metro's Mobility Equity Cabinet

King County Metro <https://kingcountymetro.blog/2021/12/27/join-metros-mobility-equity-cabinet/>

Transit Equity Advisory Committee (TEAC) Meetings

Portland TriMet <https://trimet.org/meetings/teac/index.htm>

TRANSPORTATION JUSTICE FRAMEWORKS

Transportation Justice

Portland TriMet <https://www.portland.gov/transportation/director/transportation-justice>

Mobility Framework and Policy Updates

King County Metro <https://kingcounty.gov/depts/transportation/metro/about/policies/mobility-framework.aspx>

INDIVIDUAL EQUITY INITIATIVES

There's a Reason Transit Ridership is Rising in These 7 Cities

TransitCenter <https://transitcenter.org/theres-a-reason-transit-ridership-is-rising-in-these-7-cities/>

Downtown C-Pass

Capital Crossroads Special Improvement District <https://www.downtowncpass.com/>

LinkUS Columbus

City of Columbus, Central Ohio Transit Authority, the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission, and the Franklin County Board of Commissioners <https://linkuscolumbus.com/>

Outer Division Safety Project

Portland.gov <https://www.portland.gov/transportation/pbot-projects/construction/outer-division-safety-project-se-80th-174th-avenues>

SaFE Reform Initiative

King County Metro <https://kingcounty.gov/depts/transportation/metro/about/safety-security/safe-reform-initiative.aspx>

Community Connections

King County Metro <https://kingcounty.gov/depts/transportation/metro/programs-projects/community-connections.aspx>