

# Equity Action Plan Digest: Department of Transportation

*Summarized by Madeline Baxter*

This is one in a series of Urban Institute digests summarizing federal agencies', subagencies', and commissions' 2022 equity action plans, which were released in response to the Biden administration's January 2021 executive order, Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government. The Department of Transportation's equity action plan is available at [https://www.transportation.gov/sites/dot.gov/files/2022-04/Equity\\_Action\\_Plan.pdf](https://www.transportation.gov/sites/dot.gov/files/2022-04/Equity_Action_Plan.pdf) (PDF).

## Overview

<b>What <i>problem</i> is the agency trying to solve?</b>	Access to opportunities for disadvantaged businesses, lack of resources and technical support needed to navigate community-level transportation decisions, civil rights abuses that happened under funded projects, little or no data on projects' effects on communities (p. 3)
<b>Priority groups</b>	African American, Asian, Black, Hispanic, Latino, and Native American and Indigenous people; LGBTQ+ people; people with disabilities; people in rural areas (p. 11)
<b>Historic harm mentioned?</b>	Yes (p. 1)
<b>Partners in implementation</b>	Federal Aviation Administration (p. 7), metropolitan planning organizations (p. 8), state transportation agencies (pp. 8–9)
<b>Equity defined as</b>	Not defined beyond executive order

## Pillars and Principles of Equity

<b>Acknowledgement of past harm and present barriers</b>	History of creating and perpetrating inequities across the country, communities of color were often dismissed in transportation planning decisions (p. 6)
<b>Impact goals</b>	Adopt state-level quantitative screening component (p. 8); conduct assessments of metropolitan planning organizations and state-department-of-transportation equity assessments (p. 8); launch federal partnership with key agencies (p. 9); expand partnerships to include agencies making place-based change (p. 9)
<b>Actions and activities</b>	Equity leadership team and equity task force will lead department's equity work (p.4); increased internal trainings per acquisition policy updates (p. 7); increasing public participation engagements in rural and urban communities (p. 8); relaunch advisory committee on transportation equity, building staff capacity (p. 9); decreasing administrative burdens on grantees applying for multiple grants (p. 9); providing technical assistance to communities funded by the department (p. 9); introducing racial equity and barriers as consideration for discretionary grant awards, new data collection focused on capturing individual and household cost, travel time, trips not taken, accessibility, and access to key resources across different demographic groups (p. 10)
<b>Accountability measures and approaches</b>	Equity leadership team and equity task force will lead department's equity work (p. 4); goal-specific key performance indicators (pp. 7–10); quantified metrics for each goal (pp. 7–10); incorporating measure of transportation cost burden in project selection criteria (p. 10)

**Note:** For the rubric we used to evaluate these components of the equity action plans, see the appendix to the Urban Institute's 2023 brief "Pathways to Equity at Scale: An Analysis of the 2022 Federal Equity Action Plans and Recommendations for 2023 Plans," available at [https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/Pathways%20to%20Equity%20at%20Scale%20Appendix\\_0.pdf](https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/Pathways%20to%20Equity%20at%20Scale%20Appendix_0.pdf).

## Types of Equity and Related Activities

<b>Procedural</b> (example: expanding language and translation services; simplifying the vendor application process)	Adoption of quantitative screening component at state level (p. 8); considering racial equity and access barriers in discretionary grant awarding (p. 9); requiring projects to report on benefits (p. 10); completion of national transit map to reduce transportation times and improve transportation access (p. 10); initiating rulemaking to improve and reduce procurement burdens (p. 10)
<b>Distributional</b> (example: creating new procurement program)	Launching federal partnership with key agencies making place-based investments (p. 9); piloting reduction of administrative burden for applicants applying for multiple discretionary grant programs (p. 9); launching national equity accelerator (technical assistance model) (p. 9); institutionalizing measure of transportation cost burden and developing transportation disadvantage index (p. 10)
<b>Structural</b> (example: policy change via proposing legislation related to an equity goal; changing organizational functions)	Providing increased internal trainings (p. 7); launching procurement dashboard (p. 7); establishing department-wide monitoring of funding recipient compliance (p. 8); issuing guidance for meaningful public participation under Title VI (p. 8); reinvigorated department's programmatic enforcement of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, the Americans with Disabilities Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and the Air Carrier Access Act (p. 8)

## Key Metrics to Measure Progress on Equity

- department contracting dollars awarded to small disadvantaged businesses (p. 7)
- assessment of metropolitan planning organizations and state departments of transportation inclusion of quantitative equity screenings and representative public participation (p. 8)
- monitoring of department funding recipients' compliance with "their meaningful public participation obligations" (p. 8)
- number of grant applicants from disadvantaged communities (p. 9)
- number of new projects in disadvantaged communities (p. 9)
- discretionary grant project reporting (p. 9)
- data on demographic groups' service access and usage (p. 10)
- measuring benefit of discretionary grant projects to disadvantaged communities (p. 10)

## Looking Ahead: Key Reflections for Plan Implementation

Where is the agency set up for success?	Agency presents clear timeline of action items and associated tracking metrics, goal monitoring incorporated in strategic plan (p. 5); advisory committee on transportation equity for oversight (p. 9); national equity accelerator technical assistance model as an opportunity to increase number of successful grant applications (p. 9); updated agency priority goals develop investments in climate justice; 2023 grant opportunity for place-based initiatives jointly codesigned with communities most impacted by poor transportation access and climate change
Areas for future investment and growth	Develop criteria and measures of racial equity, disability equity, and spatial equity in transportation decisions; address backlog of transportation infrastructure needs; controlled allocation of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act funds would improve directed equity impact; develop clear and actionable accountability mechanisms; clearly identify collaborators; obtain and reference disaggregated race, disability, and geographic data; invest in internal culture; internal supports for staff of color