

surface transportation policy project



The transportation system should be socially equitable and strengthen civil rights; enabling all people to gain access to good jobs, education and training, and needed services. Where possible, personal transportation expenses should be minimized in ways that support wealth creation. Integrated with land use planning, transportation should also enhance the quality, livability and character of communities and support revitalization without displacement. The transportation system should allow every American to participate fully in society whether or not they own a car and regardless of age, ability, ethnicity, or income.

–The New Transportation Charter

Our transportation decisions systematically undermine the basic rights of one-third of all Americans who are too young, old, poor, or infirm to drive. Elevated highways and transit maintenance facilities are overrepresented in low income neighborhoods and communities of color. At the same time, distressed communities experience a shortage of transportation investments that support community development like street maintenance, transit systems that are well integrated into regional destinations, and other amenities like safe sidewalks and transit-oriented development.

A Pattern of Disparate Impacts

During the first decade of Interstate highway construction, 335,000 homes were razed. A great body of documentation shows that urban freeways destroyed the hearts of African-American communities in the South Bronx, Nashville, Austin, Los Angeles, Durham, and nearly every medium to large American city.

New research also finds that communities located near heavily-traveled highways have disproportionately higher rates of lung cancer. 75 percent of ozone pollution is generated by tailpipe emissions. Ozone is a leading cause of asthma.

Six of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's eight Manhattan diesel bus depots are in West Harlem. WEACTION, a local environmental justice group, has filed a Title VI complaint with the US Department of Transportation against the MTA because of the agency's racist practices and plans to use more land in the community for additional bus facilities.

Research by the Latino Issues Forum in San Francisco found that Latino and African-Americans are more likely to be the victims of vehicle-pedestrian crashes relative to their overall share of the population.

The Transportation Disadvantaged: Children, the Elderly, People with Disabilities, Poor People, Women and Rural Residents

A 1996 report by the Federal Transit Administration found that nearly one-third of the American population is transportation disadvantaged.

This includes the fifty-six million children under the driving age, thirty-two million senior citizens whose driving ability diminishes, and twenty-four million people with disabilities who depend on transit, paratransit, or expensive private transportation services.

90% of former welfare recipients do not have access to a car.

Women, who serve as the primary caregivers in a family, typically compensate for the shortfall in transportation decision-

making. Research by STPP finds that they make two-thirds of all trips to shuttle others around.

In addition, 25 percent of rural communities have only infrequent service. 36 percent of all rural residents are considered transit dependent.

Transportation Policies Keep Low Income People Far From Jobs

According to the Federal Transit Administration, two-thirds of all new jobs are in the suburbs while three-quarters of welfare recipients live in central cities or rural areas.

While the five-year trend in national transit ridership gains and increasing recognition for “workforce accessibility” among employers bode well for better transit service, studies have shown that less than half of the jobs are accessible by transit despite extensive transit systems.

High Transportation Costs Prevent Wealth Accumulation

Most American families spend more on driving than on health care, education or food.

Research by STPP and CNT finds that the average American family spends 20 percent of their household expenditures on transportation.

The poorest fifth of American families, people earning less than \$13,060 per year, pay 42% of their income for the purchase, operation, and maintenance of automobiles.

These high transportation costs compromise household savings that could otherwise be used for home ownership, education, or other investments that give low income families a better chance of moving into the middle class. For example, over the course of a decade, \$30,000 invested in owning a car can be expected to result in just \$3,000 in equity while investing \$30,000 in owning a house on average yields more than \$13,000 in equity.

