# Transportation and data

## Technology must be paired with the right policies

Transportation planning continues to use decades-old models, engagement approaches, and tools that contribute to a legacy of harm for communities of color, whether by directing limited resources away from them, bisecting and destroying those communities, or failing to connect them to opportunities to build wealth. Done with great care and intention, new technologies can help when they are used to further policy outcomes, bake equity into their underlying assumptions, enhance old technologies on the ground, and elevate community voices in transportation decisions—as Vignesh Swaminathan helped explain.

## Key discussion points

**1**  **Without baking equity considerations into new technologies or intentionally using technology to support your policy goals, technology will just further the same inequitable outcomes.**
Electric vehicles are a great example: simply electrifying our existing car-based system will just produce an electrified version of today's inequitable system where millions can't access jobs, have to rely on poor transit service, or are more likely to be killed walking on more dangerous streets. But as Tiffany Chu explained, meaningfully integrating equity requires expertise and technical know-how, which can be difficult for places without access to data expertise. States and cities of nearly all sizes need to be asking better questions about equity so they can have better inputs for decision making.

**2**  **The most equitable uses of data connect robust qualitative (i.e, human!) analyses with the best quantitative measures.**
All the numbers in the world are no replacement for good qualitative analysis. Getting on the ground and talking to people can show where data is lacking and what needs more attention. In Pittsburgh, Kim Lucas shared that these gaps can also be instructive, like noting where few 311 requests are logged, perhaps because of a lack of access to mobile devices, the time required to log things, or even the belief that it wouldn't make a difference after years of broken sidewalks, lighting, traffic lights, etc. Quantitative data like these can show where more robust qualitative data is needed.

### Discussion guides

Day One: Equity Summit keynote

Day One: Land use and development

**Day Two: Transportation and thriving communities**

Day Three: Economic development

"Make the safe way convenient, or make the convenient way safe."

*- Kim Lucas, Acting Director, Pittsburgh Department of Mobility and Infrastructure*

### What to do next

**Public agencies**
Know your role! What are you good at and what should others do? Local partners might be better able to organize a strong public engagement workshop if you empower them and cede some control. Spend time gathering information on the history of a community from multiple perspectives, whether local history books, oral histories, or creative venues to talk to long-time residents outside of the process for specific projects.

Smart Growth America
Improving lives by improving communities

Smart Growth America's
**Equity Summit**

**3** **Engaging community based organizations is the best starting place for any data-based project.** These groups know best, and when they learn to use data, they get more engaged with decisions and can see things that public sector people can't. Bob Dean shared that the primary thing holding back more equitable transportation systems isn't an inability to do the math or access better data, but more effective community engagement. In addition, talking to community members—even those who may not be formal leaders—can help provide helpful perspectives that data or even the gaps in data (noted in #2 above) won't show.

# Questions to ask

**1** What are the policy outcomes that you are seeking to accomplish through the use of new data or technology?

**2** What would it look like for you or your agency to use new methods or new technologies to communicate, and how would that improve equity in engagement and advance equitable outcomes?

**3** How might focusing on technological opportunity distract from or even undermine discussions about the need for equity improvements to the transportation system.

**4** Can you identify any underlying inequities baked into your existing models and systems of data? How could new technologies address that?

**5** As Dr. Regan Patterson asked, how can agencies use technology to expand what is measured related to equity impacts?

**6** How do you reach and organize people who can't engage using technology, whether because of access or difficulty in use?

## What to do next

### Policymakers
Be aware of the policy development context. Policymakers should look to demonstrate examples of their policy in action, use clear language, and get out of the theoretical realm. More meaningful community understanding and discussion will produce stronger policies.

### Community coalitions
Engage and provide thoughtful critiques of the transportation planning process. Community coalitions should produce clear and concise feedback on a public agency's approach and assumptions. Demand access to information and tools needed to fully analyze community impact. From there, coalitions should look to be supportive messengers with other community members to engage and build support.

### "Transportation" people
You can't do it alone, so tap into other, adjacent efforts. Changes to housing, land use, workforce training programs, and structures for building wealth are needed to ensure that physical improvements serve to heal and uplift communities and expand access to opportunity. Transportation solutions alone will not be sufficient.

# Recommended reading

**Bicycle/Race: Transportation, Culture, & Resistance by Dr. Adonia Lugo**

The co-founder of Los Angeles's CicLAvia, inspired by her Chicano upbringing and experience with racism in bicycle advocacy, writes about environmental justice in active transportation.

**Autonorama: The Illusory Promise of High-Tech Driving by Peter Norton**

Norton considers the history of technology companies and driving, and today's utopian promises about self-driving vehicles.

**Dangerous by Design by Smart Growth America**

Our landmark report about the epidemic of people struck and killed while walking and the inequitable impacts of those deaths and injuries.

*This guide was based on conversations between Vignesh Swaminathan, Dr. Regan Patterson, Tiffany Chu, Bob Dean, and Kim Lucas.*

**Smart Growth America**
Improving lives by improving communities

**Smart Growth America's Equity Summit**