

# CDTC Equity Advisory Committee

## 2016-2021

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The Equity Advisory Committee works to ensure CDTC's conformance with Title VI regulations and Environmental Justice. It makes certain that CDTC takes reasonable steps to secure access to opportunities that ensure no person is denied benefits of CDTC's planning process on the basis of minority and/or low income status, and to identify and address disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of CDTC's programs, policies, and activities on minority and low-income populations. It accomplishes this in part by promoting collaborative problem solving on issues related to Environmental Justice and Title VI, and providing input on the most effective methods to engage and respond to Environmental Justice and Title VI populations. Membership in the Committee is by application with priority given to people of color and people who have low income.

The Advisory Committee activities are self-directed within the broad description above. This report covers the main activities undertaken in just over three years, from the group's beginning in September 2016 through December 2021. Initially a task force, the group began on a temporary basis for two years, and thereafter decided to continue meeting as an advisory group. Initially meeting quarterly with a few additional meetings as necessary, in mid-2018 members agreed to begin meeting on a bi-monthly basis. This document describes major projects undertaken and guided by the group.

### **City of Albany: S. Pearl St. Heavy Vehicle Travel Pattern Study**

At the group's first meeting, it discussed where it would like to focus its efforts. One of the topics discussed was impact analyses for select locations, such as the Port in Albany and the Rotterdam Price Chopper rail/truck transfer facility. Residents of the Ezra Prentice Homes on and adjacent to South Pearl Street had already conducted a count of large trucks traveling along South Pearl Street. In the fall, the Port commissioned its own study to count truck traffic in the vicinity. CDTC staff attended a couple of tenants' meetings at the Ezra Prentice Homes to better understand resident concerns, which included a desire to know the destinations of the trucks traveling on South Pearl Street. As part of both the Equity Task Force and the Freight Working Group, CDTC conducted an origin/destination study to research and analyze heavy vehicle travel patterns along S. Pearl St./NY 32 and develop potential strategies to mitigate the negative impacts of heavy vehicles on residents.

The following conclusions were derived from the data collected during the study:

- It is estimated that at least 770 per day (both directions), or 47%, of the heavy vehicles that pass Ezra Prentice Homes, begin and/or end their trip at other locations along S. Pearl St./NY 32 in the study area.
- An estimated 569 per day (both directions), or 34%, of the heavy vehicles that pass Ezra Prentice homes are traveling from and/or to S. Pearl St., north of the study area. These heavy vehicles

are traveling into and out of other areas of the City of Albany as part of conducting their business.

- An estimated 279 per day (both directions), or 17%, of the heavy vehicles that pass Ezra Prentice homes are traveling from/to S. Port Rd.
- An estimated 625 (81%) of the northbound heavy vehicles that pass Ezra Prentice Homes originate between Ezra Prentice and S. Port Rd.
- S. Pearl St./NY 32 acts a connector road for heavy vehicles for I-787 (northbound and southbound)

The study evaluated strategies to mitigate the negative effects of heavy vehicle travel on S. Pearl St./NY 32 and recommended implementing the following strategies in the sequence listed:

- Strategy A: Encourage Local S. Pearl St./NY 32 Heavy Vehicle Operators to Consider Using Alternate Routes
- Strategy B: Supportive Programs
- Strategy C: Restrict Heavy Vehicle Turning Movement Access at the S. Port Rd. & S. Pearl St./NY 32 Intersection
- Strategy D: Reconstruct S. Port Rd., Normanskill St., Raft St., Smith Blvd. and Boat St. as a Bypass Route for Heavy Vehicles

The report recommended three supportive programs:

- Enforcement of current laws and regulations related to unsafe driver behavior such as speeding and distracted driving, and compliance with all vehicle-related regulations, such as safety and emissions equipment
- Education of industrial/commercial land owners, heavy vehicle operators, and independent heavy vehicle drivers
- Emissions reductions for those vehicles needing to use S. Pearl St./NY 32 via alternate fuel vehicles, electric vehicles, hybrid powertrain vehicles, and vehicles equipped with other emission-reduction technologies.

Data from the study was also provided to the Department of Environmental Conservation for comparison with air quality and emissions data they collected concurrently. Following the study, the City of Albany required City vehicles to use other routes and worked with freight generators along South Pearl Street to encourage drivers to utilize other routes whenever possible. The City requested the bypass "Port Route" be reclassified to federal-aid eligible, CDTC processed the request, and it was approved. Improvements to the roadway will now be eligible for federal funding. NYSDOT has been monitoring traffic volumes.

## **Moderated Focus Groups and Data Analysis**

After discussing the Federal Ladders of Opportunity planning emphasis area and known sites of workplace inaccessibility for people without a personal vehicle, the group thought it needed more

information about residents' unmet transportation needs. CDTC released a survey to staff and/or volunteers at health, community, and youth justice entities in the area seeking their insight about transportation gaps and ideas to improve transportation. This led to consideration of focus groups of people who themselves experience a lack of access to employment, health care, schools/ education, and recreation.

In September 2017, CDTC released an RFP for a consultant to conduct focus groups to better understand gaps people experience in the Capital Region's transportation system, with a focus on people who are often not represented in the transportation planning process. Sage Shoppe Innovations, LLC facilitated eleven focus groups in April 2018 to discuss gaps people experience in the Capital Region's transportation system.

The disadvantaged transportation user may be disadvantaged due to social inequalities that operate as contributory and important mutually-connected features of transportation disadvantage. Disadvantaged transportation user-consumers may be disadvantaged due to one or more of the following factors: 1) income; 2) spatial and physical segregation; 3) conditions of aging; 4) physical impairment or disabilities; 5) new residents to the Capital District and 6) non-native English speakers. Transportation disadvantage was presented as an open concept determined by focus group participants as they were prompted to narrate the situations or contexts that illustrated their experience as "a disadvantaged transportation user."

Completed in the fall of 2018, conclusions that may be drawn from the moderated focus groups are summarized below.

### **Pedestrian Infrastructure**

Infrastructure at key bus stops and in neighborhoods was mentioned as an obstacle with regular frequency, due to both absence and poor construction or design. This notably included lack of curb ramps. Clearing of water and snow from sidewalks is especially problematic to transportation disadvantages users, and municipal service responsibilities vary and appear to be unknown by residents. Policies or ordinances outlining inclement weather responsibilities for renters, businesses, multifamily property owners, and single-family homeowners might help. Threats to personal safety also impede navigation as people feel forced to alter their routes to avoid certain individuals or situations.

### **Seamless regional system**

Focus group participants did not express a regional identity, rather one grounded by the primary spatial and geographic designation referencing their home and work locations. Overall, fragmented municipal control of much of the transportation system appears to permit the abdication for fiscal responsibility of whole system integration of equitable transportation services. In addition to snow clearing discussed above, route computing is difficult between cities, and across urbanized areas within counties, inhibiting access to work, daycare, and other necessary locations. Finally, some people mentioned issues with wheelchair batteries. Public charging that could be used for electric wheelchairs could help.

## Perception of Transit

Respondents did not view public transportation as a respected public good or service, but rather as a service for predominantly young, poor, aging, and low-income populations. It was similarly described by members of their social or age cohort. Working toward changing that perception could not only benefit the system now, but also attract more riders for a further benefit.

## Transit Amenities

The public transit system does not provide shelters, consistently marked bus stop signage, or other way-finding signs at all stops. These features are particularly important for the new, aging, or impaired transit system user. Increasing the types and formats of information and data accessible to users of mobile devices was requested by many focus group participants across age and income levels. Identifying improved written timetables, maps, and schedules would improve their service experience. Participants used the real-time, arrival, and departure updates supplied, but wanted to also have the same information displayed on all buses in case device failure occurred. Accuracy of timetables was not cited by focus group participants as the major shortcoming in service experience outside of paratransit scheduling, but access, on-boarding, and exiting vehicles were.

## Paratransit Service

Ideas for improvements to the technology and communication methods used in the STAR system were a common theme in the focus groups. This included both the certification process as well as the reservation process. One improvement could be some kind of online system to see current status that enables third-party access, in addition to the ability to call STAR staff. Accessible taxis are also desired. Disability empathy training of drivers, dispatch, and the full system of service delivery professionals is also important. When a system failure occurs, people with physical, social, and /or psychological disabilities or other impairments face greater and increased risk to their personal and physical well-being.

## Saratoga Transit

During the Schenectady focus groups, younger seasonal employees in Saratoga County and the City of Saratoga Springs noted overcrowded buses, lack of shelters, and onboard conditions that are unsafe. Aging of the population in Saratoga Springs and changes in single and multifamily housing discussed in Saratoga County dovetail with concerns expressed by employees in Saratoga's service sector, which requires younger, non-skilled workers from other areas.

## CDTC Equity Task Force

Active recruitment that is a "true" demographic sample of the region's population, transit system users, and municipalities would improve awareness of service delivery gaps. Recruitment should include representatives of professions that service, advocate on behalf of, or interact with transportation disadvantaged users and members of socially marginalized groups. Multi-modal system users who can provide input that directly impacts policy improvements and practices are also important. Cross-municipal input and participation is lacking as well, and would better achieve "total system" transportation planning.

## Further Research

A collaborative research team should implement mixed methods participatory research to determine implementable system changes. For example, this project indicated that there are disconnected transportation pockets in urban, suburban, and semi-rural areas of Albany, Schenectady, Rensselaer, and Saratoga counties. A combination of user experience and quantitative data could better identify these pockets and could be visualized in maps to thoroughly assess possible solutions. Moreover, research about the user experience arising from different mobile device usage and communication patterns could lead to recommendations for improved transportation system use by users of diverse mobile devices.

Staff provided written letter to the Cities of Schenectady and Saratoga Springs, as well as CDTA, to communicate results specific to those entities. Rather than sending each of the remaining municipalities a letter about the findings pertinent to the municipalities as a whole, CDTC staff presented them to the Planning Committee.

## Participation policy specific for projects with potentially negative impacts

In March 2018, the Equity group learned about the I-787 study, after which some members discussed the study with community members in Albany, who requested an additional stakeholder meeting because they had not previously been informed of the study, and there were some concerns about potential negative impacts that could arise from major changes to I-787. At this meeting, the question “Who is a stakeholder?” was posed.

The Equity Task Force attempted to address this question, but concluded that it would be more useful to ask the more general question, “Who should be reached in public outreach?” This would include stakeholders as well as the general public. The question should not be whether someone is a stakeholder, but rather what information should be disseminated for different kinds of projects. The group felt that the answer to “who” should include all residents within the study area or the impacted area.

Staff drafted policy language for information dissemination, versions of which the group discussed at a number of its meetings. It ultimately settled on the following, which was included in the draft 2019 Environmental Justice/Title VI Analysis and approved by the Planning Committee, with final approval by the Policy Board at its June 2020 meeting.

For projects in CDTC designated Environmental Justice areas, and that have potentially negative impacts, CDTC will work with the project sponsor and meaningful community and neighborhood representatives to disseminate project design information explaining potentially negative impacts in straightforward and plain language to impacted residents and businesses, including but not limited to those within ¼ mile of the project location. CDTC will also work with the project sponsor to create a project website with contact information or create this website itself.

After approval, staff reviewed the current TIP list, and determined that there were two projects with potentially negative impacts and that were located in designated Environmental Justice areas. Toward the end of 2020, CDTC sent the sponsor of each of those projects a letter describing the new project and offering its assistance to ensure that impacted residents and businesses are heard and any adverse impacts are recognized.

## **Transportation, Race and Poverty in New York's Capital Region**

In mid-2018, people who attended the stakeholder meeting for the I-787 Study brought a report "Transportation + Poverty in Monroe County" to the Equity group's attention, and members decided to investigate creating something similar for the Capital Region. They thought it might be used for mobility justice, especially for low-income workers who don't have access to a private vehicle. Staff initially sought assistance from staff at the Capital District Regional Planning Commission but there was ultimately a lack of interest. This stemmed from the fact that data indicating a disparity in transportation and job access is already readily available.

Staff began working on a Capital Region version in the fall of 2018. Over the course of the next two years and after a significant amount of research, it became clear that calculating jobs accessible by transit and driving for different home census tracts would necessitate using data with very high margins of error. In mid-2020 the Equity Advisory Committee reviewed an initial full draft and began discussing how to use the report upon completion.

By the end of 2020, staff suggested changed the name of the report to "Transportation + Race + Poverty." In addition, additional analyses of commuting showed that some municipalities have many times more low income jobs than low income residents, which requires more workers to travel in order to access jobs. In 2021 staff drafted a new section to discuss the connection between zoning and the job-residence mismatch for low income people. Historic and current zoning patterns in some municipalities in the region have encouraged retail and hospitality industry development but have limited the availability of housing that is affordable to low income workers.