



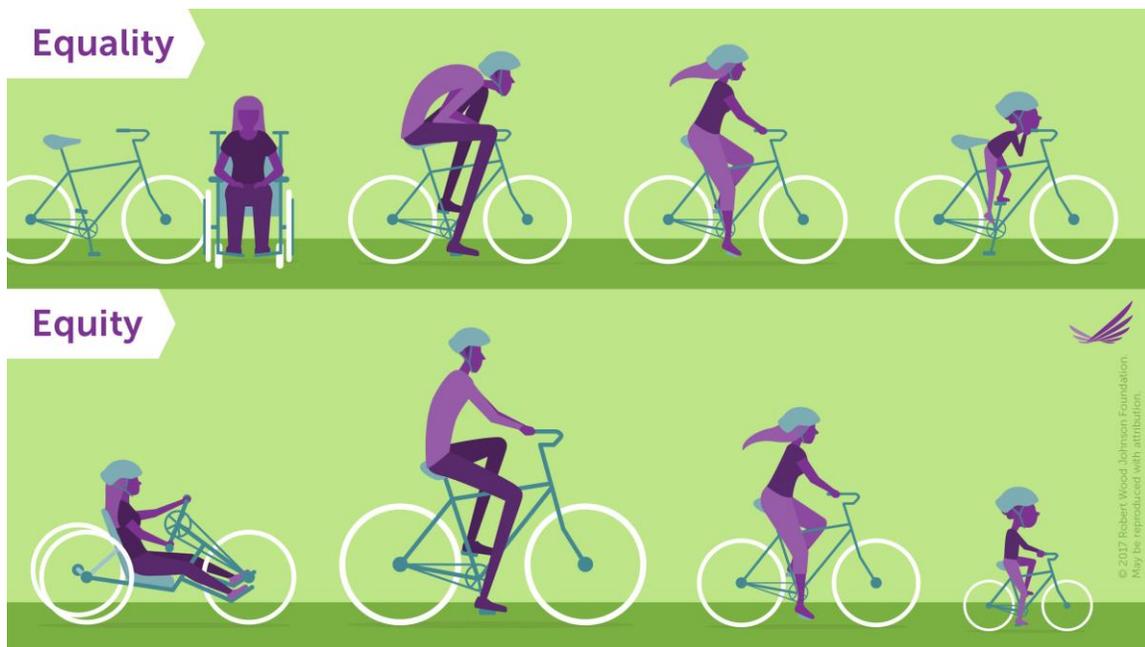
# Prince George's County Transportation Equity Practices Inventory

## Defining Transportation Equity

Although equity is mentioned several times in the County's existing plans and policies, no definition of transportation equity emerges to guide direction in the Master Plan of Transportation (MPOT) update. Clearly defining transportation equity is important to identify action items and select meaningful performance metrics that can move the County toward its desired outcomes.

**Equality** means that everyone receives the same treatment.

**Equity** means that everyone gets what they need based on their own situation.



When it comes to transportation, social determinants such as race, disability, home location, age, and employment status often produce different needs and a one-size-fits-all solution, while equal, would result in inequitable outcomes. A history of unequal investment by race and place at all levels of government, [including in Prince George's County](#), has resulted in disparities in access to safe, affordable, and reliable transportation. An equitable transportation approach is ultimately one that redistributes resources to uplift communities and populations that have historically been left behind or overlooked.

Absent an existing definition of transportation equity, MPOT can align with equity work already underway in the County. The Prince George's County Health Department [Health Equity Workgroup](#) has established the following vision for health equity:

Prince George's County is a place where everyone has equitable access to achieve their full health and wellness potential, regardless of race, color,

religion, country of origin, immigration status, class, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, or health literacy skills.

This can be adapted to set a vision for transportation equity by replacing health outcomes with transportation outcomes:

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Prince George’s County is a place where everyone has equitable access to safe, reliable, and multimodal travel choices, regardless of race, color, religion, country of origin, immigration status, class, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, or English literacy.

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The transportation outcomes—access, safety, reliability, and multimodal choices—are derived from the MPOT public input surveys and community meeting discussions.

This definition is also consistent with the Government Alliance on Race & Equity (GARE)’s [definition of racial equity](#). Prince George’s County’s Fire/EMS Department and the City of College Park are GARE members as of 2021 and 2019, respectively, as are Arlington, Montgomery, Anne Arundel, and Charles counties and the District of Columbia.

# Plan and Policy Review

The following plans were reviewed to evaluate the County's existing practices and the implications for transportation equity:

- 2009 MPOT (2009)
- Plan 2035 (2014)
- DPW&T Transit Vision Plan (2018)
- DPW&T Vision Zero Action Plan (2020)

The findings are organized by the typical stages of transportation planning and implementation:

- *Community Outreach & Engagement*
  - *Visioning*
    - *Defining the Problem*
      - *Defining Solutions*
        - *Evaluating and Refining*

## Community Outreach and Engagement

An equitable public engagement process and feedback loop is the foundation for an equitable transportation system. An engagement process that includes the full spectrum of users and user needs will result in design improvements that meet the full spectrum of needs in the County.

Of the plans listed above, only the Vision Zero Action Plan explicitly pledges an equitable engagement approach. One of the “six Es” is Equity and says, “County stakeholders commit to an equitable approach to Vision Zero by establishing inclusive and representative processes that can bring increased and overdue safety resources to low-wealth neighborhoods and communities.” Equity action item EQT-1 is to “Engage a diverse range of partners within government and community members and others...” The focus of the pledge seems to be on wealth inequities, but it also mentions diversity more generally.

Plan 2035 indicates that it included a “comprehensive” public participation process but does not detail how it connected with people representing a range of income levels, races, ages, disability statuses, genders, sexual orientations, or employment statuses. An exception is the County's immigrant community, which was engaged through a series of focus groups. But Plan 2035 does not detail how the focus group input was processed relative to input from other groups or how it shaped the Plan outcomes.

Neither the Transit Vision Plan, nor the 2009 MPOT mention equity as a goal for the engagement or public input process.

## Visioning

Everything in the planning and implementation process flows from the vision statement. Folding a clear definition of equity into the plan vision ensures that all plan components advance this concept or, at a minimum, respect it and do not hinder its chances at success. Equity appears in

varying degrees in each of the County’s existing plans but without specificity about desired outcomes.

**2009 MPOT**—Although there is no mention of equity vision in the 2009 MPOT vision, there are a few goals and principles that highlight a desire to maximize benefits for “all users” and to “ensure universal accessibility,” including for elderly, children, and disabled groups. This vision could be improved by clarifying that maximizing benefits for all users means taking an equity, rather than equality, approach.

**Transit Vision Plan**—The Transit Vision Plan includes a goal to support a range of residents with its services:

“The County, while considered affluent as a whole, has many communities with higher needs and poor health outcomes. Over three-fourths of the county’s population identifies as being a racial or ethnic minority, and one in five residents was born outside the United States. An integrated transit system consisting of fixed route transit, paratransit, taxicabs, bike share, and a robust pedestrian network is key to supporting this dynamic County.”

Although the demographic breakdown is a helpful starting point, to achieve equity, the statement would benefit from a defined set of actions and performance measures to provide more resources to communities with “higher needs.”

**Vision Zero Action Plan**—Equity is included as one of the six Es in the Vision Zero Action Plan, and is defined as process and investment equity for low-wealth neighborhoods and communities. This is a specific, actionable definition.

**Plan 2035 Vision**—Equity appears in the first line of the Plan 2035 vision statement – “Prince George’s County develops sustainably and equitably.” From there, the term appears in a number of other places but not with specificity, which will make it difficult to implement and evaluate equity.

## Defining Problems

The County can only begin to define solutions when it is clear on the disparities or inequities it is solving. Who lacks access to safe, reliable, or multimodal travel choices? What barriers stand in their way?

Many people experience transportation barriers throughout the day. Many of these barriers are normalized, such as a lack of curb ramps at intersections and infrequent transit service, such that we fail to recognize them. By considering each category of the [STEPS framework](#) developed for FHWA, these barriers are more easily identified.

*Spatial*—Distance and network connectivity factors that inhibit access to key destinations

*Temporal*—Travel time factors that excessively increase the duration of time-sensitive trips

*Economic*—Direct and indirect costs that create economic hardship or preclude users from completing basic travel

*Physiological*—Non-inclusive transportation system design that creates access barriers for people with different physical and cognitive abilities

*Social*—Social, cultural, safety, and language barriers that inhibit a user’s comfort with using transportation

The plan review indicates inconsistencies as to what populations face transportation barriers and need more transportation resources. The 2009 MPOT is primarily concerned with geographic inequities (transit resources are not evenly distributed throughout the County); the Transit Vision Plan highlights service for automobile-less households, low-income residents, seniors, and “transforming neighborhoods initiative” communities; the Vision Zero Plan focuses on low-wealth neighborhoods and communities; and Plan 2035 talks about improving transportation for the elderly, mentally and physically disabled, low-income households, and Neighborhood Reinvestment Areas.

The 2009 MPOT does not address age, disability status, and income as indicators of transportation disparities and none of these plans mention race, color, religion, country of origin, immigration status, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, or English literacy as characteristics that might influence transportation access or mobility.

If the data is not currently available to answer equity questions, the County might consider collecting supplemental data and gathering public input from residents who represent a range of identities within these categories. Community feedback collected for Plan 2035 provides insight into some of the economic barriers that low-income communities face:

“High commuting costs, combined with limited transit service and sprawling development patterns outside the Capital Beltway, have further exacerbated the cost of living in the County.”

“...the costs of childcare and transportation were barriers to employment as the costs could exceed participants’ earning potential.”

Supplemental data and analyses might be particularly helpful in answering questions like:

- What barriers exist for those with disabilities or seniors?
- How does transportation access or mobility differ for Neighborhood Reinvestment Areas when compared to other parts of the County?

## Defining Solutions

Because equity is about giving people what they need for their particular situation, effective solutions are tailored to separately address each type of barrier and may differ by population. Action items and policies should be clear about whose transportation outcomes are being improved and what barriers are being removed.

It is important to think through unintended consequences of the proposed solutions—will this “solution” create barriers for a different community? Not everything will result in improvements in all directions for all people so planners and decisionmakers should think through the tradeoffs.

**2009 MPOT**—The 2009 MPOT “recommends that transit play a more geographically comprehensive role in ensuring quality access and mobility options for all residents and workers.” This solution is not specific enough to remove barriers and is written for “*all* residents and workers” rather than populations with known mobility or access disadvantages. More detail is needed if the County wishes to advance this goal.

**Plan 2035**—Plan 2035 proposes a solution, “By diversifying available transportation options, the County has an opportunity to ensure that the physically, economically, and socially disadvantaged have safer and more equitable access to jobs, public services, recreational facilities, and neighborhoods.” Additional detail is needed on how diversifying travel options will increase accessibility and what equity barriers will be solved.

**Transit Vision Plan**—The subsequent Transit Vision Plan provides good examples of specific actions to implement transit access and mobility solutions:

“[Prince George’s County Call-A-Bus] priority is given to seniors and persons with disabilities.”

“Improve transit access to support non-traditional work hours.”

**Vision Zero Action Plan**—The Vision Zero Action Plan provides an example of action items that provides some, but not all, necessary details:

“EQT-3: Provide and use traffic safety data that gets at equity to focus efforts on high-injury areas and behaviors and advance meaningful improvements – including infrastructure investments and enforcement efforts.”

Additional clarity is needed on what “gets at equity” means. If the intent is to refer to the “six Es” Equity vision focus on low-wealth communities and neighborhoods, this action could instead call for targeted traffic safety analysis in low-wealth communities. If the term equity is meant to be more broadly interpreted, the action item could be clearer about the populations it is intended to serve.

## Evaluation

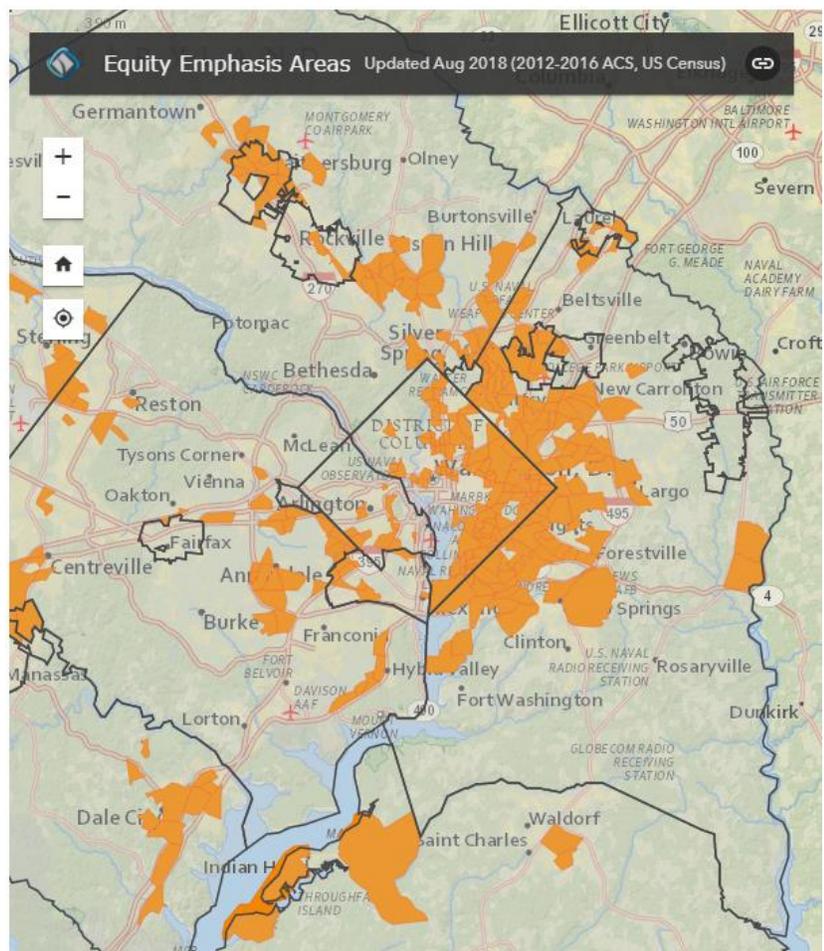
The final step in the planning process is evaluation. It means measuring progress toward the vision so the County stays accountable and can recalibrate if it is not seeing improvement. This is a critical phase in which transportation equity in Prince George’s County is currently lacking—existing plans do not measure transportation equity. For example, in the Vision Zero Action Plan, Equity is the only one of the “six Es” without “indicators of success” or suggested metrics. This omission may be due to the lack of specificity in the visioning stage; the lack of background research when defining the problem; or the lack of focus in defining solutions. It is difficult to select metrics for an undefined concept and an unclear vision. And this lack of evaluation metrics means meaningful progress may not be occurring.

# Equity in Practice

Outside of the County's existing plans, there are tools and designations to help put equity into practice. One of the most comprehensive datasets assembled to support equity implementation in the region is the Equity Emphasis Areas (EEAs) database managed by the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG). The EEA designation was first developed by the Transportation Planning Board (TPB), and as of 2021, the concept was adopted for broader application by COG. As shown in the figure below, EEAs are 350 of the region's 1,222 total census tracts identified as having high concentrations of low-income individuals and communities of color. These census tracts have a higher share of households that rent, single-parent households, individuals with disabilities, and workers without a telecommuting option. In Prince George's County, the EEAs are concentrated in the northwest and central-west parts of the county.

The TPB used EEAs as a tool to analyze adverse impacts for its Long-Range Transportation Plan, Visualize 2045. Prince George's County could use the EEA's in a similar way or could take a more proactive approach to equity and use EEAs to create an MPOT that actively invests in EEA transportation needs at a faster rate and higher percentage than it does in non-EEA census tracts. Prince George's County could also choose to tailor the EEA selection criteria to more closely match the top equity concerns for the County. For example, since the majority of Prince George's County is non-white, the community of color criterion could be eliminated or assigned a lower weight than it is given in the regional program.

The TPB is also using EEAs as selection criteria in all its grant programs that fund planning for access to transit stations, improving roadway safety, alternative modes of travel, and connecting land-use and the transportation system. If Prince George's County also uses EEAs as criteria for prioritizing its transportation projects, it will be better positioned to win TPB grant funding.





MPOT 2035 is an opportunity to formally fold the EEAs into the transportation planning, implementation, and evaluation framework.