

Pursuant to Executive Order 14091 (February 16, 2023) on  
"Further Advancing Racial Equity and Support for  
Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government"

## 2023 Equity Action Plan Summary

# U.S. Department of Transportation

## Delivering equity through DOT

Access to transportation is a basic necessity that all Americans need in order to thrive. But transportation—and the economic opportunities that come with both building and using America's transportation systems—has not been equitably available to all in this country. The Department of Transportation (DOT) is mindful of the importance of fair access to transportation, a powerful force for opportunity as Americans of all backgrounds in all kinds of communities seek safe and affordable means to get to work, school, and everywhere else we need to be. Ensuring equity and accessibility for every member of the traveling public is one of the Department's highest priorities.

## New strategies to advance equity

DOT's 2023 update of its Equity Action Plan has identified five areas of focus or "pillars," including four that carried over from the original Equity Action Plan ("Wealth Creation", "Power of Community", "Proactive Intervention, Planning and Capacity Building", "Expanding Access") and one new "Institutionalizing Equity" pillar. DOT will continue to engage the public on these pillars, its progress, and next steps throughout the year and beyond.

**1. Wealth Creation: Upgrade skills, grow entrepreneurs, increase incomes, expand net asset ownership, and foster social well-being for underserved communities through direct procurement, infrastructure projects, community wealth building, and industry at large.** *Historically, government programs designed to benefit the general public, including the federal-aid highway program administered by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), often resulted in acquisition of private property and sometimes in the displacement of people, schools, businesses, community resources, houses of worship, or farms. Additionally, due to the uneven distribution of resources and business opportunities for Black- and Hispanic-owned businesses, they have had less access to growth capital. This makes it difficult to compete and perform in government contracts, which limits award opportunities for many small disadvantaged businesses (SDBs). To address these barriers and others, DOT will:*

- Promote environmental justice "do no harm" policy and capacity building framework through DOT funding programs and technical assistance.

New strategies to advance equity

- Promote best practices, case studies, and other resources to diversify the transportation sector construction workforce.
- Strengthen partnerships with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) through the [Pathways to Entrepreneurship and Women in Transportation Internship](#) (WITI) to prepare for specific industries, such as trucking.
- Finalize and implement the [Disadvantaged Business Enterprise \(DBE\) / Airport Concession DBE \(ACDBE\)](#) final rule and support funding recipients with implementation through strategic communications and targeted technical assistance support.
- Expand DOT's Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization (OSDBU) programming and resources focused on federally assisted contracts, including a focus on access to capital and development of internal and external tools.

**2. Power of Community: Ensure individuals and communities have a greater voice in transportation decisions affecting them.** *Public involvement is often treated as an event rather than a process. In many cases, community members are not involved in early discussions to identify solutions with agency partners. Public meetings are a common public involvement strategy but can be inconvenient or impossible to attend for some. Physical meeting locations may be inaccessible for some, including those with disabilities or individuals with limited English proficiency (LEP). Virtual public meetings may be inaccessible for people without internet access or computer literacy. Across formats, public engagement may be inaccessible to individuals with LEP. Agencies are often focused on compliance when it comes to public involvement. Measures of inputs, such as number of meetings, are not distinguished from measures of impacts,*

New strategies to advance equity

*such as changes to a proposed plan or project. A 2022 DOT survey found that 6% of State DOTs and 20% of Transportation Management Area (TMA)-serving Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) self-report that they have an equity screening component in their transportation planning and programming processes for all funding sources. Equity screening involves determining and communicating equity priorities through meaningful public involvement and data-driven analysis, measuring equity impacts, and considering those impacts throughout all stages of the transportation planning process. To address these barriers and others, DOT will:*

- Establish Department-wide monitoring of recipient compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VI) and meaningful public participation obligations.
- Collect Title VI and Community Participation Plans (CPPs) from all major airports.
- Update DOT Environmental Justice Order 5610.2(s), which sets forth the DOT policy to consider environmental justice principles in all programs, policies, and activities – and tools to support strengthening public involvement and environmental justice community protection.
- Release Guide on Equity Screening in the Transportation Planning Process, with accompanying training and support for digitizing Statewide Transportation Improvement Programs (S/TIPs).
- Implement at least three public engagement workshops to promote practices for effective and equitable public engagement in the transportation process.

New strategies to advance equity

- Promote resources available for meaningful public involvement including long-term public community engagement and partnerships.

**3. Proactive Intervention, Planning, and Capacity Building: Ensure historically overburdened and underserved communities in urban and rural areas benefit from access to generational investment in the nation's infrastructure through direct, hands-on technical support for transportation projects with local impact.**

*Due to historical and systemic patterns of disparity, underserved communities may lack resources needed to develop successful discretionary grant applications. Without assistance, many underserved communities may miss chances to compete for discretionary funding due to a lack of resources rather than a lack of need. Even if awarded a grant, underserved communities may also lack the necessary resources to finalize grant agreements, meet funding requirements, and conduct or implement the work. Community Based Organizations (CBOs) often represent and advocate for underserved and overburdened communities. However, CBOs face capacity challenges since coordinating with stakeholders, transportation agencies, and contractors can be both costly and time consuming. To address these barriers and others, DOT will:*

- Provide hands-on technical assistance and planning grants to enable disadvantaged and under-resourced communities to advance infrastructure projects that will help them thrive.
- Provide technical assistance for grantees and potential grantees under the Reconnecting Communities Pilot (RCP) Program through the [Reconnecting Communities Institute \(RCI\)](#).

New strategies to advance equity

- Publish a Benefit Cost Analysis (BCA) tool for grant applicants to use when applying for DOT grant opportunities with a BCA requirement.
- Conduct quarterly [DOT Navigator](#) webinars to share information on successful grant writing strategies and spotlight new resources to assist those considering applying for grants.
- Develop a methodology to calculate the distribution of burdens (in addition to benefits) for Justice40 covered programs.
- Develop a resource to track funding investment and technical assistance in rural communities.
- Reduce burdens for low-capacity communities through streamlined grant application processes and match flexibility.

**4. Expanding Access: Increase social and economic opportunity for disadvantaged and underserved communities from the provision of affordable multi-modal transportation options close to affordable housing and the development of a transportation cost burden measure.** *The transportation cost burden experienced by an individual is influenced by numerous factors. Inadequate coordination of land use, housing, and transportation policy and investment leads to inefficient transportation options that negatively impact social, economic, and health outcomes. These factors can vary substantially across communities. People experiencing lower incomes spend a far greater percent of their income on transportation than households with middle or higher incomes. Reliable, safe, high-quality accessible multimodal transportation systems can help address these disparities and increase residents' upward economic mobility. Additionally, there are significant disparities in roadway fatalities impacting Black, Tribal, and rural communities. Persons with disabilities continue to experience barriers in*

New strategies to advance equity

*airline and transit travel. To address these barriers and others, DOT will:*

- Promote safety strategies targeted to reducing gender disparities in the transit space, including launching a study on the travel needs of women on public transit.
- Complete DOT-led rulemakings on Public Rights-of-Way, Equitable Access to Transit Facilities, and Transportation for Individuals with Disabilities – Adoption of Accessibility Standards for Buses and Vans.
- Improve understanding of pedestrian and transit access, system quality, and performance to better support State DOT progress eliminating legacy inaccessible infrastructure.
- Expand upon the current research and understanding of individual and household transportation cost, travel time, trips not taken, accessibility, and access to key resources across demographics.
- Empower transportation professionals to eliminate disparities in roadway fatalities and serious injuries by building knowledge and capacity for the equitable implementation of a Safe System Approach.
- Update the [DOT Equitable Transportation Community Explorer tool](#), including system condition and access data, to help states and communities advance projects that benefit underserved communities.
- Complete research to investigate the feasibility of enabling passengers to stay in their personal wheelchairs while travelling on commercial aircraft.
- Launch enhanced transportation insecurity measure as part of a transportation disadvantage index.

New strategies to advance equity

**5. Institutionalizing Equity: Continuously provide resources to embed equity, civil rights, and social justice initiatives into the Department's decision-making processes – including meaningful public involvement – and ensure that equity is a core part of the Department's mission and culture.** *Equity is relatively new as a priority focus for DOT at the level of a Department-wide strategic goal. Many staff have limited experience and expertise applying an equity lens to their work. It can be challenging to access outside expertise through formal mechanisms such as contracting, hiring, and advisory groups. DOT's workforce is also geographically distributed across many regional offices nationwide. This can make it hard to drive consistent practices, for equity and other areas, across the Department's policies and programs. To address these barriers and others, DOT will:*

- Launch an internal community of practice to drive adoption of meaningful public involvement practices across the DOT workforce.
- Kick off an annual Equity Action Plan update process in consultation with the public.
- Receive public recommendations from the Advisory Committee on Transportation Equity (ACTE) on the Department's equity work.
- Ensure DOT supervisory and executive employees are meaningfully trained on equity and civil rights.
- Host Town Halls across the country to engage geographically diverse members of the public on priority transportation topics and policies.



## What DOT accomplished

Below is a sampling of DOT's progress delivering on equity and racial justice since its first Equity Action Plan in 2022.

- ***Published draft rules to level the playing field for SDBs.***  
In July of 2022, the Office of the Secretary of Transportation issued a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking to modernize the Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) and Airport Concession Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (ACDBE) program regulations to help further level the playing field for SDBs.
- ***Launched education seminars to support small business owners seeking DOT contracts.***  
OSDBU launched the Master Capacity Building Series to reduce hurdles by small and minority-owned businesses in obtaining federal contracts. The initial session hosted more than 500 participants, and the program has reached over 6,400 small and disadvantaged business owners as of June 2023. Technical assistance has contributed to an increase in SDB utilization, from 18.2% of DOT direct contract dollars in FY 2021 to 21.25% in FY 2022.
- ***Began tracking displacements.***  
In February of 2022, FHWA began tracking the number of residential and non-residential displacements to ensure displacements, especially in communities with environmental justice concerns, are reduced across all projects and that mitigation measures are in place to minimize impacts of relocation.

What DOT accomplished

- ***Convened the first meeting of the Women of Trucking Advisory Board.***

In November of 2023, DOT's Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) held the sixth meeting of the Women of Trucking Advisory Board, whose work supports women pursuing careers in trucking, expands scholarship opportunities for women in the trucking industry, and enhances trucking training, mentorship, education, and outreach programs for women.

- ***Expanded outreach and planning capacity in rural communities.***

Launched the [Rural Opportunities to Use Transportation for Economic Success \(ROUTES\)](#) initiative to address concerns and identify transportation challenges facing rural communities. ROUTES offers comprehensive technical assistance to rural communities across a variety of transportation-related topics, including grant funding, electric vehicles, safety, and infrastructure development and maintenance.

- ***Launched the Thriving Communities Program and awarded \$21 million to four Thriving Communities capacity builders.***

DOT launched the [Thriving Communities Program](#) in October 2022, and announced awards to capacity builders in April 2023. The capacity builders program will support 64 communities in 42 states, including six Tribal Nations and Puerto Rico.

What DOT accomplished

- ***Announced \$800 million in grant awards for the Safe Streets and Roads for All program.***

DOT announced awards in February 2023. The [Safe Streets and Roads for All](#) grant program will help communities improve roadway safety, especially for the most vulnerable roadway users, benefitting disadvantaged communities who are disproportionately impacted by roadway fatalities.

- ***Awarded \$570 million in project funds under the Railroad Crossing Elimination Grant Program.***

DOT announced awards in June 2023. The [Railroad Crossing Elimination Program](#) provides funding for highway-rail or pathway-rail grade crossing improvement projects that focus on improving the safety and mobility of people and goods. With the proximity of rail infrastructure to minority and low-income areas, there often is a correlation between grade crossing delays and negative impacts to those communities.

- ***Formed the DOT Equity Council.***

The [DOT Equity Council](#) was formed in December 2022, to guide and oversee the process for institutionalizing equity across the Department's policies and programs, and compliance with related Executive Orders and authorities. The Equity Council is chaired by Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg and meets quarterly.

What DOT accomplished

- ***Reestablished the Advisory Committee on Transportation Equity (ACTE).***

In May 2022, DOT reestablished the [ACTE](#) to provide independent advice on DOT equity programs. Appointees to the Advisory Committee were [announced in August 2023](#), and are drawn from various sectors of the transportation industry. The group held its first meeting in September 2023. The ACTE is chaired by former USDOT Secretary Anthony Foxx and [meets](#) every other month.