

# Memorandum

## Comprehensive Plan Update

December 8, 2015

**To:** Transportation and Public Facilities Subcommittee  
**Cc:** Project Team  
**From:** Jessica Berry, Transportation Planner  
**Re:** Policy Recommendations—Health and Equity, and Utilities

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### I. OVERVIEW

This memo presents proposed health and equity policies and related strategies for consideration. Also, included in this memo is a utility policy that was previously discussed as a topic by the subcommittee to address.

### II. HEALTH AND EQUITY ISSUE SUMMARY

Existing transportation systems in the US have been shaped by multiple policy inputs and decisions provided by planners, funding agencies and others at local, state, and national levels that have focused largely on building a system designed to move people and goods efficiently. An increasingly large body of research now shows that transportation decisions also directly and indirectly impact human health in multiple ways by influencing a wide range of “health determinants”. Health determinants—also referred to as “social determinants of health” or “risk factors”—are features of the built, social, and natural environment that are known to impact an individual’s risk of experiencing negative health outcomes (injury or illness). According to the American Public Health Association, “fifty percent of the leading causes of death and illness in the United States—traffic injuries, heart disease, cancer, diabetes, and respiratory illness—are preventable” because “these diseases have several risk factors that can be mitigated by transportation policies.”<sup>1</sup> The Baseline Report that was prepared for the Comprehensive Plan Update contains existing conditions information about planning related health determinants and outcomes in different parts of Multnomah County.

Much of this research has also highlighted the fact that the benefits and burdens of transportation decisions has fallen unequally on different sub-groups within a community. In particular, the negative health impacts stemming from transportation systems have disproportionately fallen on low income and minority groups, as well as others who lack access to cars or the resources to choose where they live. As a result, many transportation decisions to date have often inadvertently supported or exacerbated health inequities. Health inequities are unfair and avoidable differences between socio-economic groups in the presence of disease,

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<sup>1</sup> American Public Health Association. (2009). *At the Intersection Of Public Health And Transportation*. Washington, DC: American Public Health Association.

injury, or other health outcomes. For the public health sector, addressing equity means prioritizing the elimination of health inequities by addressing the root causes of inequity and related health outcomes. From a transportation planning perspective, this means ensuring that the benefits and burdens of the transportation system are equitably distributed, and prioritizing investments that address historical inequities and ensure that the transportation system provides all members of a community with the ability to safely and conveniently move about to meet their daily wants and needs.

As a result of the increasing awareness of the connections between transportation systems, health, and equity, more and more planners and policy-makers recognize that transportation plans provide an opportunity not just to improve mobility, but also to address historical inequities and improve the health and well-being of all the members of the communities they are designed to serve. An increasing number of state, regional, and local transportation plans are acknowledging these connections by including goals and metrics that mention both health and equity. Locally, this trend is evident in the inclusion of health and equity policies and goals in Metro's Regional Transportation Plan and in Clackamas County's recently updated TSP. In Multnomah County, the cities of Portland and Gresham are working on including similar policies and goals into their Comprehensive Plan and TSP updates.

### III. HEALTH AND EQUITY POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

#### A. HEALTH

**Ensure that the transportation system is designed to minimize negative health impacts and promote healthy behaviors and environments by:**

- **Reducing the likelihood and severity of injuries from crashes for all modes**
  - Strategies include:
    - Lowering traffic speeds through speed limits, enforcement, and roadway design
    - Minimizing modal conflict by planning and building bicycle and pedestrian networks that encourage travel on low-traffic streets or off-street trails
    - Identifying and addressing high crash corridors or hot spots with high crash rates
    - Incorporating safety-related features and best practices when designing new facilities or renovating existing facilities
    - Ensuring that vulnerable groups such as youth, elderly, and disabled are engaged in planning and design efforts.
    - Supporting Safe Routes to School and other education and encouragement programs that teach people how to safely use the transportation system
    - Developing a transportation safety action plan

- **Increasing opportunities for physical activity by promoting active transportation modes (walking, bicycling, transit, and equestrian) and multimodal access to parks, trails, open space, and other recreational facilities.**
  - Strategies include:
    - Building out multimodal transportation networks
    - Ensuring safe, convenient, multimodal access to parks, trails, open space and other recreational facilities
    - Supporting Safe Routes to School and other education and encouragement programs that teach and encourage people to safely use active transportation modes
    - Partnering with the Multnomah County Health Department on health promotion and chronic disease prevention programs and initiatives that focus on increasing physical activity
- **Reducing exposure to air pollutants**
  - Strategies include:
    - Encouraging programs that reduce vehicle miles travelled and use of electric and low emission vehicles.
    - Encouraging bicyclists and pedestrians to use parallel low traffic streets instead of high traffic roadways.
    - Coordinating land use and transportation planning to ensure that sensitive new land uses such as schools, senior centers, and affordable housing that are used by vulnerable groups are not located within a quarter mile of high traffic roadways or freight routes
    - Establishing vegetative buffers (trees and hedges) along high traffic roadways to reduce the dispersion of air pollutants
    - Implementing anti-idling campaigns around schools, road construction zones, and other places where drivers tend to idle.
- **Reducing exposure to noise pollution**
  - Strategies include:
    - Encouraging bicyclists and pedestrians to use parallel low traffic streets instead of high traffic roadways.
    - Coordinating land use and transportation planning to ensure that sensitive new land uses such as schools, senior centers, and affordable housing that are used by vulnerable groups are not located within a quarter mile of high traffic roadways or freight routes
    - Using paving materials that are designed to minimize the production of road noise
- **Ensuring multimodal access to health supportive resources such as healthy food retail, employment, affordable housing, and parks and recreation facilities**
  - Strategies include:
    - Coordinating land use planning to ensure that such resources are easily accessible by multiple modes

- Working with transit providers to ensure that service plans are coordinated with development
  - Working with transit providers to ensure that bicycle and pedestrian improvements support transit use
  - Ensuring site design guidelines and requirements provide and promote multimodal site access and circulation, and connections to surrounding lots and streets
- **Working with Multnomah County Health Department staff to ensure that the TSP and related planning documents incorporate the findings and recommendations from the most recent versions of their Community Health Assessment and Community Health Improvement Plan.**
  - Strategies include:
    - Having relevant health department staff serve on planning related technical and advisory committees
    - Having relevant planning staff participate in the development of the community health assessments and community health improvement plans

## B. EQUITY

**Ensure that transportation system plans and investments not only equitably distribute the benefits and burdens of the system improvements, but also prioritize and support programs and projects that eliminate transportation-related disparities faced by groups that have historically had significant unmet transportation needs or who have experienced disproportionate negative impacts from the existing transportation system.**

- Strategies include:
  - Incorporation of project prioritization criteria that address equity in the County Capital improvement Plan and Program to address investments in road, bicycle, and pedestrian programs and infrastructure in order to improve mobility and access for people who don't have access to a personal vehicle.
  - Investments in areas with relatively high concentrations of people that have historically received relatively little benefit from transportation system investments should be considered. These people include:
    - *People who cannot drive.* People in this category include many older adults, children, and persons with disabilities.
    - *People experiencing poverty,* including those who do not have access to a car, are struggling with the high costs of car ownership, maintenance, and operation, or are struggling with the cost of transit. People in this category include many people with low incomes, people of color, older adults, persons with disabilities, people who are geographically isolated, and people who experience language barriers.

- *People with limited mobility.* People in this category include many older adults and persons with disabilities.
- *Isolated individuals living far from community centers and lacking direct routes for accessing goods and services*
- *Communities experiencing racism and discrimination*
- Coordinating transportation planning with land use and development to avoid locating sensitive land uses near high traffic roadways. Sensitive land uses include schools, parks and playfields, community and senior centers, affordable housing, and other places where vulnerable groups such as youth, seniors, and people with low incomes spend significant amounts of time.
- Coordinating transportation planning with land use and development to ensure that new development is well connected with existing development and provides convenient multi-modal access to health supportive resources such as schools, healthy food retail, employment, affordable housing, parks and recreation facilities, and medical and social services
- Ensure that public participation includes outreach to equity focused or population specific organizations or culturally specific organizations and explore partnerships with these groups to develop the capacity to effectively participate in planning processes.
- Working with the Multnomah County Office of Diversity and Equity to use their Equity and Empowerment Lens tool to ensure that county planning staff and project stakeholders are prepared to engage in internal and external conversations about equity and use this input to inform plans, policies and projects
- Conducting equity analyses that identify existing disparities as a part of county planning processes.
- Gathering available data and public input useful for understanding equity issues, impacts and opportunities

Sauvie Island Multnomah Channel Equity Policy is attached for reference.

#### IV. ADDITIONAL POLICIES DISCUSSED PREVIOUSLY

##### A. UTILITIES

**Coordinate with public service providers and private utility suppliers to maximize the efficient delivery of both public and private utilities and facilities in County Right of way.**

- Strategies include:
  - Work with utility companies that own transmission and distribution lines to strive to bury the power lines to provide more secure power service during emergency situations and improve scenic qualities.