EQUITY *THROUGH* ACCESS

2016 Update to the Region's Coordinated Human Services Transportation Plan

Gaps & Bridges

DELAWARE VALLEY dvrpc
REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

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Introduction

The Equity Through Access (ETA) project is the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission's (DVRPC's) update of the region's Coordinated Human Services Transportation Plan (CHSTP), which seeks to improve economic and social opportunity in the region by improving access to essential services for vulnerable populations. This project responds to the changing CHSTP funding landscape and looks for new ways to promote accessible, affordable, and safe mobility.

One of the guiding influences of the ETA project is the U.S. Department of Transportation's Ladders of Opportunity initiative. This effort was launched in 2015 to foster more involvement and inclusion, and to mitigate barriers through the nation's infrastructure improvements in order to build more vibrant communities; a healthier economy; and a stronger, more connected nation. The initiative recognizes that transportation projects exert influence beyond the built environment, impacting the job opportunities and social mobility of individuals and communities.

Building off the Ladders of Opportunity initiative, the ETA project conducted an outreach process, meeting with a wide range of stakeholders to define DVRPC's vision and parameters for this project. **Vulnerable populations** are defined as persons who are more critically impacted by barriers and gaps in infrastructure, service coordination, and policy development. In the context of this project, these populations are individuals who are low income, seniors, physically disabled, mentally disabled, and/or transit dependent. **Essential services** are defined as destinations needed to access high quality of life for vulnerable populations and all citizens of the region. These resources include places of employment, grocery stores, schools, medical facilities, recreation/open space, senior centers, and centers for the developmentally disabled.

Associate Director Karin Morris presents the Equity Through Access Project to the Bucks-Mont Collaborative for Health and Human Services at one of DVRPC's outreach roadshows.
Credit: DVRPC, 2016

The iterative outreach process revealed a series of issues and needs that vulnerable populations face in accessing essential services. These were compiled into "Gaps and Bridges." Gaps are existing factors in the region that constrain access to transportation or mobility for vulnerable populations. Bridges are possible solutions, based on case studies and expert opinion, aimed at developing more comprehensive and effective regional transit service and multi-modal infrastructure.

The following gaps and bridges reflect the ETA project's findings based on the collected feedback and information, and together serve as the priority strategies of the new regional CHSTP.

Gaps and Bridges

Gaps

Listed below are existing factors in the region that constrain access to transportation for vulnerable populations.

Infrastructure

- Not all fixed-route service is Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessible.
- Some ADA-accessible transit vehicles and stops are hindered by inaccessible or nonexistent sidewalk networks.
- Some intersections lack appropriate signals, curb ramps, or marked pedestrian crossings.
- Existing utility infrastructure (electric poles, street lighting) and limited rights-of-way create barriers for ADA-compliant networks.
- Some transportation infrastructure (such as overpasses, rail lines, and wide roadways) can create barriers within neighborhoods.
- Transfers between transportation modes are not always accessible, affordable, or intuitive.

An inaccessible sidewalk in Camden, NJ. Credit: DVRPC, 2015

Service and funding

- Existing routes and schedules are not always coordinated, flexible, or convenient. For example, some on-demand paratransit services require advance reservations of a day or more.

- Shared services for riders with different needs are inhibited by rules and licensing developed by the services' individual funding sources.
- There is inadequate funding to meet overall service demand among vulnerable populations.
- Paratransit funding is scarce, inflexible, and siloed, making it difficult for providers to find funding. It can be difficult to find partners to fund projects where local funding matches are required.

Data and coordination

- Human services transportation providers lack detailed, block-level data on the needs and associated destinations of local shuttle users. This can be due to:
  - lack of access to privately held data;
  - small and hard-to-reach groups of potential and current transit riders; and
  - privacy restrictions associated with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA).
- There is a lack of coordination between public transit services and Transportation Network Companies (TNCs), such as Uber and Lyft.
- Vulnerable populations sometimes lack access to smartphones and other technology that provide up-to-date information on available transit services.
- Information about travel options for vulnerable communities is not always clear or accessible in universal platforms like Google Maps.
- There is a lack of coordination between transit services and land development projects.
- There is a lack of available travel information in other languages.

Bridges

The following are possible solutions aimed at developing comprehensive and effective regional mobility for those most in need.

Create accessible and affordable infrastructure

Vulnerable populations are more acutely affected by poor sidewalk connectivity, inaccessible transit stops or vehicles, and disconnected land use planning. The region's transportation system should be linked with the communities people live and work in, and designed to be navigated with comfort and dignity by users of all ages and abilities. Implementing these solutions will require the dedicated efforts of many actors, including federal, state, and, local governments; transit agencies; social service providers; real estate developers; major employers; and funders. Some of these efforts are already underway thanks to the work of a few individuals, organizations, businesses, and institutions; however, there is much more work to do.

- Ensure that transit stop locations, connecting pathways, and street crossings are accessible and prioritize improvements where they are not.
- Encourage equitable transit-oriented development that includes affordable housing and essential services.
- Support Complete Streets, Vision Zero, connective sidewalk networks, public restrooms, and places to sit or rest in all communities—especially those with concentrations of vulnerable populations—recognizing that these features often make the difference between being able to safely go out or having to stay home.

A public restroom next to a Complete Street in Vancouver, BC. Credit: DVRPC, 2016

- Offer seamless and accessible movement between modes by clustering infrastructure, coordinating arrival and departure times, implementing effective wayfinding, and providing free or affordable transfers.
- Prioritize accessibility improvements at/in:
    - key transportation hubs and activity centers that serve significant numbers of vulnerable populations;
    - communities with concentrations of disabled and/or senior populations; and
    - essential service locations, such as hospitals, medical facilities, and senior centers.
- Develop a greater number of discounted transit pass types for vulnerable communities, such as free full-week passes for public school students (not just Monday–Friday), and discounted passes for low-income customers.

Provide infrastructure that feels safe for vulnerable users

Fear for one's safety, because of crime or the perception of crime and/or the design of the built environment, can inhibit access to important services and opportunities. Agencies should work closely with vulnerable communities to understand their safety concerns, remove existing barriers, and plan new infrastructure with personal safety and security in mind.

- Encourage planning and design efforts that improve the safety and comfort of navigating the transportation system, such as improved lighting, security cameras, staffed transit stations, crosswalks, pedestrian countdown clocks, and traffic-calming treatments, among others.
- Employ design features that create a welcoming environment, minimize opportunities for criminal activities, and foster a sense of ownership by transit users and employees, and other Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) strategies.
- Use collaborative community processes to understand end-users' safety concerns.

Improve transportation service

Vulnerable populations are often burdened by unreliable or infrequent transit service. Improving service in the region requires strengthening coordination efforts, improving reliability, and developing flexible services that improve access to essential services and job opportunities.

- Support the deployment of new technology to enhance passenger service and information coordination, such as Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) real-time signage at transit stops and convenient online schedule information.
- Support initiatives promoting shared-use mobility, including participation in pilot projects that aim to test ways that

traditional transit services can be coordinated with new modes like TNCs.

- Support initiatives that provide better access to online travel information for vulnerable populations, including outreach and communications provided for limited English proficiency populations.
- Explore partnerships for services that cross geographic boundaries, such as the Gloucester County–Camden County partnership for nonemergency medical transportation.
- Encourage planning efforts and develop partnerships that provide service enhancements and access to living-wage jobs in difficult-to-reach locations.
- Encourage improvements to service frequency, service span, and transit stations for routes serving low-income areas with high ridership.
- Support the creation of mobile health care programs that provide in-home appointments for vulnerable populations, like Johns Hopkins' Program of All-inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE).
- Plan for the changing travel needs of an aging population, such as a greater reliance on transit, paratransit, and shared-ride services, along with the need for a more accessible built environment.
- Strengthen and coordinate partnerships between health care systems and transportation providers, recognizing that different types of health appointments, such as a person needing kidney dialysis or a monthly physician check-up, may require different and/or flexible transportation and scheduling options.
- Incentivize the purchase of more wheelchair-accessible taxis and shared vehicles.

- Given the limited funds available for retrofitting the region's transit system, transit agencies should prioritize:
  - ways to make lifeline services such as paratransit and low-frequency fixed-route transit more convenient and affordable for the passengers who rely on them; and
  - transit service changes that provide new ways for vulnerable populations to access essential services, employment, and last-mile connections (for example, Greater Mercer Transportation Management Association's ZLine connects New Jersey Transit riders in Trenton to Amazon's distribution center in Robbinsville, New Jersey).

Improve outreach and communication

Effective outreach, marketing, and education are essential to ensuring that future transportation investments will be useful for—and used by—the populations they are intended to serve. Direct outreach to and communication with vulnerable populations provides feedback that is unobtainable by other means.

- Use multiple outreach tools, tailor materials, and put more funding toward marketing that presents transit as a mainstream, viable alternative to the private automobile.
- Distribute transit service materials at essential service destinations.
- Conduct comprehensive outreach directly to transit riders during transit service improvement and expansion efforts.
- Expand and refine methods for educating people on how to access and use public transit.
- Train case workers and job coaches to provide travel training to clients.

Encourage creative, flexible use of existing funding sources and identify new funding partners

Expanding access to essential services requires years of continued efforts, creating difficulties for sustaining long-range solutions in a resource-limited financial landscape. To address this challenge, future work should draw on creative mixes of public, private, and philanthropic funding, or develop new approaches to use existing resources more efficiently.

- Encourage flexibility in funding sources.
- Encourage creativity in the mixing of funding sources to break down funding silos (such as those separated by trip purpose) and increase transit options for vulnerable populations.
- Identify nontraditional funding sources that can be used for transportation improvements (such as Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality grants to subsidize the operation costs of a new transit service).
- Share information about best practices for funding infrastructure and transit projects.

Create data resources

Access to rich and accurate data can inform planning and service improvements in vulnerable communities by revealing demographic and transportation trends. To provide greater access to existing data, intuitive platforms should be developed so that nontechnical users can better evaluate existing transportation options and advocate for improved infrastructure and service in their communities.

- Support collaborative and open platforms that develop and share new data to bridge knowledge and access gaps for providers and the general public.

- Encourage data sharing between transportation agencies to perform travel demand analysis to define potential changes to existing paratransit services.
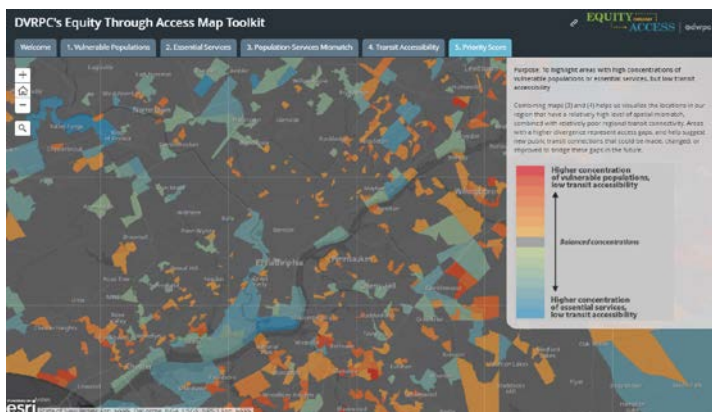
DVRPC's Equity Through Access Map Toolkit
Credit: DVRPC, 2016

- Develop and share more planning and mapping tools to help with project development, such as DVRPC's ETA Map Toolkit.
- Build technical capacity for small transit providers to better share information through trainings and information exchanges, such as the General Transit Feed Specification (GTFS) builder. The GTFS builder allows transit agencies to publish transit schedules and geographic data for use in trip planning applications like Google Maps.