

## Transportation Trends Affecting Metro Portland

With identification of disparities affecting marginalized communities

December 2021

Trend	Disparities	Amount of Research	Confidence Level
Portland will continue to have a <b>two-caste transportation system</b> , with priority for those who can afford to, and are legally and physically able to operate a car (the upper caste), and lower priority for those too poor, too young, too old, to operate a car (the lower caste). Most of the other inequities (safety, pollution, lack of access and discrimination) flow from this two-caste system.	<b>Low income</b> people, people of <b>color</b> , and the <b>old</b> and the <b>young</b> are disproportionately consigned to being in the <b>lower caste</b> by our car-dependent transportation system.	High	High
Portland area transportation <b>greenhouse gas emissions have increased by 1,000 pounds</b> per person annually (14 percent) over the past few years, and show no signs of declining, despite state, regional and local plans calling for a reduction in GHGs. The region will have to take much bolder action than any laid out in the RTP to comply with adoption laws.	Climate change caused by GHG emissions disproportionately come from higher income households and lower density sprawling neighborhoods, and disproportionately affects low income neighborhoods.	High	High
ODOT plans to spend billions of dollars <b>widening area freeways</b> , which will <b>induce additional travel</b> ; Gas taxes from road use don't cover anything approaching the cost of building and maintaining freeways, meaning that their costs are subsidized by non-users.	Freeways are only usable to people who can afford the roughly \$5,000 annual cost of owning and operating a car. Car ownership is much lower among low income populations and people of color. A car dependent transportation system doesn't work for those who can afford to own a car and those who can't or shouldn't drive.	High	High

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The number of <b>persons killed on Portland area streets</b> and roads has increased steadily. Pedestrians and other vulnerable road users account for half of deaths. Most transportation spending is devoted to enabling vehicles to move faster making roads more dangerous for non-car travelers	People of color, low income people, and the young and old are disproportionately likely to be pedestrians, cyclists and vulnerable road users. Spending most transportation dollars on freeways, which are the least deadly roadways is inequitable.		
<b>Gasoline prices and gas taxes don't cover the fiscal, social or environmental costs</b> caused by driving. These costs, which range into the billions of dollars annually, are shifted to non-users.	Under-charging users for the costs of driving results in more driving, and more social costs that would otherwise occur, and unfairly imposes these damages and costs on non-users, who tend to be disproportionately low income and people of color.	High	High
Public policies will continue to allow <b>unpriced use of public roads</b> by cars while charging prices for use of transit. Congestion on public streets by unpriced private automobiles diminishes the speed and efficiency of public transit, which lowers its productivity, decreases its services levels and competitiveness, which lowers ridership and increases costs.	Low income people and people of color, as well as the very young and very old are more likely to be transit-dependent than the overall population. They disproportionately bear the costs of worse bus service caused by the unpriced use of public streets by private cars.	High	High
Public policies will continue to <b>subsidize free on street parking</b> for most car owners at a cost of tens or hundreds of millions of dollars a year.	Free and subsidized parking only <b>benefits those who own cars</b> , and disproportionately benefits higher income and whiter populations.	High	High
Roads and streets continue to contribute 50 percent or more to <b>stormwater</b> runoff, which causes pollution, and is expensive to fix. Yet streets and roads, and their users pay nothing toward costs of stormwater collection and treatment. These costs are largely shifted to water users, especially households, many of whom don't own or drive cars.	Low income populations and people of color are disproportionately likely to be responsible for paying costs of stormwater due to costs shifted on to residences.	High	High

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<b>Adjacency</b> is not a good measure of equity	Currently Metro relies on measures of adjacency (i.e. the demographic composition of census tracts adjacent to transportation infrastructure) to determine whether projects are equitable; This approach ignores the negative effects of proximity to many types of infrastructure, particularly highways)..	High	High
<b>Accessibility</b> Measures should be used, rather than mobility.	The performance of the transportation system should be judged by accessibility (the number of destinations one can easily reach), rather than by mobility (distance and speed traveled). Maximizing accessibility is consistent with the region's environmental, social and land use objectives; maximizing mobility undercuts key objectives and is more expensive.	High	High
Equity is best served by <b>direct payments</b> rather than more spending to increase supply.	Measures such as Portland's transportation wallet can promote equity by giving more purchasing power and a wider array of options to low income households and targeted populations.		
Target <b>VMT reductions</b> . Reduced VMT is needed to achieve the state and region's legislatively mandated GHG reduction goals. Portland decreased VMT 1.5 percent per year between 2005 and 2013.	VMT reduction saves money and stimulates the local economy, which benefits disadvantaged populations. The 1.5 mile per day decrease in average trips between 2005 and 2013 saved the region \$600 million per year on transportation expense, which benefited the local economy.	High	High
Transportation spending targets <b>peak hour car trips</b> .	Peak hour car commuters have vastly higher incomes than the general population, and those who commute by transit, bike or walking	High	High

**Green Dividend:** Measures that reduce transportation costs have, in the past, created a “green dividend” for local households. Failure to continue to decrease VMT and transportation expense would be a missed opportunity to improve the region’s economy.

Transportation is costly: the average household spends 15 percent of its income on transportation. Policies that reduce the amount of travel that households need to make, as measured by average VMT, reduce household expenses and increase household disposable income. Transportation expenditures are particularly burdensome for lower income households.

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**Demand for Walkability.** Walkable neighborhoods are in high demand and short supply. More housing in dense, high demand locations results in fewer VMT, lower GHG emissions, and higher use of transit, biking and walking.

More and more people are interested in living in walkable urban neighborhoods, which are in short supply. The failure to build enough housing in walkable neighborhoods drives up housing prices, and makes it more difficult for low income households to be able to live in walkable neighborhoods, where transportation costs are lower.

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City Observatory is an urban policy think tank based in Portland, specializing in the analysis of housing, transportation, economic development and equity issues in the nation’s large metropolitan areas. City Observatory develops independent policy research and provides regular commentary on urban policy issues. For more information, visit [www.CityObservatory.org](http://www.CityObservatory.org).