

OPERATIONALIZING
EQUITY

Community and Economic Opportunity

January 29, 2026

Divya Gandhi

Transportation Planning Division

Sherri L. Dawson, AICP

Moderator

Dionne Hines, AICP

SOTP Co-Editor



Definitions and Future Events

Equity Statement for 2025 State of Transportation Planning Report

Equity in planning starts with a broad perspective of equity as fair and just inclusion in a society where everyone can participate and thrive. Equity in transportation planning is a value-driven approach that recognizes the inequities that past discriminatory practices may have caused. These inequities need to be considered and ideally rectified in current transportation planning activities. The transportation planning community strives to provide transportation improvements through a holistic approach, recognizing that communities have unique needs and challenges. The goal of these efforts is a society where everyone shares in the benefits and burdens of the overall transportation system.

The Transportation Planning Division has a book club! See “In the Community” on the TPD web page for details

Moderator

Sherri L. Dawson



Sherri L. Dawson, AICP is the Chair-Elect for the Transportation Planning Division and also serves as a Member Advocate for the APA Virginia Chapter. Most recently, she served as the Director of Transit Development at Hampton Roads Transit (HRT), where she led innovative transit projects across the Hampton Roads region. She has over 15 years of expertise in transit and transportation planning across the public and private sectors, spearheading high-capacity transit projects and community engagement and education programs that go beyond checking a box.

Presenters



Michael Belvin

Mr. Belvin, a senior environmental planner, has more than 30 years of experience in transportation planning, project development, environmental documentation, field investigation, and analysis. He has been the principal author of numerous environmental documents. His transportation knowledge is broad-based from surveying to design work, including the drawing and review of design plans. He has personally been involved in identifying impacts related to community issues, environmental issues, and economic issues such as cohesiveness, travel patterns, historic structures, and hardships placed on businesses due to construction and rerouting of traffic.



Karen Hadley, AICP, PMP

Karen Hadley is a senior project manager and Discipline Leader for Environmental Planning based in Denver, Colorado with over 20 years of experience focused on transportation projects. Karen is experienced in the oversight and management of complex, multi-disciplinary project teams and enjoys helping clients deliver lasting and implementable solutions to critical challenges. She has extensive knowledge of planning principles, practices, and procedures necessary to deliver multiyear projects that are highly visible and controversial, requiring unique solutions. In addition, she is adept in translating highly complex materials into easy-to-understand formats for the public and stakeholders.



Davonna Moore - Edeh

Davonna C. Moore-Edeh is an accomplished Project Manager and Freight Discipline Leader with over 25 years of experience in project and program management, specializing in complex multimodal and freight planning within the public sector. Her career is marked by leadership roles in significant freight projects, including the development of statewide freight plans, truck parking studies, and urban freight movement strategies. Mrs. Moore-Edeh has guided numerous initiatives for departments of transportation, metropolitan planning organizations, and municipalities, bringing valuable insight into stakeholder engagement, policy coordination, and the integration of advanced technology solutions.



Corey Hull, AICP

Corey Hull is the Director of Partnerships and Strategy for The Ray, a nonprofit reimagining highways as safer, cleaner, and more productive systems. With over two decades of experience in transportation planning and sustainable infrastructure, he leads partnerships with state DOTs, local governments, and regional agencies to advance innovation in right-of-way solar, energy transmission, safety technology, and pollinator habitat restoration. Before joining The Ray, Corey led regional planning programs in Georgia, managing a \$500 million transportation sales tax initiative and helping launch two public transit systems.

A group of diverse people are gathered around a long table in a community meeting. They are looking at and pointing to various maps and documents spread out on the table. The room has large windows on the right side, and a sign with a palm tree and a crescent moon is visible on the wall in the background. The overall atmosphere is collaborative and focused on planning.

Going Beyond. When Policy Isn't Enough

*Michael Belvin
Environmental Planning Discipline Lead*

*Karen Hadley, AICP, PMP
Environmental Planning Discipline Lead*

Agenda



1. Settlement Communities
2. The Regulatory Gap
3. The Voice of the People
4. The Power of Outreach and Data
5. Summary and Questions

About Settlement Communities

- Established during Reconstruction through the early 1900s
- Home to free Gullah Geechee people and their descendants
- Defined by shared history, identity, cultural institutions, and ancestral connections

Source: Charleston City Plan, 2021. Image: Come Back to the Land Study, 2022.





When conducting our **effects analysis**, we encountered:

- Insufficient data
- Lack of regulatory and institutional guidance

Data Gaps

- No spatial datasets representing boundaries
- Historic boundaries may not represent where people live

Why?

- Boundaries based on ancestral connections rather than land ownership
 - Ancestral connection not reflected in institutional frameworks



Image: Come Back to the Land Study, 2022.

Lack of Regulatory and Agency Guidance

National Historic Preservation Act

- ✗ No eligible infrastructure in place

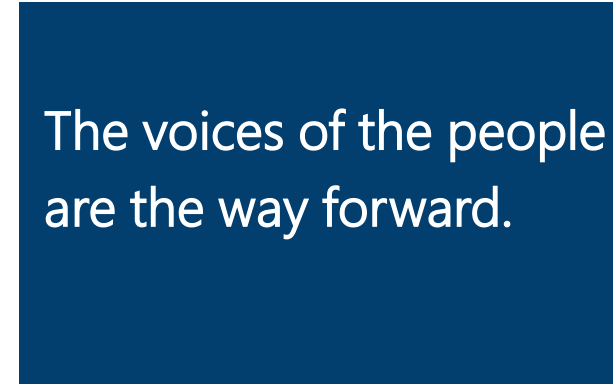
Community Impact Assessment Guidance

- ✗ Lack of traditional neighborhoods

Executive Orders

- ✗ Rescinded in January 2025
- ✗ Existing demographics did not reflect historic populations

With a lack of data, regulatory coverage, and guidance, how do you move forward?



Come Back to the Land Study, 2022.

Participants (Left to Right) - (Top Row) Joshua Parks, Amelia Ann Washington, Ned Roper (Middle Row) Ercella Chillis, Eugene Frazier (Bottom Row) William Brown, Josephine Brown, William Cubby Wilder, Earnest Parks.



We heard the **voice of the people** and:

- Developed spatial datasets
- Documented oral and visual history
- Built public excitement and political interest

Key finding:

Working with communities brings valuable data that may otherwise be unobtainable.

The public engagement process directly led to the development of new datasets.

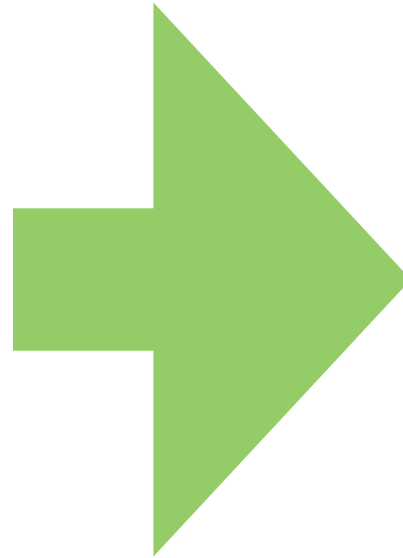
Type of Outreach

Oral history interviews

Public meetings

History gathering events

Archival document collection

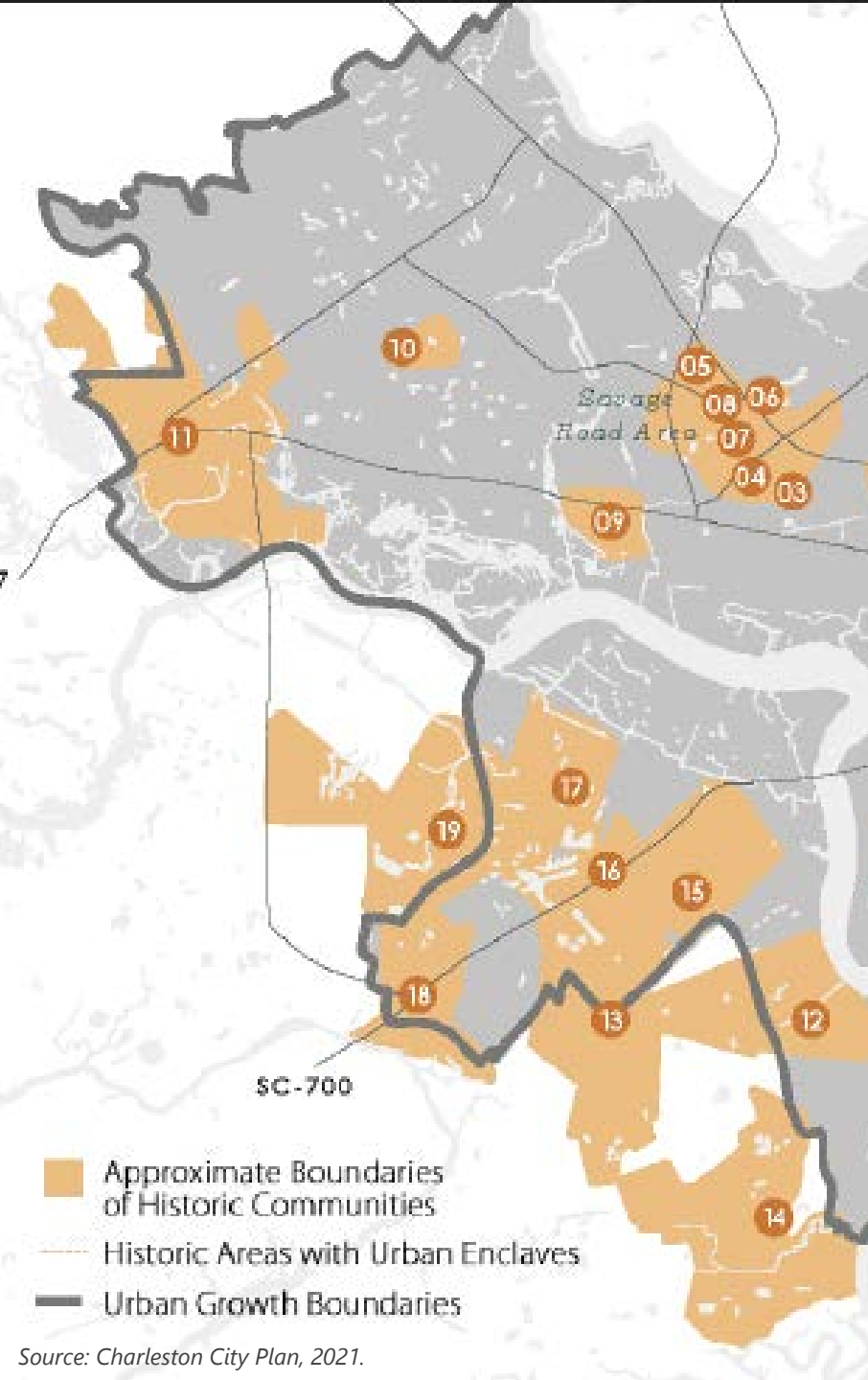


Data Generated

Geographic Information Systems (GIS) boundaries and location-specific resource files

Documented histories

Recommendations for preservation

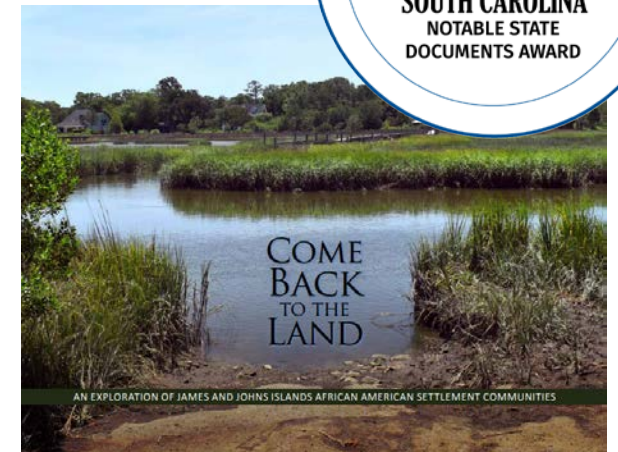


Charleston City Plan (2021)

- GIS boundary files
- Background and history
- Recommendations for preservation

Come Back to the Land Study (2022)

- GIS boundary files
- Location-specific resources
- Documented oral histories



Come Back to the Land Study identified:



In Action: The Power of People and Data



Settlement Community Stakeholder Meeting



Buy-in among the public and decisionmakers **generates** the **interest** necessary to get projects done.



PRESERVATION
ESTD SOCIETY 1920
of CHARLESTON



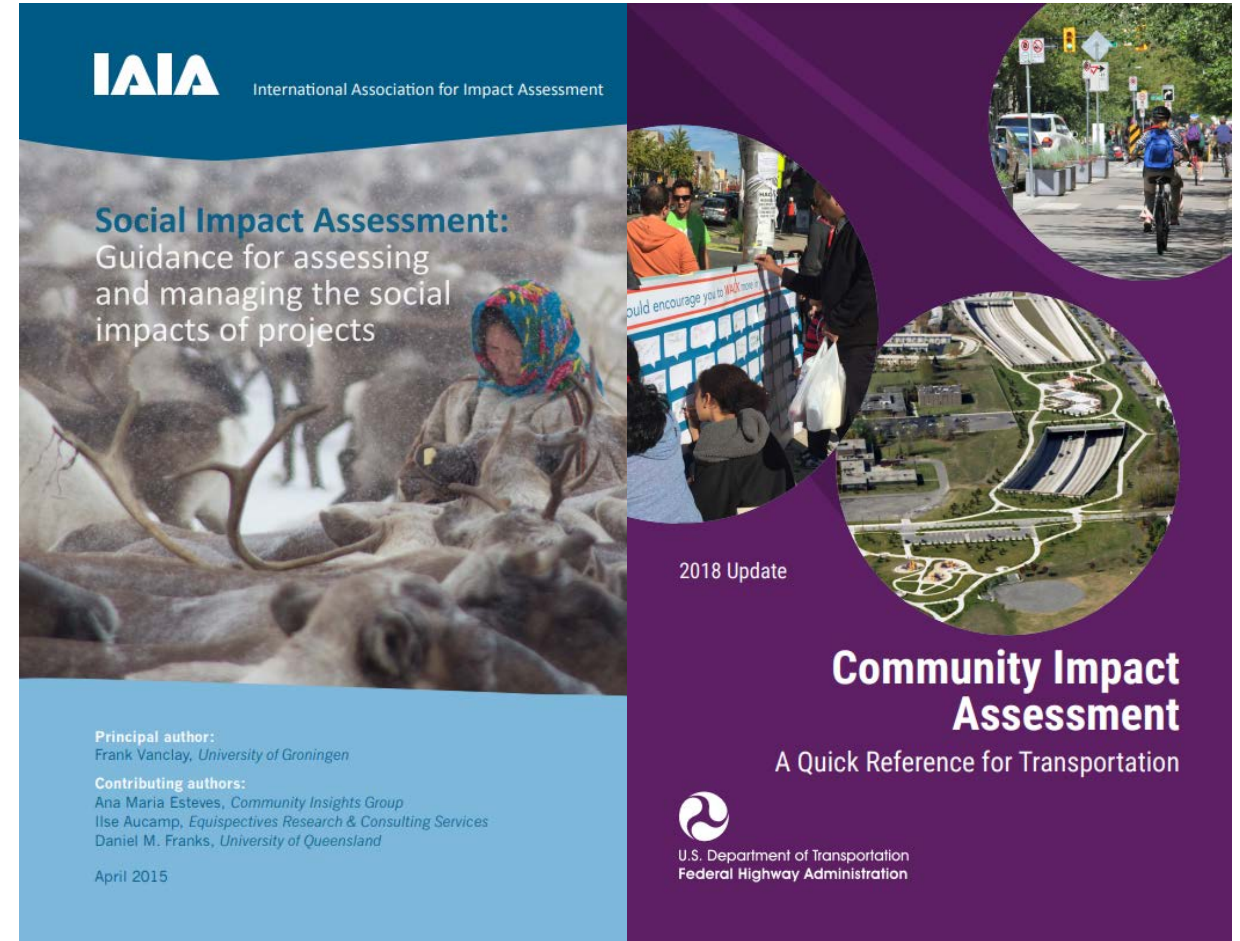
The best way to get started is by getting all your stakeholders at the table.

Support from stakeholders empowered us when building a methodology.

Consider:

- Academic guidance
- International guidance
 - Ex: International Association for Impact Assessment
- Methodologies aimed at making similar analyses
 - Ex: US Department of Transportation (DOT) Community Impact Assessment

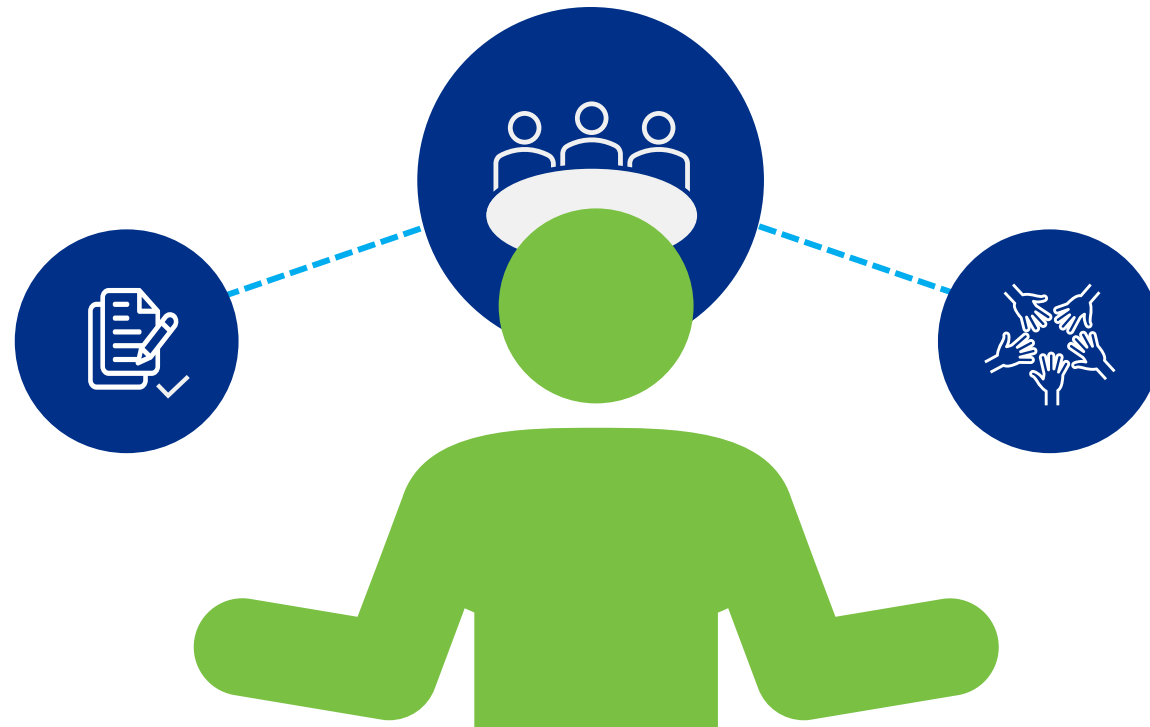
Key finding: The use of existing guidance, however modified to meet specific needs, helps to establish a defensible methodology that can be used to analyze new data that does not fit traditional frameworks.



The Bottom Line

Public engagement helps **fill data gaps** and **generates the buy-in** needed to complete projects.

With better data and decision-maker support, you can create a **strong, defensible methodology** and improve your effects analyses.



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Thank you!

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Reshaping Justice 40 Data to Identify and Address Transit Needs

Data-Driven Planning for Improved Transit Access

Presenter: Davonna Moore-Edeh,
Community Impacts Discipline Leader

Overview of the I-285 Express Lanes Transit Study

I-285 Express Lanes Transit Study



- I-285 EL from I-20 East to I-20 West
- 34-miles
- Two new, barrier-separated lanes
- Includes Congestion Pricing
- The I-285 Express Lanes Transit Study Use of Transit within the I-285 Express lane
- The study prioritizes mobility needs throughout the transit planning process to enhance transit effectiveness.
- The study identifies high-need areas with a nuanced methodology to focus significant transit improvements.

Methodology for Assessing Transit Access Burden

Traditional Approaches to Identifying Transit Demand Areas

Traditional Demographic-Based Approach

Prior methods focus on residents' demographics to locate transit-dependent populations using variables like income and vehicle ownership.

Limitations of Traditional Methods

Traditional approaches exclude transit supply factors, ignoring differences in transit availability across communities.





Supply-Side Transit Analysis

Identify Transit Service Function

Accessibility is evaluated by travel time, transfers, and distance to essential destinations for transit users.

Methodology Integration



Demand-Side Factors

Demand-side analysis focuses on identifying populations facing transportation barriers like car-deficient households and seniors.



Supply-Side Factors

Supply-side analysis evaluates transit service frequency, stop density, and accessibility to key destinations.



Comprehensive Integration

Combining demand and supply analyses provides a fuller understanding of transit needs across communities.

Transit Access Burden Metric Components

Innovative Integrated Approach

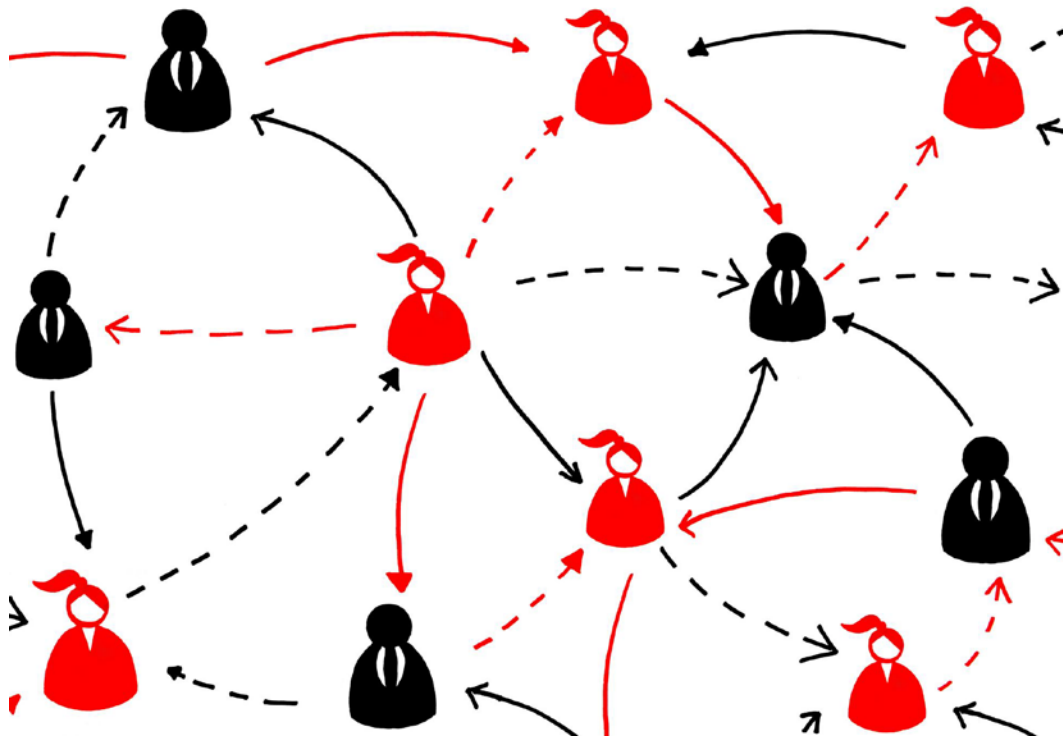
Combine demand-side demographics and supply-side transit system features for a more equitable transit need analysis.

Multi-Faceted Transit Accessibility

Integrate transit-dependent population and Transit Access Burden for comprehensive transit evaluation.

Spatial Analysis Approach

Detailed analysis at census tract level identifies areas with highest transit access needs and burdens.



Spatial Analysis of Transit Needs at the Census Tract Level

Spatial Analysis and Mapping Populations



Census Tract Level Analysis

Spatial analysis at census tract level ensures data-driven and legally compliant transportation planning.

Mapping Transportation Barriers

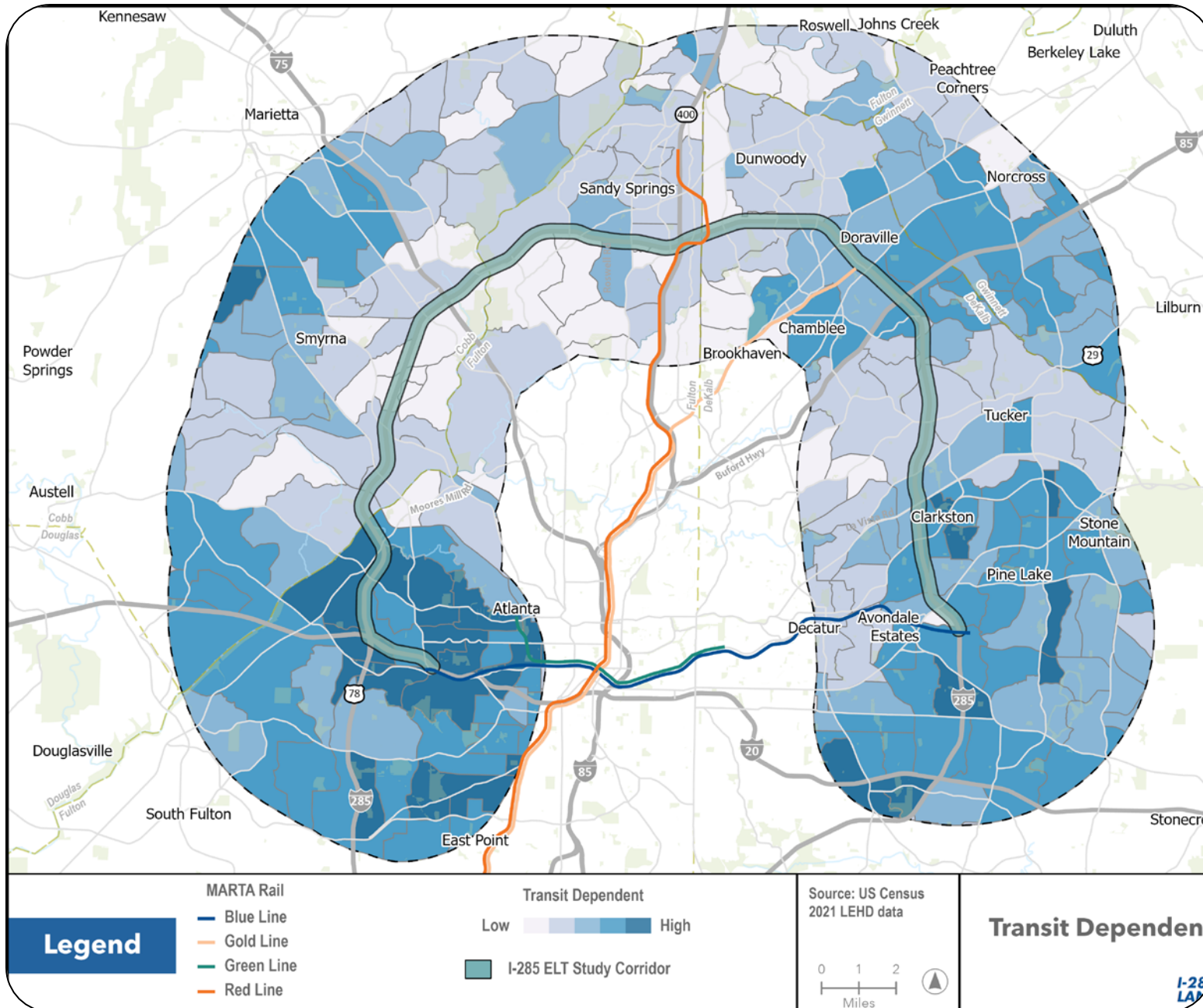
Public datasets are used to identify populations facing chronic transportation barriers and access limitations.

Evaluating Transit Service Quality

The analysis assesses both access to transportation and the quality of existing transit services to identify service gaps.

Targeted Mobility Interventions

Combining data helps identify low investment regions to guide decentralized decision-making and targeted local interventions.



Mapping Transit Dependence

Visualizing Transit Dependence

Maps illustrate areas with varying levels of transit dependence using color gradients from light to dark blue.

Concentration of Transit Dependency

Highest transit dependence is concentrated near southern regions adjacent to I-285 and I-20 interchanges and nearby communities.

Transit Access Burden Analysis

High Access Burden Areas

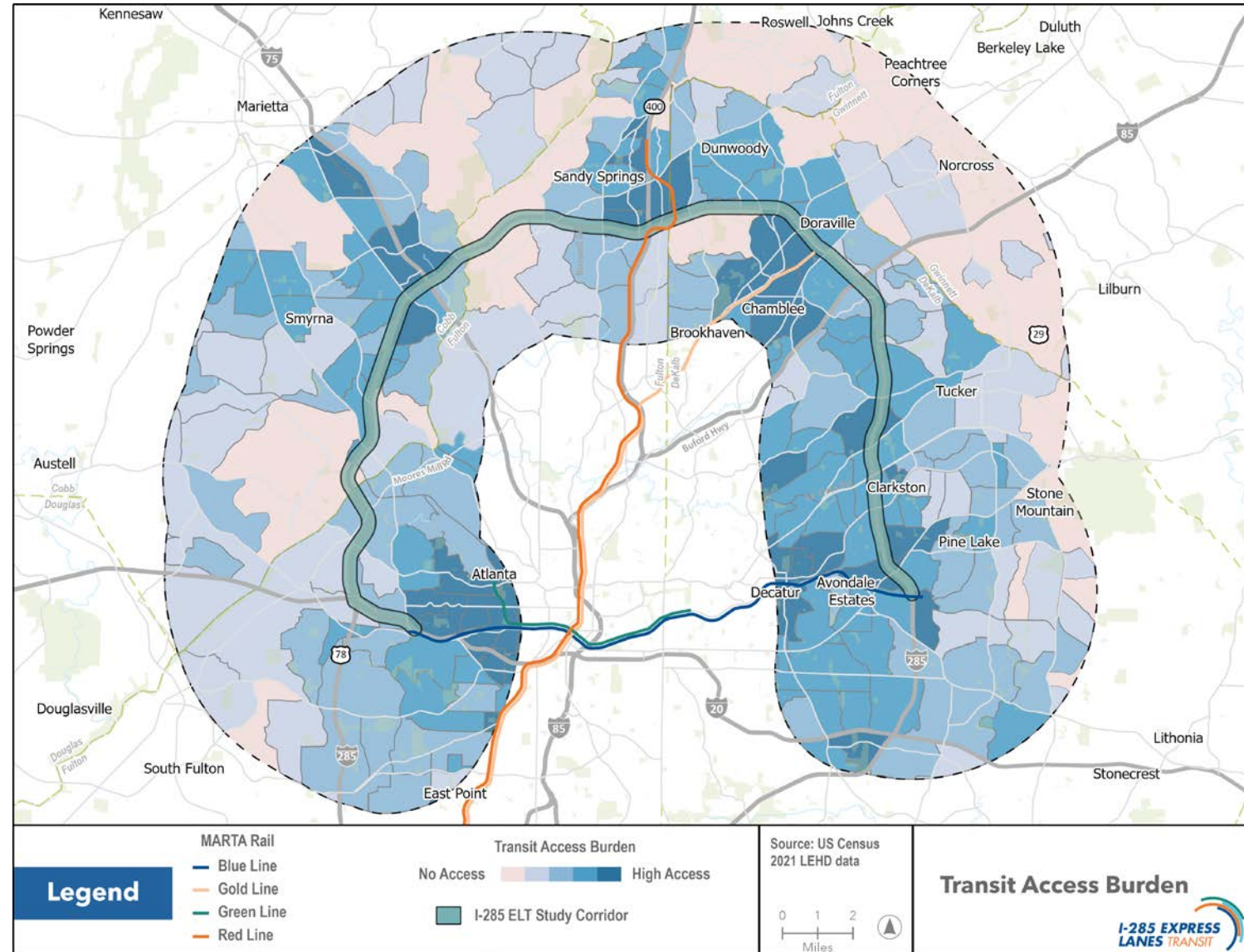
Outer suburban census tracts experience the highest transit access burden

Transit Service Gaps

Many high burden areas have limited or no existing transit services and low transit demand.

Challenges for Transit Dependents

Providing transit in low-demand areas may help residents but might not fully meet transit dependent needs.



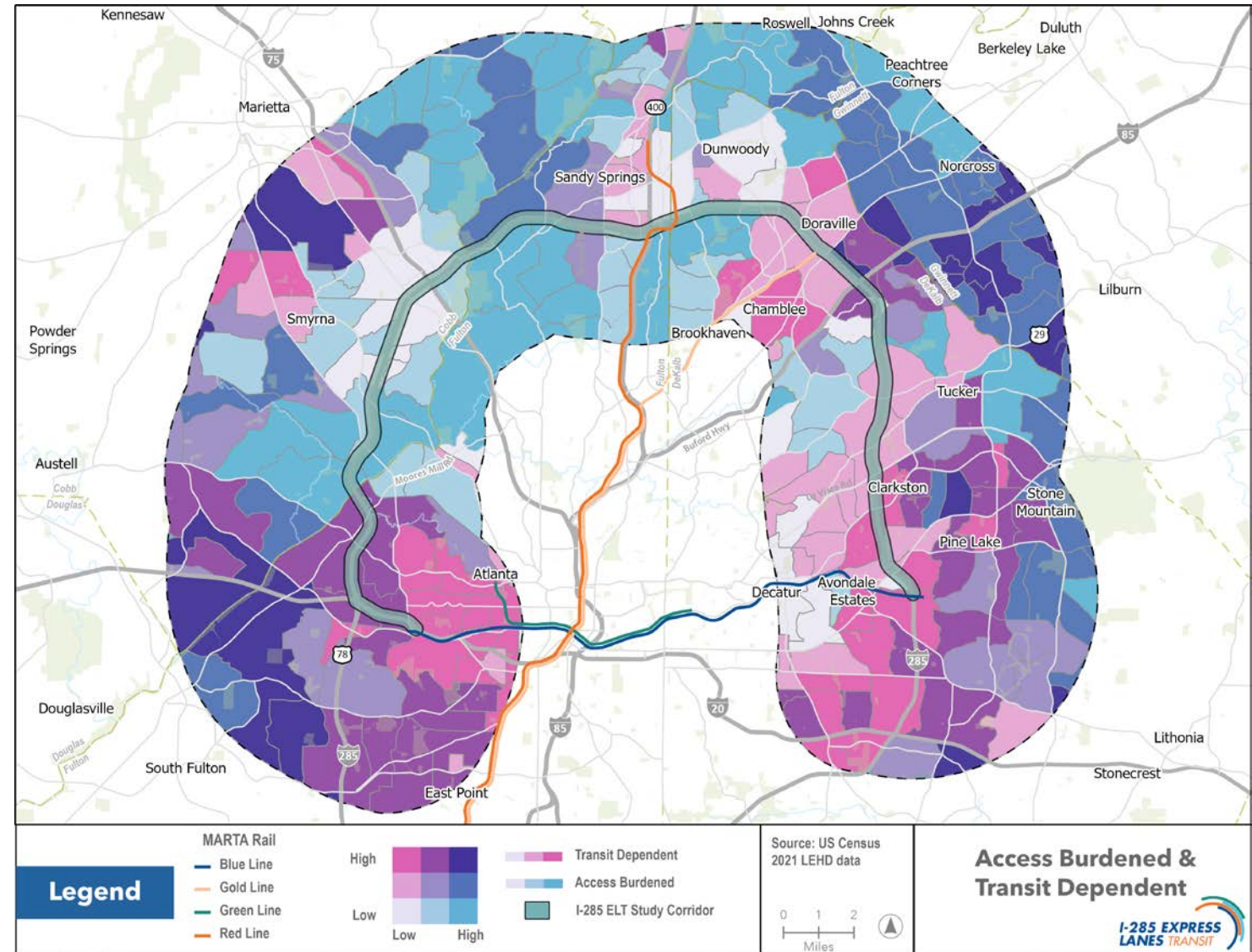
Composite Results for Access Burden and Transit Dependence

High Transit Dependence Areas

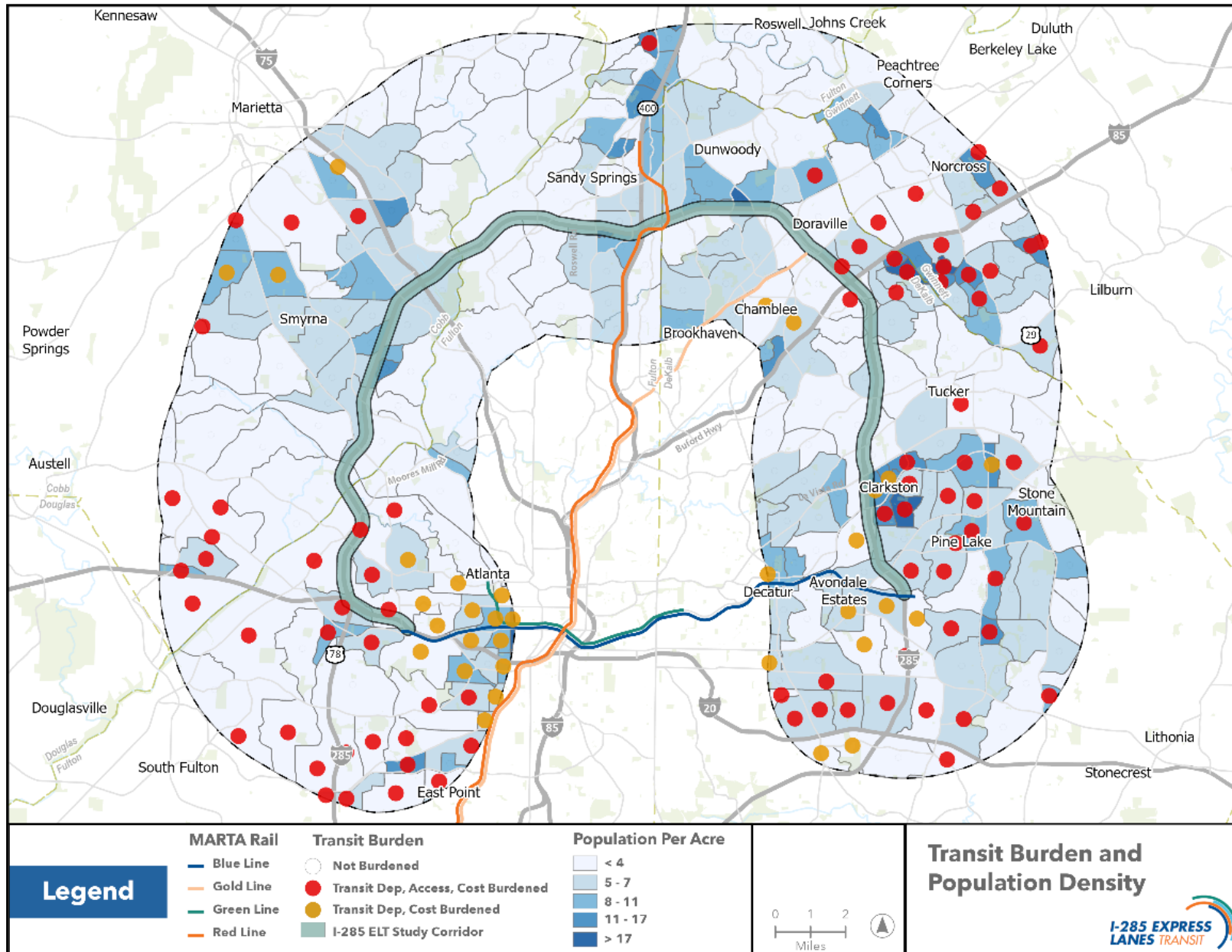
Dark purple/blue census tracts show high transit dependence mostly in outer edges of the study area near suburban regions.

Access Burden Concentration

Areas with high access burden coincide with regions having limited transit availability, primarily in peripheral zones.



Transit Access Burden informing Service Planning



Action Steps for Planners to Address Transit Needs



Integrating Census Data and Innovative Methodologies

Census Data Integration

Integrating census data with transportation projects directs resources to communities with the highest needs effectively.

Transit Access Burden Metric

The Transit Access Burden metric combines supply and demand factors to reveal deeper insights into community transit needs.

Prioritizing Investments

Using innovative methodologies ensures transportation investments are allocated for maximum community impact and system efficiency.

Recommended Steps for Planners

Regular Transit Accessibility Assessments

Continuously evaluate transit accessibility using updated data to identify communities lacking sufficient services.

Prioritize High-Need Areas

Focus planning and investments on communities with high transit dependence and access burden scores.

Leverage Technology

Use data and geospatial tools to dynamically assess service gaps and optimize routes and schedules.

Engage with Community Stakeholders

Collaborate with residents, businesses, and advocacy groups to understand transit challenges and develop solutions.

Conclusion

Data-Driven Transit Planning

Utilizing reshaped census data helps planners accurately identify specific transit needs in urban areas.

Promoting Equitable Access

Robust methodologies enable effective transit access that provide opportunities

Supporting Sustainable Mobility

Informed decision-making fosters sustainable urban mobility, balancing environmental and social goals.

Questions?

Davonna Moore-Edeh

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A photograph of four people walking across a gravel parking lot in front of a large, multi-story brick building with many windows. From left to right: a woman with blonde hair wearing a dark blue top and light grey pants, smiling and holding a white paper; a man with a beard wearing a grey polo shirt and dark pants, gesturing with his right hand and holding a white coffee cup; a woman with dark hair wearing a light blue button-down shirt and dark pants, looking towards the man; and a man with curly blonde hair wearing a light blue button-down shirt and grey pants, holding a laptop. The text "Thriving Communities Program – Equipping Underserved Communities for Sustainable, Equitable Growth in Transportation and Beyond" is overlaid in a large, blue, serif font across the middle of the image.

Thriving Communities Program – Equipping Underserved Communities for Sustainable, Equitable Growth in Transportation and Beyond

What Thriving Communities Teaches Us About Measuring Impact

Corey A. Hull, AICP
The Ray

Operationalizing Equity After the Ribbon Cutting

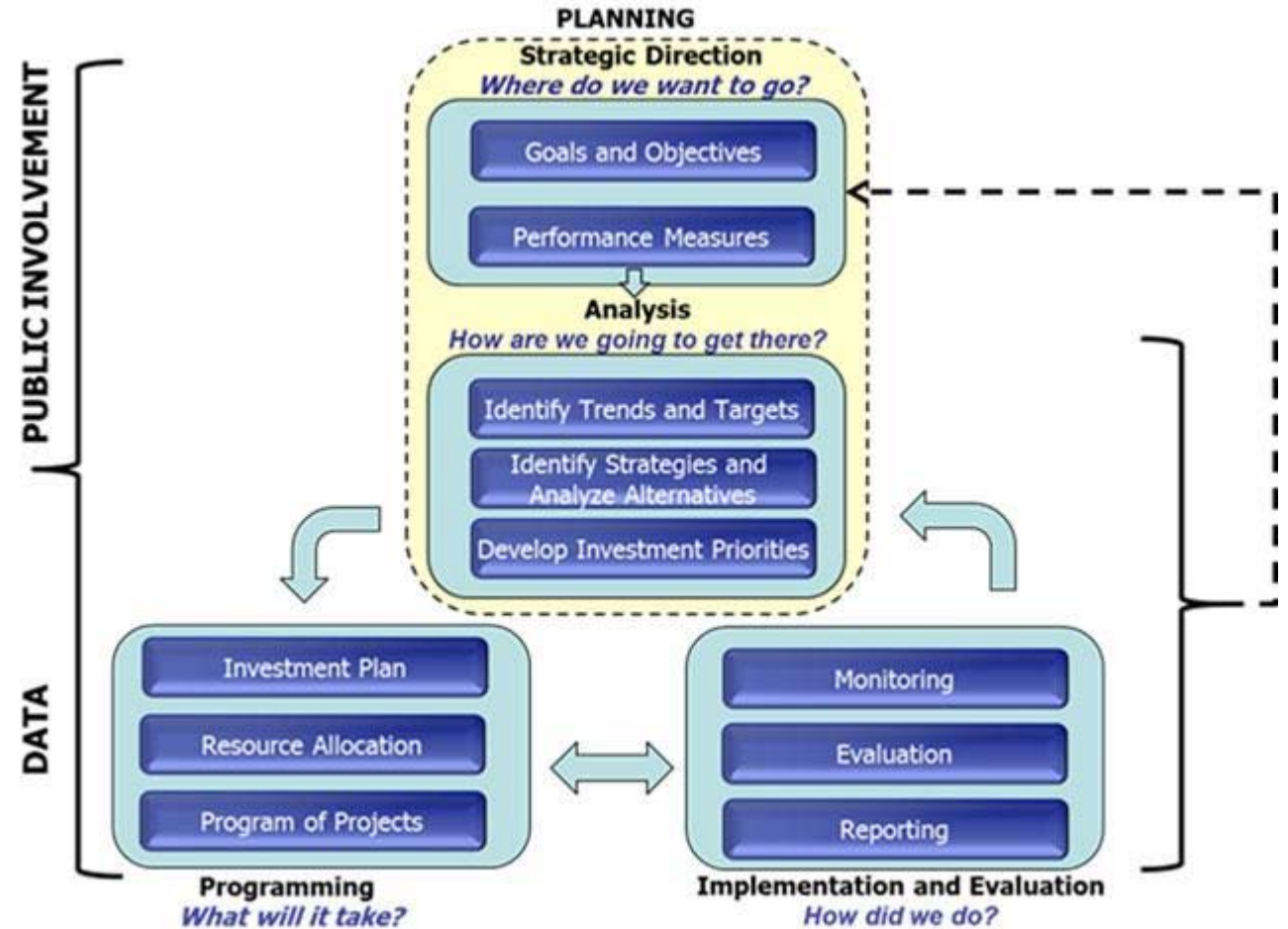
“*We got experience working and meeting together, out of our silos. And we gained a greater appreciation for differing values, priorities, and perceptions.*”

- Equity doesn't end at project delivery
- Evaluation is where accountability begins
- Lessons from the Thriving Communities Program

– Mike Narcowich,
Borough of Pottstown, PA

Why Post-Project Evaluation Matters for Equity

- Most transportation metrics stop at delivery
- Equity requires understanding:
- Who benefited
- Who was burdened
- What changed over time
- Without evaluation, equity is rhetorical



Source:
FHWA

Thriving Communities Program as a Living Laboratory



- USDOT TCP = capacity + implementation
- 15 Networked Communities
- Diverse geographies, shared capacity gaps
- Focused on moving from planning → action



What We Chose to Measure

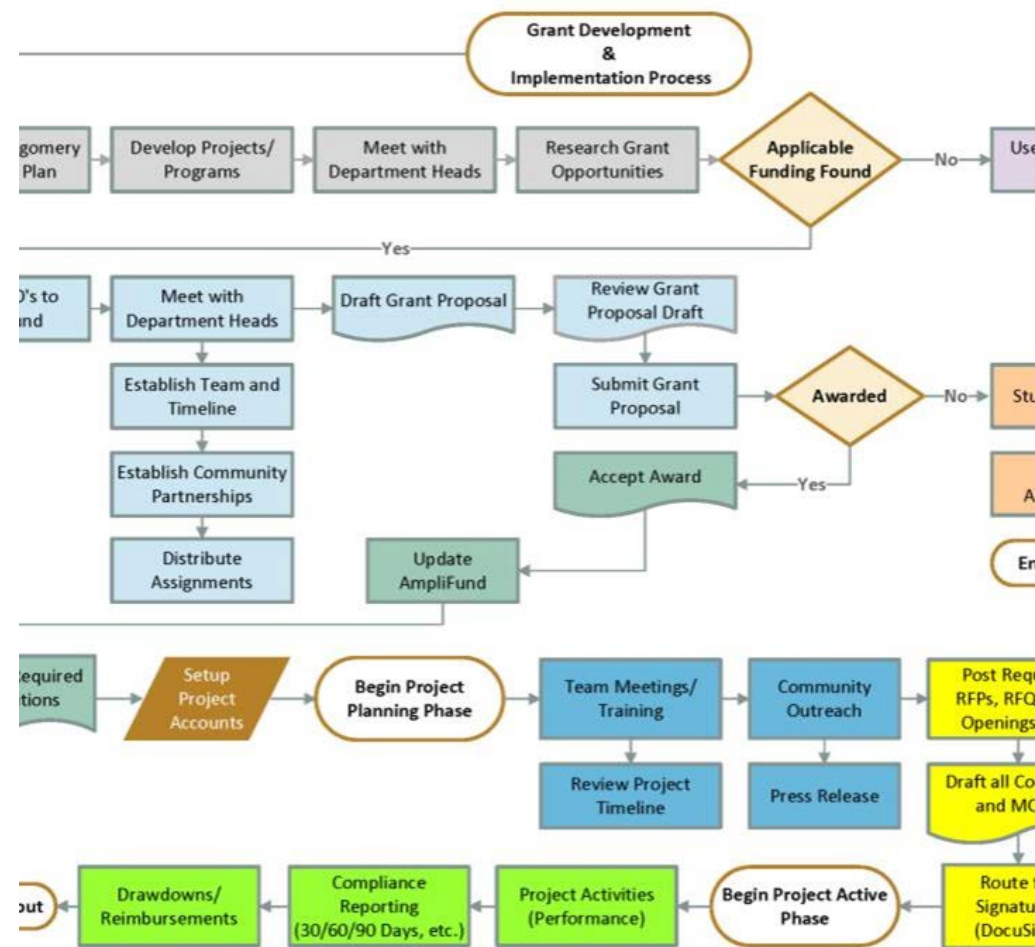
Beyond “Did the project happen?”:

- Capacity gained
- Community trust built
- Institutional learning
- Ability to deliver the *next* project better

Montgomery, AL — Measuring Capacity as an Outcome

Shifted focus from “grant submitted” to:

- Internal project tracking
- Cross-department coordination
- Readiness for future implementation



Source: City of Montgomery

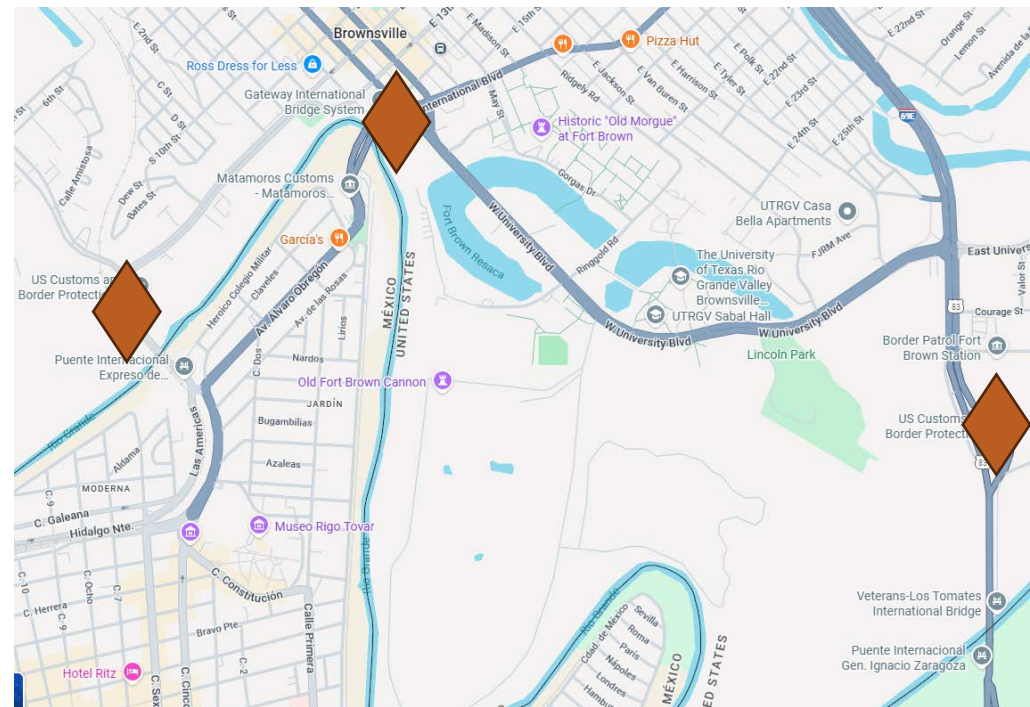
Measuring Benefits vs. Burdens

Evaluation questions asked:

- Who gained safer access?
- Who experienced disruption?
- Were language, cultural, and economic barriers reduced?
- Did benefits persist beyond grant timelines?

Brownsville, TX — Freight Access Without Community Harm

- Freight efficiency gains
- Pedestrian safety impacts
- Environmental justice near port-adjacent neighborhoods



Brownsville, TX with border crossings marked, Source: Google Maps

Tools That Made Evaluation Possible

- Workplans as living documents
- KPIs tied to equity and capacity
- Community feedback surveys
- Qualitative storytelling alongside metrics

Doraville, GA — Language Access as a Measurable Outcome

- Multilingual engagement strategies
- ESL outreach effectiveness
- Participation diversity tracked over time



What Communities Told Us



- Stronger internal coordination
- Increased confidence navigating federal systems
- Better ability to identify future impacts and risks
- Greater ownership of outcomes

Pottstown, PA — Community Confidence as Impact

- Increased comfort engaging regional funding partners
- Youth participation in ETOD conversations
- Clearer community ownership of outcomes

Equity as De-Risking

Post-project evaluation helps:

- Reduce unintended harm
- Identify early warning signs
- Strengthen future applications
- Build political and community durability

Detroit, MI — Equity as Risk Management

- Phased freight strategy
- Air quality and neighborhood impacts evaluated early
- Reduced long-term implementation risk



Source: Google Maps

Implications for Planning Practice

- Budget for post-project evaluation
- Track capacity, not just construction
- Treat community feedback as ongoing data
- Close the loop publicly

Chester, PA — Evaluation Builds Readiness, Not Just Reports

- Scoped rail-adjacent projects
- Improved grant competitiveness
- Clearer roles across agencies



Closing: Equity Is a Process, Not a Phase



- Equity doesn't end at delivery
- Evaluation is accountability
- Thriving Communities shows what's possible
- Planning includes learning from what we've built

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