

Factors that Drive Implementation of Equitable Land Use and Transportation Policies



Action Planning and Reporting

Specificity in plan and policy text and the regular assessment of progress, keeping a racial disparities and health burdening lens

As community organizations invest further into land use and transportation policy efforts, often with heightened stakes for capital funding and equitable development outcomes, there is a growing insistence for “mutual accountability” practices as part of the policymaking process. The concept of mutual accountability (framed by policy researchers at the Urban Institute¹) identifies three necessities for systems change: (1) the making of explicit commitments by those entities with power to implement actions, (2) the synergy of those commitments with systems change goals and existing/planned capacities, and (3) the presence and use of result-based tracking mechanisms. Applying these within community design policy can take a variety of innovative forms, such as online project trackers. The strongest examples **use intentional action terms, supplement policy text with robust action plans, and establish expectations for regularized reporting** with relevant indicators.

Policy Details that Clarify Intent and Accountability

The National Complete Streets Coalition’s [Complete Streets Policy Framework](#) sets a best practice for strong,

comprehensive Complete Streets policies. Consisting of ten elements, the framework describes the importance of embedding intent and accountability throughout, which distinguish policies with a strong potential for follow-through from those that are more symbolic. For example, “shall” and “must” are preferable to “may” or “consider”, which are all too common methods for enabling avoidance by responsible agencies. The framework also calls for time-bound parameters for when regulatory actions and procedural updates will take place, the assignment of implementation responsibility to a committee of specified government and non-government partners, and specifics about the content and timing of required staff trainings. Furthermore, the framework recommends adopting specific performance measures to track implementation progress, integrating equity indicators (e.g. race, vehicle access) within performance measures, and setting a timeframe for recurring public reporting on the performance measures.

Complete Streets Tucson (adopted in 2019) is a [policy](#) that aspires to meet the standards for intent and accountability set by the ten elements in the Complete Streets Policy Framework. The policy calls for the creation of a coordinating council (composed

of city staff and diverse community representatives) within six months of adoption. This committee is responsible for monitoring implementation and producing biennial progress reports, while also refining a set of performance measures to document actions taken and community benefits. The policy also details fourteen initial implementation steps, including an overhaul of project [design standards](#) (implemented in 2021) to incorporate Complete Streets practices. The collaborative structure of policy implementation in Tucson is one of the strongest examples of a “mutual accountability” approach in active transportation.

Action Plans for Implementation

The largest efforts to invest equitably in mobility and greenspace infrastructure will need action planning that is more extensive and recurring than what may be detailed in an adopted policy. When composed well, these action or implementation plan documents contain detailed responsibilities, timeframes, and prioritized project lists (based in equity criteria) that frame the ongoing intent of local agencies and provides essential information needed for further community engagement. Since its adoption in 2014, the **Seattle Bicycle Master Plan** has been supplemented by robust implementation plans in two-year intervals. The [implementation plans](#) provide extensive documentation on completed work, explanations for projects that encountered status changes, and an update on program initiatives and emerging priorities. Of particular importance, the implementation plans include an updated list of planned projects (also shown in mapped form) that clarify completion dates, locations, cost ranges, and the applicability of five benefit/challenge criteria (including racial and social justice).

Reporting on Implementation Progress and Outcomes

One of the strongest examples of reporting corresponds to the **Baltimore Complete Streets** ordinance (adopted in 2018), which requires the collection and publication of a variety of performance measures. As a result, the city’s transportation department produced extensive [annual reports](#) in 2021 and 2022 addressing 19 performance measures related to project activity, commute patterns,

collisions, and greenery. A key feature of the reports is that year-to-year changes in performance measures are enumerated not just for citywide totals, but also for three distinct equity criteria: people of color, household income, and car availability. Performance measures are also shown graphically across a base map of census tracts, which are shaded based on equity priority (lower to higher). Besides their easy to reference data tables and graphics, the Complete Streets reports in Baltimore are notable for their willingness to publicly depict that some project investments were not consistently equitable, though year-to-year improvement was shown for other measures. Community groups like **Bikemore** consider the detail and authenticity of these reports to be essential as they seek to maintain accountability and political momentum for an inclusive Complete Streets effort.

Tracking Implementation Progress Online

A recommended alternative for tracking implementation progress is through web-based platforms that provide project status information in a graphic, user-friendly format. Compared to static reports, web-based platforms can increase public access and transparency about implementation actions. Government agencies often maintain data portals or resource pages that may be more intended for use by policy or project staff. However, the **Propel ATL Project Infrastructure Tracker** shows the potential of community-driven platforms in generating broad awareness and accountability about an important policy, while working within limited technological capacities. The tracker was developed to help the public monitor the ambitious Action Plan for Safer Streets enacted by Atlanta’s mayor in 2019, which sought to triple the mileage of protected bike lanes within two years and prioritize roadway improvements within the city’s identified high-injury network. It allows users to customize map views, toggle between project locations, reference basic project details, and determine the completion status and responsible agency. Interviews with local practitioners highlighted that this type of user-friendly tool can be better maintained in the long-term by government agencies with ongoing data collection and mapping capabilities, though they remain feasible for community organizations that plan ahead and use collaborative relationships to access data and mapping expertise.

¹ Lo, L., Aron, L. Y., Pettit, K. L., & Scally, C. P. (2021). Mutual Accountability Is the Key to Equity-Oriented Systems Change ([urban.org](#)).