Factors that Drive Implementation of Equitable Land Use and Transportation Policies

Budget and Capacity

Funding and staffing strategies to match the legislative intent of equity-focused land use and transportation policies

In places where stronger implementation practices are helping advance equity-focused policies, we found efforts to draw a clearer connection between proposed strategies and the funding processes that enable action. There is a strong awareness among local practitioners and national advisors of how “unfunded mandates” can equate to weak intent by government decisionmakers. This situation wastes the momentum and civic energy contributed by community groups and other participants to the policymaking process. Conversely, the **purposeful implementation of equity-focused policies involves decisions by responsible agencies to allocate resources internally and secure funding externally, while also building staff capacity** to carry the work forward.

Staffing and Budgeting Challenges to Implementation

Interviews with local practitioners raised the likelihood that agencies will be understaffed on equity-focused strategies when they are first adopted, despite the sizeable aspirations of policy language. These deficits can be seen in comparison to more conventional functions within planning and transportation departments and in comparison to cities that have progressed further with their policies. Hiring for management positions was also found to correlate with implementation progress when those positions have access to executive leadership across multiple departments and the power to convene working groups. A further challenge highlighted by local practitioners was the turnover of key agency staff with issue expertise who felt unsupported in their work to advance equity-focused policies and had the mobility to work in more committed places.

Planning to fund equity strategies is complicated by budget uncertainties, complex project cost estimates, shifting rules for capital funding sources, and uncertain support for raising new revenue. Strong policies address these challenges by offering as much detail in their implementation plans as can be provided while outlining reporting structures that create future opportunities to analyze project funding and consider strategies.

Highlighting Staffing and Budgeting Actions to Advance Policies

Complete Streets Tucson emphasizes staff and budget needs with two detailed charts included in the **policy** document describing implementation steps (table 2) and performance measures (table 1). The implementation table calls for a dedicated staff position to manage the city's overall work on the policy, staff training on Complete Streets approaches and equity considerations, and the active search for funding sources to support implementation. Along with metrics on staff training and hiring, the recommended performance measures include project funding allocations by travel mode (i.e., pedestrian, bicycle, transit, vehicular) and by equity criteria. This is a transparency practice considered vital by mobility practitioners in many cities because it shows which user groups and communities benefit more from transportation expenditures; a comparison that often corresponds to race, income, age, and ability disparities.

The **Seattle Bicycle Master Plan** provides an example of an extensive and routinely renewed **Implementation Plan** that includes detailed reporting on policy and program actions taken and status information on dozens of planned and completed projects across the city. Important features of the Implementation Plan are a classification system for projects based on expected (low-medium-high) costs and a year-to-year projection of various funding sources available to support the work. This detail sets expectations for the development of various infrastructure investments across the city and, when referenced with the plan's equity criteria, provides community groups with a key basis of accountability.