The Quest for Environmental Justice and Transportation Equity for All

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Connecting the dots...
Books that I have Written:
*It’s just one book, but don’t tell anybody...*

- Invisible Houston
- Dumping in Dixie
- In Search of the New South
- Growth and Decline of a Sunbelt Boomtown
- Confronting Environmental Racism
- Residential Apartheid
- Unequal Protection
- Just Transportation
- Sprawl City

- Just Sustainabilities
- Highway Robbery
- The Quest for Environmental Justice
- Growing Smarter
- The Black Metropolis in the Twenty-First Century
- Race, Place, and Environmental Justice After Hurricane Katrina
- The Wrong Complexion for Protection
Defining the Environment

- Where We Live
- Where We Work
- Where We Play
- Where We Learn
- Physical and Natural World
Environmental Justice Defined

• The fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies (U.S. EPA, 1992)
Fair Treatment Defined

• Fair treatment means that no group of people, including racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic groups should bear a disproportionate share of the negative environmental consequences resulting from industrial, municipal, and commercial operations or the execution of federal, state, local, and tribal programs and policies (U.S. EPA, 1992)
Environmental Justice Principle

- Environmental justice embraces the principle that all people and communities are entitled to equal protection of our environmental, health, employment, education, housing, transportation, and civil rights laws.
Transportation as Civil Rights
Separate But Equal...Not Justice

- Transportation and Civil Rights have been linked for more than 120 years.
- The 1896 U.S. Supreme Court *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision codified “Jim Crow” segregation.
- *Plessy* was all about transportation justice.
Frontal Assault on Transportation Apartheid

- U.S. Supreme Court overturned Plessy in 1954
- Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka
- The system was later challenged by Rosa Parks in 1955 and Montgomery Boycott
- Freedom Riders placed their young lives on the line in the early 1960s
It All Started on a Bus...
Government Response - 1994

- Environmental Justice Executive Order 12898 – February, 1994
- Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964
- National Environmental Policy Act of 1969
Title VI of the Civil Rights Act
1964

“No person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance”
Populations Protected Under EJ and Title VI

EJ Executive Order

Title VI Statute

Low Income

Minority

Race

Color

National Origin

Source: FHWA.
The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 was created to ensure federal agencies consider the environmental impacts of their actions and decisions. Federal agencies are required to systematically assess the environmental impacts of their proposed actions and consider alternative ways of accomplishing their missions, which are less damaging to and protective of the environment.
USDOT Transportation Justice

- The 1994 EJ Executive Order 12898 cover more than a dozen federal agencies, including USDOT
- U.S. DOT Order – April, 1997
- FHWA Order – December, 1998
Just Transportation - 1997

- Tales of highways in two North Carolina cities
- Transit racism in Los Angeles
- Transportation justice and sustainability in the S.F. Bay Area
- Race, politics and transportation in Atlanta
- Jim Crow in Macon, Georgia
- Transportation and zoning in Austin, Texas
- I-10 destruction of New Orleans black neighborhoods
- Lawrence (Kansas) Trafficway impact on Native Americans
Confronting Transit Racism in LA

- Grassroots groups from New York to California are challenging transit racism and other transportation policies that aid and abet the flight of people, jobs, and investments to the suburban fringe.

- In 1996, the LA Bus Riders Union won a $1.5 billion dollar Title VI Civil Rights settlement against the Los Angeles MTA and set a national model for grassroots transit organizing, advocacy, litigation, and policy formulation.
Transportation Injustice in Atlanta

In 2000, a dozen civil rights and faith groups filed a Title VI and ADA complaint with the USDOT charging the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) with discrimination against riders in minority areas:

- Inferior service
- No bus shelters
- Overcrowding
- Older fleet
- Dirty diesel buses
- No handicap accessible

Case was mediated and settled
In 2000, Seattle Save Our Valley (SOV) group sued Sound Transit over the 4.6-mile segment of the 21-mile proposed light rail line from north Seattle to Sea-Tac Airport. The proposed 4.6-mile segment was at street level thru the mostly minority Rainier Valley, unlike most of the rest of the line, which was proposed to be elevated or placed underground. SOV argued this would have a disproportionate impact on residents, including the taking of residential and business properties, displace families and safety problems. SOV plaintiffs lost their lawsuit in Federal Court in 2003.
Alexander v Sandoval Decision – 2001

- In 2001, the U.S. Supreme Court limited the way advocates could use Title VI—requiring them to prove intent and limited their right of private action.
- The Federal Highway Administration receives 40-60 Title V complaints each year and investigate only about seven complaints (12-18%).
FUNDING ROADS AND TRANSIT

- My 2003 “Highway Robbery” book called for balanced and flexible transportation funding
- Roads get 80% of transportation dollars vs 20% for transit
- Roads often get priority while most transit systems struggle to stay afloat
Transportation and Disasters: Why Planning Matters
WHO GETS LEFT BEHIND BEFORE AND AFTER DISASTERS STRIKE?

- People of color
- Poor People
- Elderly
- Disabled
- Sick People
- Children
- People without Cars
- Transit Dependent
- Non-Drivers
- Homeless People
Failed Emergency Transport Plan

- The New Orleans Rapid Transit Authority (RTA) emergency plan was woefully inadequate to transport an estimated 100,000 to 134,000 transit dependent residents out of harms way.
- Given the size of transit-dependent population, some transportation experts estimate that at least 2000 buses would have been needed to evacuate all New Orleans residents who needed transportation.
Flooded Automobiles

- Over 350,000 automobiles had to be drained of oil and gasoline and then recycled because of Katrina.
- Katrina flooded more than 145,000 cars in New Orleans alone.
Getting There on Public Transportation

• Nationally, only about 5 percent of all Americans use public transit to get to work

• In urban areas, African Americans and Latinos comprise over 54 percent of transit users (62 percent of bus riders, 35 percent of subway riders, and 29 percent of commuter rail riders)

• African Americans are almost six times as likely as whites to use transit to get around
2014 Transit Score® Rankings

Top Midwest Cities
1. Chicago
2. Minneapolis
3. Milwaukee

Transit Score: 65, 58, 49

Top Northeast Cities
1. New York
2. Boston
3. Philadelphia

Transit Score: 81, 75, 67

Top Western Cities
1. San Francisco
2. Seattle
3. Oakland

Transit Score: 80, 57, 54

Top Southern Cities
1. Washington DC
2. Miami
3. Atlanta

Transit Score: 70, 58, 43

www.walkscore.com
Transportation Funding Ballots - 2016

- Over $200 billion was at play through local and state ballots measure in 2016
- Of the 45 ballot measures on transportation, 33 (74%) passed, including the $54 billion proposal to add 62 miles to Seattle’s light rail system
Give Me Liberty...
Lack of car ownership and inadequate public transit service in many central cities and metropolitan regions exacerbate social, economic, and racial isolation.

Nationally, 15.9 percent of blacks, 9.1 percent of Hispanics, and 5 percent of white live in household without cars.

Over 46.5% of blacks with incomes under $15,000 do not own cars compared with 14.9% of all U.S. households.
Transportation-Induced Pollution

- Contributes 60-90% of air pollution in U.S. Cities
- Accounts for 75% of carbon monoxide emissions
- 30+ health studies have linked diesel emissions to increased incidence of cancer
- Diesel emissions may be responsible for 125,000 cancer cases in the U.S. annually
Geography of Air Pollution

- Nationally, 57% of whites, 65% of blacks, and 80% of Hispanics live in counties with substandard air
- Over 61.3% of Black children, 69.2% of Hispanic children and 67.7% of Asian-American children live in areas that exceed the 0.08 ppm ozone standard, while 50.8% of white children live in such areas
- Air pollution costs Americans $10 billion to $200 billion a year
Traffic Pollution Health Outcomes

- Children living or attending schools within 300 meters of major roadways are 45 percent more likely to get asthma and other respiratory illnesses.
- Mothers are more likely to have premature or low birth weight babies.
- Adults are more likely to die from stroke and heart disease.
- The elderly are more likely to suffer from cognitive decline.

Most Vulnerable Population
Paying with Our Health

- Air pollution claims 70,000 lives a year, nearly twice the number killed in traffic accidents.
- Public health costs due to air pollution account for over three-quarters of the total pollution-related public health costs and could be as high as $182 billion annually.
- An estimated 50,000 to 120,000 premature deaths are associated with exposure to air pollutants.
- People with asthma experience more than 100 million days of restrictive activity annually, costing $4 billion a year.
An Asthma Epidemic

- Asthma affects 15 to 17 million people, including 5 million children in the U.S.
- Six percent of U.S. children have asthma
- Asthma is now the nation’s number one childhood illness
- Asthma is the number one reason for childhood emergency room visits and school absenteeism
Asthma and People of Color

- African American asthma rate is 35 percent higher than whites
- Hospitalization rate for African Americans and Latinos is 3 - 4 times the rate for whites
- African Americans and Puerto Ricans are three times more likely to die from asthma-related causes than whites
- African Americans account for 13% of the U.S. population, but 26% of asthma deaths
Olympic Size Health Gains

- Reduction in motor vehicle emissions can have marked health improvements.
- The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that “when the Atlanta Olympic Games in 1996 brought about a reduction in auto use by 22.5 percent, asthma admissions to ERs and hospitals also decreased by 41.6 percent.”
- Because driving was banned from the Atlanta central business district during the two-week period of the July 1996 Olympics, millions of people rode MARTA.
Growing Smarter and Healthier

• Smart Growth is defined as growth that is economically sound, environmentally friendly, and supportive of community livability - growth that enhances our quality of life

• Smart growth is development that is just, sustainable, and serves the economy, the community and the environment
Health and Equity in Transportation

- Adopt “Health in Everything” paradigm via Health Impact Assessments (HIA)
- Equity Analysis (Procedural Equity, Geographic Equity, and Social Equity) via Equity Impact Assessments (EIA)
Why Place Matters

• In the real world, all places are not created equal
• The built environment, infrastructure, and environmental policies all have a direct impact on health and wellbeing
• Some government policies, including transportation policies, have aided and abetted the creation of separate and unequal places
Unintended Consequences...

Preemptive Planning to address unintended challenges:
• Displacement
• Gentrification
• Exclusion
• Affordability
• Equity
• Diversity
Healthy Places and Healthy People

- Where you live affects your health and chances of leading flourishing lives:
  - Important indicator of an individual’s health: **Zip Code**

- Wealth and health are correlated:
  - The poorest people within the U.S. have the worst health and the most degraded environments
The Best Zip Codes in America

Source: Movoto.com (2014)
Most Stressed Zip Codes in U.S.

Source: Movoto.com (2014)
Planning in a “New” America
2040 Percent People of Color by County

- Less than 40% People of Color
- "Tipping Point" Counties: 40% to 50% People of Color
- Greater than 50% People of Color

Notes: Grey areas on the map are places where data is unavailable.
Sources: Woods & Poole Economics, Census TIGER/Line, NMSI, and CDR.

PolicyLink
Lifting Up What Works
ERCE Program for Environmental & Regional Equity

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THE “BEST PLACES” TO LIVE

• SAFEST
• HEALTHIEST
• FITTEST
• GREENEST
• MOST WALKABLE
• MOST BIKABLE

• MOST PARK FRIENDLY
• MOST SUSTAINABLE
• MOST ACCESSIBLE
• MOST LIVABLE
THE “BEST” PLACES DON’T HAPPEN BY ACCIDENT!
Top 10 Most Walkable States

1. New York
2. California
3. Washington
4. Minnesota
5. Connecticut
6. Oregon
7. Pennsylvania
8. Ohio
9. Massachusetts
10. Indiana

Top 10 Most Walkable U.S. Cities

Source: Walkscore (2014)

1. New York, NY
2. San Francisco, CA
3. Boston, MA
4. Philadelphia, PA
5. Miami, FL
6. Chicago, IL
7. Washington, D.C.
8. Seattle, WA
9. Oakland, CA
10. Baltimore, MD
Why Walkable Communities?

- Walkable neighborhoods have much lower rates of traffic fatalities
- Walking is the easiest and most affordable way to meet minimum guidelines of moderate physical activity
- Walking journeys reduce carbon footprint significantly
- Walking reduces traffic congestion and the cost of road maintenance
- Walkable neighborhoods allow families to own fewer cars and save money
Top 10 Most Bikable U.S. Cities

1. Minneapolis, MN
2. Portland, OR
3. San Francisco, CA
4. Boston, MA
5. Madison, WI
6. Washington, DC
7. Seattle, WA
8. Tucson, AZ
9. New York, NY
10. Chicago, IL

10 Fittest Cities in America

1. Aurora, CO
2. San Francisco, CA
3. Oakland, CA
4. Albuquerque, NM
5. Seattle, WA
6. Denver, CO
7. Portland, OR
8. Sacramento, CA
9. Irvine, CA
10. San Diego, CA

Source: Fit Cities Index (2015)
10 Least Fittest Cities in America

1. Fort Wayne, IN
2. Fort Worth, TX
3. Arlington, TX
4. El Paso TX
5. Tulsa, OK
6. Lubbock, TX
7. Detroit, MI
8. Birmingham, AL
9. Memphis, TN
10. Laredo, TX

Source: Fit Cities Index (2015)
Linking Transportation Equity to Smart/Fair Growth

- Enforce Civil Rights and Anti-Discrimination Laws
- Broad Coalitions Across Political Jurisdictions
- Coordinated and Linked Regional Transportation
- More Funds for Public Transit
- Build Equity Analysis into Regional Planning (RTP/TIP)
- Making Metropolitan Planning Organizations Accountable
- Transit-Oriented Development
- In-Fill Development
- Plans to Minimize Displacement and “Gentrification”
- Streets for Walking, Bicycles, and Transit
- Energy Efficient Vehicles and Clean Fuels
Building Healthy and Resilient Communities

- Sustainability must address equity, social inequality and community resilience
  - equitable development
  - families below poverty
  - widening health, income and wealth gap
- Addressing equity is a prerequisite to achieving sustainable and livable communities
Thank You!

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