

Equity Analysis Reflections - Nov. 9, 2022
Susan De Vos

Hi. This is Susan De Vos. I make three main points here, each related to issues of equity and access:

1. Public Hearings should all ideally be in a hybrid format.
2. The Equity Analysis needs to be written and/or reviewed by an independent third party.
3. Not only is transferring responsibility for access to public transportation by disabled people to Paratransit ethically questionable, it may be counterproductive financially as well.

First, at a recent pilot training session on public involvement and equity put on by the US DOT, I heard planning practitioners say they found the hybrid format superior to either an in-person only or virtual-only format. They had encountered serious limitations and equity issues with either type alone. They cited issues of access and disenfranchisement.

Second, peer review by a third party is the basic and ethical way to assess the quality of an article or analysis. One does **not** ask the same author or a colleague of theirs to write a credible review. In this case, you are hearing reasonable criticisms of the so-called Equity Analysis from erstwhile reviewers. The Equity Analysis needs an independent review.

An independent review helps compensate for our tendency to be unduly awed and intimidated by the use of numbers, too many of which occupy the current so-called Equity Analysis at the expense of good qualitative exposition and logic. People bow down unquestioningly to an emperor who dons numbers woven into tables, graphs and charts. You are hearing this from a quantitatively-oriented social researcher.

Third, at the few Zoom meetings I attended, there were constant expressions of alarm about the difficulty or risk involved in getting to a bus stop, especially when it involved crossing a busy street or traversing a steep incline, was in the winter or when it was dark. The typical rejoinder was that some people could take Paratransit if accessing a bus stop was too difficult. Tragically, the planners could not turn to Metro's Paratransit Manager for information because she had just retired.

However, what might look like a cost savings on one balance sheet could end up being a huge addition on another, the overall being that it required more money. That is because the average Paratransit ride costs Metro over ten times as much as a fixed route ride.

Moving people over to Paratransit is of course also a huge step backward for a community that aspires to enhancing the equity of *all* its under-represented groups. I was gratified to see, for instance, that after a visit from the city's Civil Rights department, Metro hastily conducted an additional survey of disabled transit riders. However, that survey was not even mentioned in the supposed Equity Analysis. Why not? An independent analysis might think it had more than appeasement value.

According to the TRB, accessibility is defined as the ***ease with which travelers can reach valued destinations.***