

Pursuant to Executive Order 13985 (January 20, 2021) on "Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government"

## Equity Action Plan Summary

# U.S. Department of Transportation

Department of Transportation's (DOT) mission is to deliver the world's leading transportation system, serving the American people and economy through the safe, efficient, sustainable, and equitable movement of people and goods.

## Delivering equity through DOT

From the construction of the transcontinental railroad to the Montgomery Bus Boycott, transportation has always been inseparable from America's struggle for racial and economic justice. At its best, transportation can be a powerful engine of opportunity, connecting people to jobs, education, and resources—whether they live in a big city, a rural community, or anywhere in between. Ensuring equity and accessibility for every member of the traveling public is one of the Department's highest priorities. As DOT continues to advance this work, it is important to recognize that past federal transportation investments have too often failed to address inequities, or even made them worse. And because a piece of physical infrastructure endures for decades, families and communities today must contend with the results of discriminatory choices that may date back generations. The Department is committed to doing the right thing for our shared future, addressing these inequities, and building a better, more equitable transportation system. DOT has already begun working to implement the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, which provides for historic investments in transportation equity. Done right, transportation policy can help level the playing field, transform economies, connect people to opportunity, and empower underserved communities to build generational wealth for the future. In partnership with community leaders, state and local governments, and the traveling public, the Department will be a key part of realizing the vision for this vital work.

## New strategies to advance equity

- **Empower communities to engage in transportation decision-making more effectively**

Public involvement in transportation projects is often treated as a one-size-fits-all compliance exercise. Traditional methods of public involvement like meetings, print, and radio can be inconvenient, challenging, or impossible for some communities to engage with meaningfully. DOT will issue guidance on meaningful public involvement and reinvigorate the Department's enforcement of the Civil Rights Act, including emphasizing proactive agency review of the potential discriminatory impact of grantees' proposed activities before awarding federal funds—as opposed to waiting until a project is delivered to enforce civil rights protections—and empowering community voices in transportation decision-making.

- **Target interventions to increase investment in underserved communities**

Underserved communities often lack the resources and expertise needed to successfully navigate the complex federal grantmaking environment. Community-based organizations often have limited capacity to advocate on behalf of their communities successfully. The Department will launch a national assistance center to provide direct, hands-on support with local impact in areas of planning, project development, grant applications, and project delivery. The Department will also relaunch an Advisory Committee on Transportation Equity to provide independent advice on equity programs. These actions will help ensure that transportation investments and benefits support underserved and overburdened communities.

- **Expand transportation access for underserved communities**

Lower-income people spend a much larger share of their income on transportation than other people. The transportation cost burden experienced by people is influenced by numerous factors, including living in “transit deserts” created by infrastructure and land use policies that favor car-ownership over multimodal options. The Department will develop a method for measuring the transportation cost burden on communities

New strategies to advance equity

and incorporate that measure into decision-making processes. This measure will be a critical tool to address barriers to accessing affordable transportation options that have consequences on economic mobility and help bring measurable transportation benefits to disadvantaged communities.

- **Build wealth in underserved communities by empowering small disadvantaged businesses**

Federal law, policies, and programs can present inadvertent barriers to opportunities for small disadvantaged businesses. Priorities to reduce contract awards have led to contract consolidation, and requirements and resource constraints create incentives for agencies to purchase from large, established businesses. By providing technical assistance to small disadvantaged businesses, the Department will help increase their understanding of how to navigate the Department’s contracting process, gain awareness of upcoming contract opportunities, and enhance their core competencies and skills—enabling them to compete for DOT contracting opportunities more effectively and build wealth.

## Building on DOT's progress

**This equity action plan builds on DOT's progress delivering on equity and racial justice in the first year of the Biden-Harris Administration.**

- **Advancing equity through grantmaking**

In February, 2021 DOT introduced advancing equity and reducing barriers to opportunity as a consideration for awarding discretionary grants.

- **Strengthening Tribal consultation at the Nation-to-Nation relationship**

In March, 2021 DOT consulted with federally recognized Tribes on updates to the Department's Tribal Policy & Consultation Plan.

- **Improving public engagement on equity priorities**

In May, 2021 DOT published a Request for Information asking the public for comments about transportation equity.

- **Expanding contracting opportunities for small disadvantaged businesses**

In December, 2021 DOT reinforced small business requirements in the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) acquisition governance process. In January, 2022 DOT launched an agency-wide procurement dashboard to drive accountability for small and disadvantaged business goals.

- **Supporting Tribal electricity mobility infrastructure**

In January, 2022 DOT published a toolkit for planning and funding rural and Tribal electric mobility infrastructure.