

8.0 RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

The SJTPO has recently taken actions to identify and address “environmental justice” issues of concern by setting aside research funds in its Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP), conducting the *Environmental Justice Evaluation and Strategy* presented in this report and developing a new *Public Outreach Program* for the 2025 Regional Transportation Plans (RTP) which includes strategies for reaching out to low-income and minority communities.

This report has included a review of SJTPO’s existing policies and plans as well as presented the findings of an accessibility analysis, TIP evaluation, and survey. Based on these research activities, there are strategies and actions that the SJTPO can continue to pursue in the future toward the integration of environmental justice into its programs, plans and activities. This chapter has divided these strategies and actions into three broad categories:

- ***Public Involvement and Community Outreach*** – Proactively engage minority and low-income populations, along with organizations that serve them, in the transportation planning and project development process.
- ***Technical and Analytical Support*** – Continually compile, map, and analyze socioeconomic and transportation data to determine the spatial patterns of low-income and minority populations, identify their transportation needs, and assess whether the distribution of benefits and burdens from transportation investments and decision making processes in the SJTPO region is fair and without disproportionately high and adverse effects to low-income and minority populations.
- ***Incorporate Environmental Justice Issues and Concerns in the Transportation Planning and Project Development Process*** – Develop mechanisms to ensure that the fundamental principles of environmental justice (see Chapter 1) are appropriately considered in the transportation decision-making, planning, and project development processes.

The remainder of this chapter will describe in further detail these strategies and actions and how they may be integrated into future transportation planning and decision making processes.

8.1 Public Involvement and Community Outreach

Public involvement and community outreach should engage minority and low-income populations, as well as organizations that serve them (such as those surveyed and discussed in Chapter 7), in the transportation decision-making, planning, and project development process. The following actions can be taken to help the SJTPO effectively reach out, educate, and involve minority and low-income populations in their future activities.

- ***Employ a variety of traditional and innovative public involvement and community outreach techniques.***
 - Several MPOs have developed a “Citizen’s Guide” to the general transportation planning process. These guides explain the role and responsibilities of the Metropolitan Planning Organization (as well as the FHWA, FTA, State DOTs, Transit agencies and other non-transportation agencies). The guides provide an introduction to the purpose of the Regional Transportation Plan and the TIP, the transportation decision-making process, typical funding sources, the role of citizens in the planning process and other elements of the transportation planning and project development process including key steps in the environmental review process that must be taken before implementation of Federally-funded projects. A glossary of terms can also be provided to clarify technical jargon often included in transportation studies. Several of these introductory items are

already included on the SJTPO web site, but the objective of this product could be a primer for those least familiar with the agency and transportation planning issues. The purpose of the Guide is, in part, to clarify for the public the limits of the SJTPO's responsibilities vis-à-vis other agencies of government (e.g., county transportation, municipal public works, etc.) which can lead to a better understanding of how citizens may best focus their comments, concerns and complaints. Encourage the development of the Citizen's Guide into Spanish. The Citizen's Guide can be posted on the SJTPO web site as well as distributed at events and public meetings.¹

- Attend and actively participate in local community events such as neighborhood association meetings, faith-based institutions, festivals and school carnivals.
- Solicit the participation of community-based organizations (such as churches and social service providers) in the transportation decision-making process.
- Conduct outreach efforts at non-traditional meeting places such as shopping malls, workforce investment boards or one-stop career centers, religious institutions, senior center complexes, community centers, or local community colleges or schools.²
- Enhance existing communications media such as the SJTPO website, newsletters, and videos. Add links from the SJTPO web site to the joint FHWA/FTA web site on Environmental Justice as relevant facts, technical guidance, data resource sites, case studies and effective practices on environmental justice can be further examined by staff and public. The web site link is <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/ej2.htm>

▪ ***Expand and maintain committee and project mailing lists, agency contacts, and partnering opportunities.***

- Recruit citizens and/or organizational leaders from low-income and minority communities onto SJTPO committees such as the TAC, CAC, and project steering committees. Community-based organizations that participated in the environmental justice survey appear to offer some candidates for these committees.³
- Expand the SJTPO mailing lists for public involvement to include organizations that serve low-income and minority populations including organizations and individuals identified through the environmental justice survey effort.
- Develop and strengthen relationships with community-based organizations that serve low-income and minority populations. Perhaps, forge partnerships with select community-based organizations (i.e., coordinate and/or provide funds) to assist in attracting participation for key workshops by relying on their facilities, events or contacts with community leaders.
- Partner with appropriate community-based organizations to develop programs and projects that better meet the transportation needs of low-income and minority populations.

▪ ***Establish environmental justice coordination and monitoring process.***

- Periodically consult with service and advocacy organizations for low-income and minority populations about local needs and deficiencies and preferred solutions or projects. Review areas of potential common ground and opportunities for partnerships. Encourage suggestions to increase the effectiveness of existing policies, strategies and actions taken to accomplish “environmental justice” and, when necessary, develop new policies. Organizations that

¹ A good example of a Citizen's Guide can be found at the FHWA web site at:

<http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/citizen/index.htm>

² For a more comprehensive list of effective public involvement and outreach tools for promoting environmental justice principles in transportation visit the FHWA's Environmental Justice website at

http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/ejustice/lib/lib_pubinvtools.htm

³ Due to confidentiality reasons, the list of community-based organizations that participated in the environmental justice survey is not presented in this report. However, a list of organizations that expressed interest in participating in a focus group or committee will be given to the SJTPO.

participated in the survey (See Task 7) and indicated a willingness to participate in future focus groups are prime candidates for such consultation sessions.

- Monitor and evaluate new effective practices for environmental justice and create a continuing process to update and refine existing SJTPO policies and practices. Coordinate with federal and state partners, such as the FHWA and FTA, to ensure that the SJTPO is operating at or above “environmental justice” standards.
- ***Educate low-income and minority communities, along with organizations that serve them, about community-based transportation funding programs, work with them to identify projects, and assist them with the application process.***
- According to the environmental justice survey, several organizations that served low-income and minority communities were not aware of community-based transportation funding programs (e.g. Transportation Enhancements (TE), Job Access and Regional Commute Planning (JARC), Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ), and Transportation Community and System Preservation Pilot Project) made available at a Federal level under ISTEA and/or TEA-21. These programs are intended to improve job access, enhance neighborhood character, and improve the quality of life and/or safety of communities. The SJTPO is not an incorporated entity and does not have the authority to serve as a project sponsor for receipt of such program funds, but can provide a forum and/or serve as a conduit for technical assistance that connects potential, eligible recipients with valuable information for successful grant applications.
 - Hold workshops or open-house sessions and/or invite responsible NJDOT representatives to meet with grant-seeking parties including those that advocate for low-income and minority populations. Such workshops can provide organizations with background information about the purpose and availability of these funding programs.
 - Assist organizations, especially those that serve low-income and minority populations, with the application process for the desired funding program. This can include advertising the availability of funds and offering technical assistance with application preparation, application review, and/or assistance with submittals. The SJTPO can be an important means for connecting local non-profit organizations with municipal sponsors who have the professional capabilities to undertake required technical and environmental documentation.
 - Partner with non-transportation agencies and/or work with organizations that serve low-income and minority populations to jointly develop projects that are fully or even partially funded with community-based transportation funds. For example, the SJTPO could encourage a local housing authority to develop traffic calming and streetscape improvement projects that are eligible for TE funding or other state and local funds.⁴

⁴ The *Transportation and Environmental Justice Effective Practices* booklet issued by the FHWA provides provocative examples of projects whose goals are creating “livable” communities. Inter-agency partnerships are created to form collaborative planning processes and “community solutions teams” where transportation resources may be an element of larger strategy of urban revitalization or crime prevention through environmental design. For example, the Oregon Department of Transportation participates in problem-solving teams comprised of district representatives from the state’s housing and community services, environmental, economic and community development, and land conservation departments. Their joint presence improves the ability to create multi-agency, multi-funding source approaches to problem-solving and project development.

8.2 Technical and Analytical Support

Proficient technical and analytical support is critical to ensuring that the benefits and burdens of transportation investments in the SJTPO region are equitably distributed. The following proposed strategies and actions were developed to assist the SJTPO with establishing an “environmental justice” evaluation process, ensuring that low-income and minority populations are not denied benefits from -- or disproportionately and adversely affected by -- transportation investments and other actions.

- ***Continue to monitor and assess the region’s changing demographics and economic characteristics to determine the locations and evolving needs of low-income and minority populations.***
 - Continue to update and evaluate socioeconomic and travel data as they relate to environmental justice concerns. The socioeconomic data and GIS mapping efforts presented in Chapter 3 and the travel data analyzed in Chapters 4 and 5 should serve as the foundation for future evaluation efforts. For example, detailed block-level data on household income and poverty from the 2000 Census should be utilized to reevaluate the location of low-income populations in the SJTPO region.
 - Draw on non-traditional data sources to profile the location and transportation needs of low-income and minority populations. For example, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) and Free or Reduced Price Lunch Eligibility data were used as proxy measures, in the absence of 2000 Census data, for low-income populations in this study.⁵ Other types of data that should be considered include subsidized housing (i.e. recipients of Section 8 vouchers), subsidized health care (i.e. Medicaid and Medicare participants), education attainment, disability status, and mental health care.
 - Maintain a database and map of essential services, such as childcare and medical care facilities that are critical for populations reaching self-sufficiency.
 - Monitor the U.S. Census Bureau progress in the implementation of the American Community Survey (ACS). The Census Bureau is changing its data collection procedures with the ACS program. This program includes continuous data collection throughout the decade including data about low-income and minority populations. As data from the ACS becomes available, over the next few years, the ability to perform up-to-date equity assessments will significantly improve.⁶
- ***Continue to evaluate the impacts of the RTP, TIP, and UPWP for environmental justice concerns.***
 - Conduct an accessibility analysis of the RTP when significant changes are proposed or made to ensure that the accessibility benefits are equitably distributed. The accessibility analysis presented in Chapter 5 should serve as a guide for future evaluations.
 - Evaluate the project and funding distribution asserted by the TIP and UPWP to ensure that low-income and minority communities are receiving a fair proportion of the region’s transportation resources. The TIP evaluation presented in Chapter 6 provides an example of how to assess the allocation of the region’s transportation resources.
 - Compare the bridge problem areas, safety concerns, and roadways with poor pavement conditions identified in the 2025 RTP with the location of low-income and minority populations. The analysis can be conducted following similar methods as the TIP evaluation reported in Chapter 6. Maps of the bridge problem areas, areas with safety concerns, and roadways with poor pavement conditions can be compared to the locations of low-income and minority populations identified in

⁵ Given the unavailability of income data from the 2000 Census, these data served as valuable proxies for identifying the current location of low-income communities.

⁶ More information about the ACS can be found at the U.S. Census Bureau web site on the program: <http://www.census.gov/acs/www/>

Chapter 3. Based on this evaluation, the SJTPO can determine if the “issue” areas are disproportionately situated in low-income or minority communities and use these findings to ensure that the benefits and burdens of future transportation investments are equitably distributed. Findings from this analysis can also be used to develop “Environmental Justice” criteria for the project selection process, which is discussed further in Section 8.3.

- ***Conduct studies that further the understanding of the transportation needs and issues of low-income and minority populations, and develop projects that help meet their needs.***
 - Assess the safety and condition of pedestrian/bicycle facilities in low-income and minority communities. Several survey respondents indicated that the pedestrian/bicycle facilities of low-income and minority communities were in poor condition (see Chapter 7). An evaluation of the need for improvements to the region’s sidewalks – or to a select community -- should be given priority with the objective of enhancing the quality of the built environment and/or correcting threats to the health, safety and welfare of pedestrians. One effective yet inexpensive method of conducting such an evaluation would be to partner with one or more predominantly minority schools or school districts in a demonstration project. Teachers, working collaboratively with local public works staff and/or MPO staff, could devise a curriculum/work plan that engages youth at the elementary or junior high school level in a neighborhood study targeting bicycle/pedestrian conditions. Students would inventory local bicycle/pedestrian conditions, interview parents and neighbors, and identify key issues and improvement opportunities.⁷ Local public works and transportation agency staff could come to the classroom to give an introduction to the transportation, planning and engineering professions or go to the worksite to describe how they would perform a study. These encounters can be particularly constructive and “eye-opening” for young people who do not have role models in the professional occupations.
 - The SJTPO has previously worked closely in concert with the South Jersey Traffic Safety Alliance (SJ TSA), which has brought together enforcement, community, education, engineering and planning firms from throughout the SJTPO region’s counties. The SJ TSA may be an appropriate forum or means for encouraging such a community-based initiative.
 - Conduct regional and local transit needs assessments, focusing on the location and needs of low-income and minority communities. Survey respondents indicated that existing transit service did not adequately meet the transportation needs of low-income and minority communities. These observations were reaffirmed in the accessibility analysis findings (see Chapter 5). Also, as discussed in Chapter 3, low-income people and minorities were much more likely to be transit-dependent than non-minorities and non-low-income people. Therefore, periodic local transit needs assessment studies focused on enhancing service to employment and other essential activities are of continuing importance.
 - Explore the list of projects recommended by survey respondents (see Chapter 7). Several respondents recommended improvements that would help meet the transportation needs of low-income and minority populations. These improvements should be explored and, if deemed worthy of further consideration, studied in more detail. The SJTPO could contact the organization that recommended the improvement for further background and/or discuss how to work with them to bring an improvement to fruition.

⁷ The *Transportation and Environmental Justice Effective Practices and Case Studies* booklet issued by the FHWA provides several examples of studies conducted by MPOs or DOTs that have worked with students (e.g., Indiana, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, North Carolina) on bike/pedestrian studies, transit condition surveys, and environmental review processes. The benefits to the community and to transportation agencies extend beyond the development of technical findings. Students gain “real-world” exposure to the transportation profession; transportation agencies build trust in communities that can have long-term value.

- Commit to the development of studies in the annual UPWP that directly address environmental justice-related issues and which seek to better understand and meet the transportation needs of low-income and minority populations. The annual UPWP gives the SJTPO staff, member agencies, and the community an opportunity to develop and suggest projects. It provides a great opportunity to fund projects and studies that focus on enhancing pedestrian/bicycle facilities, increasing transit access, and improving local quality of life. For example, in the FY 2003 UPWP, a project to enhance pedestrian safety and signage in Cape May County was funded.

8.3 Incorporate Environmental Justice Issues and Concerns in the Transportation Planning and Project Development Process

The consideration of environmental justice issues should be an integral part of study and project development, the transportation planning process and other activities carried out by the SJTPO. The MPO Certification Review Process, as outlined in the October 7, 1999 FHWA/FTA memorandum, supports this strategy and asks certification reviewers to pose the following question with the MPOs under review:

“What mechanisms are in place to ensure that issues and concerns raised by low-income and minority populations are appropriately considered in the decision-making process?”

While Title VI and environmental justice is part of the MPO Certification Review Process and, therefore, an obligation of the agency, embracing the fundamental principles of environmental justice is highly consistent with effective transportation planning. For example, early and continuing public involvement often can lead to projects more likely to be accepted by communities; thus, it is an effective strategy for streamlining the project development process. Similarly, adopting comprehensive analytical methods that integrate equity into decision-making processes offer decision makers the most informed platform for assessing existing needs and future priorities. The FHWA and FTA have made clear in their technical assistance guidance that environmental justice has many practical benefits and need not compromise the achievement of other important objectives or planning factors sought through transportation investments (e.g., safety and mobility).

With nearly one-third of the region’s population considered to be minority and one-tenth in poverty, incorporating environmental justice issues in the transportation planning and project development process is not only an important step in ensuring that the benefits and burdens of transportation investments are equitably distributed, but also that individuals have access to the resources and opportunities to get to work or to reach other services (e.g., educational facilities, child care, medical care) essential to sustaining themselves and their families. Similarly, the condition and quality of transportation systems play an important role in defining the character of community and securing a safe and livable “built” environment capable of attracting future investment and reinvestment dollars.

Below is a list of actions the SJTPO can take to ensure that environmental justice issues are considered in the transportation planning and project development process.

- ***Require that project sponsors applying for funding indicate whether environmental justice issues have been considered in the project development process.***
 - Public involvement carried out with low-income and minority populations affected by the project is one determinant to consider.
 - An analysis of the benefits and burdens resulting from the proposed project for all populations involved is also a valid determinant to consider.

- ***Incorporate “Environmental Justice” criteria in the project selection process for the UPWP, RTP and TIP.***
 - Example criteria could include whether the project results in disproportionate high and adverse impacts on low-income or minority populations, or benefits derived from the project are equitably distributed, or whether the project addresses the transportation needs of low-income and minority populations.
 - Projects that meet the established criteria should receive additional consideration in the prioritization process.⁸
- ***Integrate into study Scopes of Work elements that assess environmental justice.***
 - Other transportation studies – not just the RTP and the TIP -- should include a work element addressing the issue of environmental justice. This can include needs assessment, corridor studies, safety studies, pedestrian and bicycle studies and environmental documentation.
 - Inform staff about the need for environmental justice sensitivity and methods for addressing Title VI and environmental justice. This can be accomplished through sending staff to National Highway Institute/National Transit Institute or other sponsored technical assistance training courses or workshops or holding in-house discussion sessions.
 - Educate member organizations, TAC members, and other organizations and individuals involved in the transportation planning, project development, and decision-making process about the need for environmental justice sensitivity and methods for its accomplishment.

8.4 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined several strategies and actions that the SJTPO can pursue to incorporate the needs and concerns of low-income and minority populations in the transportation decision-making process. By pursuing these strategies and actions, the SJTPO can be more effective at fulfilling the fundamental principles of environmental justice which are:

- Ensuring the full and fair participation of low-income and minority communities in the transportation decision-making process;
- Preventing the denial of, reduction in, or significant delay in the receipt of benefits from transportation plans and projects by low-income and minority populations; and
- Avoiding, minimizing, or mitigating disproportionately high and adverse impacts of transportation investments on low-income and minority populations.

⁸ Such criteria was introduced into the North Jersey Transportation Plan Authority decision-making process.