City of Cambridge Net Zero Transportation Plan Advisory Group

Meeting #6 notes – Wednesday, August 9, 2023

The Advisory Group held its sixth meeting on Wednesday, August 9, 2023, at the Cambridge City Hall Annex and via Zoom. The objectives of the meetings were to –

- Discuss ways to center racial equity and mobility justice in the Net Zero Transportation Plan (NZTP);
- Clarify what outcomes the Advisory Group is working toward to make transportation more equitable; and
- Think about ways to measure whether strategies meet these outcomes.

Below are important points and action items, followed by a summary of discussions.

Important points and action items

- Advisory Group members discussed ways to think about equity in transportation planning. Key points were as follows:
  - Members noted that equity can be centered on different groups, e.g., people who are low-income, BIPOC, people with disabilities, etc. Equity doesn't necessarily mean the same thing across these groups and actions will affect equity for some groups and not others.
  - Advisory Group members are interested in understanding the role large institutions like Harvard and MIT have played and can play in making the transportation system more equitable.
- Advisory Group members also reviewed two frameworks that others have developed for thinking about equity in transportation planning. Members also shared features of Cambridge's population that are important to consider and ideas for ways to address equity in Cambridge.
- The Advisory Group agreed to continue meeting into spring 2024 to continue developing recommendations for the NZTP.

Summary of discussions

Welcome and introductions

Stephanie Groll (Community Development Department) welcomed Advisory Group members. Advisory Group members, staff, and consultants introduced themselves for members of the public.

Advisory Group members also welcomed Nora Sears, who has replaced Elizabeth Brusie from the De Novo Center for Justice and Healing.

How should the Net Zero Transportation Plan make transportation more equitable?

Advisory Group members reviewed ideas they had shared so far about ways to make transportation in Cambridge more equitable:

- Make predictable and reliable transportation available to everyone. Unreliable transportation is harder for people who are already marginalized.
- Give people more good options to get where they need to go. Reduce costs of transportation (e.g., Charlie Cards that are free or free for those with demonstrated low income).
- Ensure that benefits and costs are distributed equitably. Larger institutions that have built wealth and made climate change worse should take more responsibility for reducing emissions.
- Everyone should feel safe and feel like they belong as they move around the city.

Advisory Group members shared the following reflections on equity:

- Equity can be centered on different groups, e.g., people who are low-income, BIPOC, people with disabilities, etc., and equity for one does not necessarily equate to another. For instance, racial equity does not always correlate with income inequality, though in communities like Cambridge it often does.
- Individuals within these groups have a range of perspectives and do not all see equity in the same way. Members noted that within their communities some people identify as part of a group that is marginalized, oppressed, or facing unique barriers, and others do not. For example, one member noted that internalized oppression and stigma have caused many people with disabilities to disavow that identity. Members also noted that people have different views about the challenges each of these groups face.
- It is important to be able to collect and interpret data about different types of equity and how they correlate. For example, having a disability often puts someone in a more vulnerable economic position because there are income restrictions for disability benefits, essentially forcing people with disabilities to live in poverty to qualify. Members noted that it is also important to focus on identifying and interpreting the trends in the data rather than only on individual cases, because the trends give a better overall picture.
- In urban planning, there is the idea that if a city works well for an 8-year-old and an 80-year-old, then it will work well for everyone. In other words, because systems of discrimination often intersect with one another, focusing on certain categories (in this case, age) can also improve other categories. However, while identities intersect, they often do so in complicated ways. For instance, a focus on age does not necessarily account for hardships faced by women and trans people, nor does it necessarily account for racial and ethnic discrimination. Nonetheless, thinking about these intersections is important for having a holistic conversation about equity.
- There have been attempts in the past to make private transportation systems (including those run by Harvard and MIT) more accessible to the public, but they have not been successful. Many of these systems are already "open" to the public, but the operators

do not make this widely known. It would be useful to understand Harvard and MIT's reasoning for this way of thinking.

How have others thought about equity in transportation planning?

Afterward, Advisory Group members reviewed two examples of equity "frameworks":

1. The Greenlining Institute's Mobility Equity Framework; and
2. Los Angeles Metro's Equity Platform and Rapid Equity Assessment tool.

The *Mobility Equity Framework* uses a three-step process for making transportation planning decisions:

1. Identify the **mobility needs** of a specific low-income community of color.;
2. Conduct the **mobility equity analysis** to prioritize the transportation modes that best meet those needs while maximizing benefits and minimizing burdens.; and
3. Place **decision-making power** in the hands of the local community.

The Framework also proposes 12 indicators that can be used to evaluate and prioritize transportation options for equity. Any proposal would go before the community to decide.

Los Angeles Metro's Equity Platform guides how the agency addresses inequities and creates more equitable access to opportunity. LA Metro's efforts ultimately strive for justice, which they define as a reality where:

- All underlying barriers are removed;
- All people enjoy access to opportunities; and
- Disparities do not exist.

One of the tools that LA Metro uses to support their Equity Platform is their Rapid Equity Assessment, which Metro staff are required to use as a first step to quickly prioritize equity opportunities.[1] Members also learned that the City of Cambridge has a similar tool for assessing racial equity in proposals (see Appendix A).

Members shared the following reflections on the frameworks:

- The Mobility Equity Framework has a data-driven structure and, if managed well, can provide measurable considerations to guide community members through proposals. However, it is important to ensure that the capacity exists for this level of data tracking.
- The Rapid Equity Assessment can provide useful qualitative data. However, its accuracy depends on the staff's knowledge about equity considerations, commitment to equity in their work, and ability to see and interrupt their own biases. It could be useful to include a question that asks staff to identify their biases that are affecting their decision-making when filling out the form.

Thinking about equity in Cambridge

Afterward, members shared features of Cambridge and its population that are important to consider when thinking about equity:

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[1] LA Metro defines equities opportunities as opportunities to enhance positive outcomes and reduce negative consequences.

- **More culturally and ethnically diverse** than other places;
- **High income inequality**;
- **High population density**;
- Large immigrant populations, which highlights the need for **language accessibility;**[2]
- **High costs of housing.**

Members also shared the following ideas for addressing equity issues in Cambridge:

- Supporting workers to take public transportation by educating employers about the benefit of supporting staff who choose not to drive to work;
- Improving connectivity, efficiency, and access to transit for people in different neighborhoods, making it easier to live further away from condensed areas (especially for young people);
- Supporting teachers and other essential professions being able to afford to live in Cambridge;

Members identified the following groups to consider involving in the NZTP process:

- Youth representatives;
- Senior centers; and
- Central Square Business Improvement District.

Other matters and closing thoughts

Elizabeth Cooper (CBI) shared that the City and consultant team would like to extend the Advisory Group process into spring 2024. There will be additional stipends for eligible members.

Members closed the meeting by sharing things they had learned and other reflections from the meeting, including the following:

- Commuters are an important group that the NZTP process will affect. The Advisory Group should consider recommendations to make the transition easier for these and other groups, such as vouchers and offsets.
- It was good to learn about the frameworks, and good to learn that the City has its own equity assessment tool.

The Advisory Group adjourned and will meet next on Wednesday, September 27, 2023 at 9 AM at the City Hall Annex.

Attendance list

Advisory Group members
- Pastor Farris Blount (Western Avenue Baptist Church / Cambridge Black Pastors Alliance)
- James Pierre (Adius Arts Initiative)
- Nora Sears (De Novo Center for Justice and Healing)
- Rachel Tanenhaus (Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities)

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[2] The City has a Language Justice Division and translates many materials into the 9 most commonly spoken languages in Cambridge.

- Karim Elrazzaz (Islamic Society of Boston Cultural Center)
- Ibrahim Omar (Islamic Society of Boston Cultural Center)
- Yao Wu (Chinese American Association of Cambridge)

Community Development Department staff

- Stephanie Groll (Mobility Strategy Manager)
- Susanne Rasmussen (Director of Environmental and Transportation Planning)

Consultant team

- Michael Bangert-Drowns (Arup)
- Brandon Chambers (Consensus Building Institute)
- Elizabeth Cooper (Consensus Building Institute)

Appendix A: City of Cambridge Anti-Racism, Equity, and Inclusion Strategy Filter

Anti-Racism, Equity, and Inclusion Strategy Filter
February 1, 2022

As part of our implementation of a _pilot_ Anti-Racism, Equity, and Inclusion Strategy Filter, we expect staff involved in creating new internal policies, practices, and key decisions or revising existing internal policies and practices to apply the following filter.

What is the overall goal?

Consider the following questions:
- Specifically, what problem(s) are you trying to solve, or barrier(s) are you trying to dismantle?
- What are your desired outcomes?

How are the needs of the most impacted stakeholders being prioritized?

Consider the following questions:
- Which stakeholders are likely to be impacted by this decision (for example, employees, departments, or residents)?
- Which stakeholders are being prioritized with this policy, practice, or decision?
- How does this support stakeholder or City goals?

How might this policy, practice, or decision remove barriers to equity and inclusion or promote anti-racism?

Consider the following question:
- What barriers to equity and inclusion might exist, and what actions might be needed to remove these barriers?

What might be the impact of this policy, practice, or decision on operational needs, customer service, or other existing policies?

Consider the following questions:
- How will you know if you are achieving your desired outcomes?
- What data or information do you have or need to collect?
- How will this policy impact employees, departments, or residents?

How will stakeholders be included in the process?

Consider the following questions:
- Which stakeholders should be consulted or included in this decision, and in what capacity?
- How will you communicate with the stakeholders impacted by the policy, practice, or decision as needed?
- Who will need to be informed after a decision has been made? How will they be informed?

What resources are required to ensure that this policy, practice, or decision is equitably and successfully implemented?