



# Key Takeaways

Friday, April 19, 2024

## Overview and Shared Goals



Nearly 400 leaders and practitioners in transportation and urban planning convened for the New York City Department of Transportation's (NYC DOT) inaugural *Equity in Motion* Summit at the CUNY Graduate Center in New York City. Participants attended several plenaries, panels, and workshop discussions to share and learn strategies that meaningfully advance transportation equity.

Advancing transportation equity is a collaborative effort that requires buy-in from those within an organization and centers community voices in delivering transportation and urban planning projects. It also takes time to improve systems and implement equitable solutions. The Summit provided opportunities to learn from experts and peers who shared actionable strategies to work toward equitable outcomes.

**Through the scheduled program and dedicated activations space, the Summit advanced three goals:**

- Elevate the importance of centering equity in transportation and urban planning;
- Provide space for leaders to exchange best practices;
- Establish partnerships with governments, nonprofits, and industry partners.

# Key Learnings and Program Highlights

## Opening Remarks and Plenary

NYC DOT Commissioner Ydanis Rodriguez highlighted the importance of building on past progress and acting as responsible stewards, showcasing NYC DOT initiatives, including:

**Priority Investment Areas:** A transportation planning framework that prioritizes street improvement projects based on demographics, population density, and past investment. The framework puts equity at the center of projects by generally prioritizing those in areas of New York City with the highest non-white, low-income populations.

**MWBE Opportunities:** Due to NYC DOT's recent efforts to expand opportunities for Minority- and Women- Owned Business Enterprises, the agency has reached a 31% utilization of such contracts in the agency, up from 11% three years prior. The approach included creating a MWBE-only prequalified list procurement method that alone has awarded up to \$20 million in prime contracts annually.

**Reimagining Infrastructure and Public Spaces:** The agency is taking on large scale projects that explore addressing the impact of divisive infrastructure in underserved communities and connecting them, such as the **Brooklyn-Queens Expressway Corridor Vision** and the **Reimagine the Cross-Bronx Study**. Both incorporated Community Partners programs that funded local organizations to conduct grassroots engagement, especially for populations whose primary language is not English and with support to participate like childcare, meals, and transportation. The strategy has been effective in advancing equity by reaching communities often left out of engagement processes.



NYC DOT Commissioner Ydanis Rodriguez started the day with opening and welcoming remarks.



In her keynote address, US DOT Director of the Office of Civil Rights Irene Marion charged attendees with a mission to center equity in transportation and provided practical steps to do so from the agency's Equity Action Plan.

**Keynote Address** Irene Marion, Director of the United States Department of Transportation's (US DOT) Office of Civil Rights, highlighted the new and pivotal **US DOT Equity Action Plan**. She encouraged attendees to be innovative as they pursue equity in their work and reshape systems that were not designed to advance fairness. Director Marion shared six key insights from her experience advancing equity.

1. Executive leadership in government must activate their workforce and hold them accountable for specific outcomes;
2. Create real and consistent opportunities for meaningful, accessible, and creative public engagement to turn communities' ideas into technical solutions;
3. Activate subject matter experts across every line of business in an organization;
4. Utilize trusted resources such as trainings and tools from the federal government;
5. Make a personal commitment to allyship by creating space for diverse parties to lead and contribute to this work;
6. Roll up your sleeves by pursuing organizational infrastructure and cultural change work.

Director Marion's recommendations emphasized that in addition to safety, equity is central to transportation work and takes time and steady commitment. She emphasized that a better future is attainable by showing up ready to listen, with meaningful resources, and in partnership with allies.

**Opening Plenary** Panelists working to advance equity nationally and locally set the tone for the Summit by establishing a working definition of transportation equity.

**Transportation equity is both an iterative process and an outcome that leads to all people having unburdened access to reliable and safe transportation.**



NYC DOT Chief Strategy Officer Julie Bero moderated a conversation with national leaders that defined transportation equity for the audience and framed the conversations ahead.

Shown seated on stage (left to right) besides Julie Bero are NYC Chief Equity Officer and Commissioner Sideya Sherman, Midori Valdivia Consulting LLC Founder and Principal Midori Valdivia, Former Mayor of Los Angeles Antonio Villaraigosa, US DOT Director of Public Engagement Kala Wright, and Transit Center Director of Research and Policy Chris Van Eyken.

The panelists further discussed learnings from their work in government, the private sector, and the non-profit space which framed later breakout sessions. For instance, Commissioner Sherman noted she is leading the effort to develop New York City's first **Racial Equity Plan**. Former Mayor Villaraigosa identified the importance of tracking equity commitments by establishing metrics and target goals, and ensuring there is someone responsible for advancing the work. Director Wright, who works nationally to advance **meaningful public involvement** in transportation projects, emphasized that it is vital to understand a community's history and present in the engagement process. By centering community perspectives and needs from the beginning, it is easier to create long-lasting projects.

Their collective expertise underscored the importance of pursuing transportation equity as a matter of fairness, building trust with communities, and aligning internal approaches and external work to advance equity. You can watch the full opening plenary online at: [www.equityinmotionnyc.info](http://www.equityinmotionnyc.info).

# Breakout Sessions

The Summit program featured workshops and panels in three themed sessions — “Access in Transportation,” “Community Engagement and Organizing,” and “Building Just Futures”

## Session I. Access in Transportation

Accessibility is about more than disability. A more inclusive society is possible by listening to, reflecting on, and planning for the needs of underserved and underrepresented groups. Implementing projects that prioritize inclusivity will produce longer-lasting results.

### Panels and Workshops

- Advancing Accessible Infrastructure for All
- Reimagining Public Spaces to Create Belonging
- Navigating Space: Designing Cities for Diverse Populations

### Takeaways

- **Build From the Margins:** plan for the needs of the least-resourced group—those at the “margins” of society—so that projects include consideration for the most people and have a higher chance of success. When designing, consider who is excluded and keep iterating to narrow that list.
- **It’s About Belonging:** public space must be responsive to community needs by being inclusive and culturally relevant both in how they are built and maintained. Well-planned public space presents opportunities for social connection and long-term community sustainability.
- **Start Small and Build Up:** be proactive in advancing accessibility at any scale feasible. Set a goal and commit to work daily to reach beyond the minimum requirements for a safer and more inclusive society.

For more strategies to holistically address accessibility, read the International Association of Public Transport’s [recommendations](#) and visit the [U.S. Access Board’s website](#) for general resources.



## Session II. Community Engagement and Organizing

Community-responsive projects that address and reflect community needs begin with centering people and their perspectives. Below are some techniques for pursuing meaningful partnerships that lead to more sustainable projects.

### Panels and Workshops

- How to Meaningfully Engage the Public in Ways that Don't Waste Their Time (or Yours)
- Reconnecting Communities and Dismantling Inequitable Infrastructure
- Worker Justice when Work is on the Move
- Winning Safe Streets for Every Family

### Takeaways

- **Earn Trust:** institutions have a trust gap they are responsible for bridging. Community meetings are about showing up on the ground to listen and sit in difficult spaces. When listening, respect resistance, which is an opportunity to learn key information about community needs and preferences.
- **Value Community Expertise:** working across disciplines and stakeholders is paramount and the onus is on institutions and government to reach populations that have often been left out of processes. Some partners may need extra or different support to participate, and institutions should accommodate those – including with financial support. As one panelist said, “nothing about us without us.”
- **Lay the Foundation for Resilient Communities:** be proactive in advancing accessibility at any scale feasible. Set a goal and commit to work daily to reach beyond the minimum requirements for a safer and more inclusive society.

To learn more about approaches to equitable, community responsive processes and connect to practitioners nationwide, check out resources from the [Government Alliance on Race and Equity \(GARE\)](#).



## Session III. Building Just Futures

It is crucial that a forward-looking perspective be applied to transportation work. Practitioners must use equity-focused strategies that harness tools like technology and data to turn current and future challenges into opportunities for success.

### Panels and Workshops

- Resilient Cities: Environmental Justice is Transportation Justice
- The Future of Enforcement: Data, Education, and Neighborhood Design
- Operationalizing Equity in Transportation Agencies

### Takeaways

- **Institutions Must Reflect the Constituents They Serve:** staff at every level of an institution must reflect populations they serve. Institutions have a responsibility to support workforce development to build a diverse bench of future leaders.
- **Own Up to Your Organization's Aspirations:** celebrate successes and be transparent about where there is room to grow. Use data to track and inform what is possible when developing strategies to reach goals.
- **Put Your Money Where Your Mouth Is:** budgets and contracts are values documents and must invest in local, minority- and women-owned businesses. Plan projects in areas that have been under-invested and target investments to prioritize underserved communities.
- **Get Creative:** nurture transportation systems by considering quality of life and well-being to build for the next generation. Institutions must continually create space where communities can imagine their futures and work collaboratively to meet project goals.

For more ideas on how to “Build Just Futures,” visit [PolicyLink's website](#) for featured publications, tools, and other resources to advance equity.



For more information about the *Equity in Motion Summit*, visit [www.equityinmotionnyc.info](http://www.equityinmotionnyc.info).



## Key Terms

### Transportation Equity:

As determined in the Summit Opening Plenary, transportation equity is an iterative process and outcome that leads to all people having unburdened access to reliable and safe transportation.

### Underserved Communities:

As defined by the U.S. government, underserved communities are populations or geographic communities that have been systematically denied the opportunity to participate fully in aspects of economic, social, and civic life. This includes people of color, indigenous populations, women and gender minorities, LGBTQIA+ individuals, people with disabilities, low-income people, and more.

The NYC Department of Transportation thanks the *Equity in Motion* Summit Host Committee, Partners, and Sponsors for making the inaugural event possible.

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