

Executive Summary

May, 2006

“[Incorporating environmental justice into the transportation planning process] involve[s] a significant adjustment in the way transportation planning has traditionally been approached.”

- Kern Council of Governments,
Environmental Justice Report, 2003

“Transport planners must recognize that their decisions can create self-fulfilling prophecies.”

- Victoria Transport Policy Institute,
Reinventing Transportation, 2003

Those involved with community and transportation planning efforts are discovering a need for new decisionmaking models, techniques, and partnerships that will help communities provide **healthy and equitable access to services, employment, education and recreation**. At all levels of government and within diverse planning disciplines, there is an increasing awareness that:

- **Transportation, land use and economic development decisions are inextricably linked and**
- **Transportation investments affect public health and social equity.**

The importance of transportation investments has begun to result in **new decisionmaking practices**. **Civil Rights Act and Environmental Justice (EJ)** regulations have provided some guidance and tools for transportation planners within most urban and metropolitan regions. However, Regional Transportation Planning Agencies (RTPAs) and planning departments with limited staff and resources are increasingly challenged to meet these government regulations while still addressing the needs of their communities.

This project has been an effort to incorporate Planning for Active Transportation and Health (PATH) into decisionmaking processes as a way to address these regulations and improve overall access for community members. Those communities that pursue transportation equity ensure that all members **benefit from an equitable distribution of transportation investments that serve travelers of all means**.

A New Perspective

To collectively **modify the standard tools, policies and funding programs** that contribute to inequitable, unhealthy and unsustainable transportation decisions, we need a new perspective. An evolution in the way we think about, identify and evaluate solutions to transport challenges will help communities:

- **Efficiently get people where they need to go:** plan for **community access** to services, employment, and education instead of focusing on mobility. In the PATH model, enhancing mobility is not the goal, but is instead one strategy among many toward achieving the overarching goal of improved equitability through increased access.
- **Consider everyone’s needs:** establish a planning process and system for investments that clearly considers, includes and addresses the **needs of the whole community** -- including transportation-disadvantaged populations.
- **Look ahead:** consider, proactively, the **impacts of transportation decisions and investments** on public health, social equity, land use and economic development, and involve a diverse spectrum of professionals and stakeholders to assist in the transportation planning process.
- **Learn from ourselves:** periodically **review progress, adapt** to ‘best practices’ information and evaluate and adjust planning and design practices to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of transportation planning and investments.

Guide to the Project

The PATH effort is an exploration of **practical measures** to improve the equitability of transportation decisionmaking and investments. It is a series of in-depth reports and supporting resources that synthesize research and emphasize the goal of transportation equity. The following documents and online resources are a product of a Caltrans Environmental Justice Program-funded grant to the County of Humboldt and Redwood Community Action Agency.

Summary of Research

INVESTIGATE new planning perspectives that achieve transportation equity in the *Summary of Research*, which also includes a literature review and preliminary discussion of Humboldt County transportation issues.

Event Summaries

EXPLORE the results and implications of numerous gatherings of transportation, land use, health, social service and economic development professionals between November, 2005 and May, 2006.

Best Practices Report

GET INSPIRED by a unique compilation of innovative programs, projects and policies in the *Best Practices Report*. The report provides rural regions with ideas about transportation equity, multi-disciplinary planning efforts, promoting access and active transportation and highlights numerous planning and decisionmaking tools.

Transportation Disadvantaged Populations Report

DISCOVER new ways to consider needs of the entire community in the *Humboldt County Transportation-Disadvantaged Populations Report*, featuring intriguing GIS maps of disadvantaged populations, bicycle- and pedestrian-vehicle collisions and access to public transit services.

The PATH Guide

USE INNOVATIVE TOOLS from the *PATH Guide*, a compilation of ideas, examples and resources to help rural region governments shift decisionmaking perspectives to find affordable, practical ways to improve transportation equity.

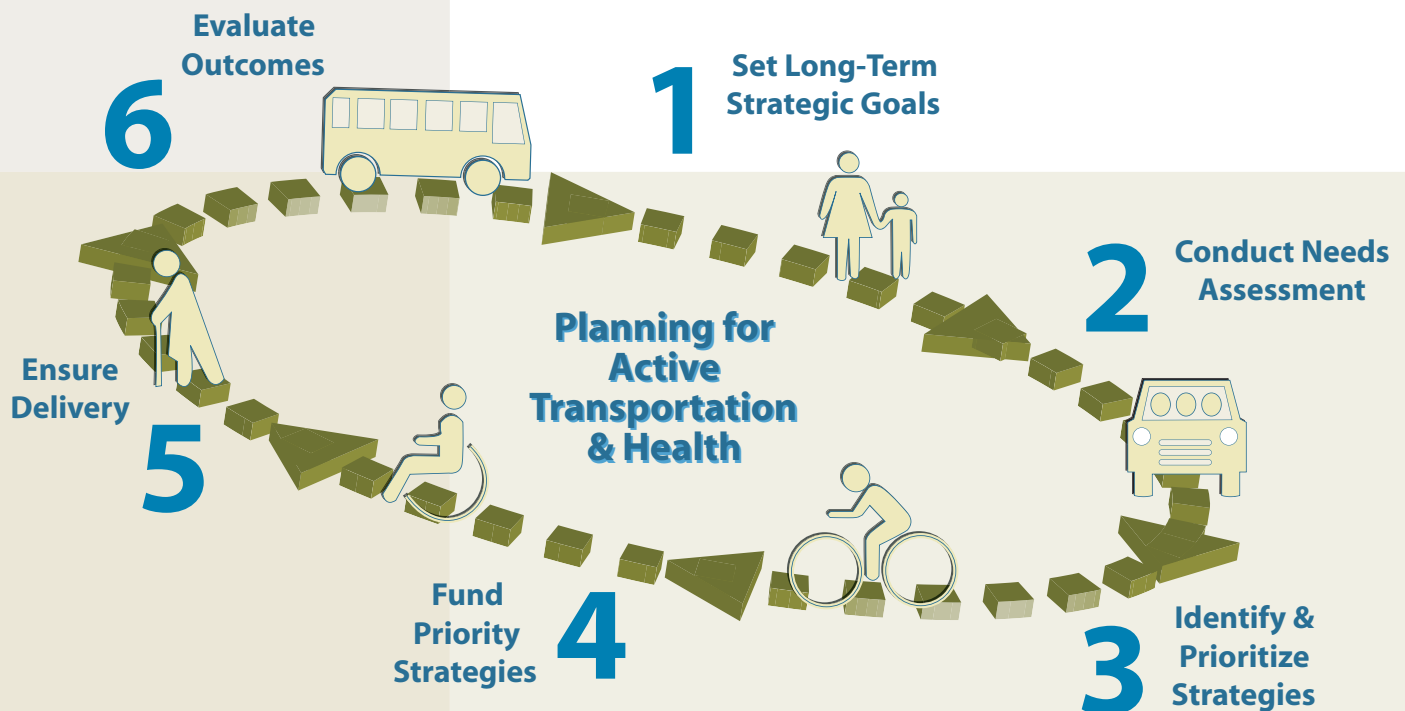
Opportunities for Improving Transportation Equity

SUPPORT AND INCORPORATE recommended strategies to improve public participation, active transportation and community access in *Opportunities for Improving Transportation Equity in Humboldt County*.

In addition, the PATH Web Resources Guide provides links to many creative efforts highlighted in the *Best Practices Report* and useful literature reviewed in the *Summary of Research*, as well as links to many online tools and useful resources. All of the above documents and resources can be viewed at www.nrsrcaa.org/path.

The PATH Model

The PATH model is intended to incorporate a wide range of community interests and needs into traditional transportation planning efforts. The PATH model outlines **six basic procedural steps** (explained in detail in the PATH Guide).



At first glance, the model may look similar to conventional transportation planning processes, but there are several differences, including emphasis to:

- **Link transportation goals to broader community goals** for equity, public health, economic development, and land use
- Consider a **diversity of planning inputs** (e.g. hard data, qualitative information, maps of target populations, personal stories)
- Use inclusive, **innovative public participation techniques** to understand actual community needs
- Consult the latest 'best practices' and research to help prioritize **which transportation investments will achieve strategic goals**
- **Create funding partnerships** to get multimodal projects moving forward and build local stewardship
- Ensure accountability in planning, contracting, and construction management so **multimodal projects are delivered intact**
- Evaluate outcomes to ensure transportation **investments are cost-effective in achieving community goals**, and revise investment as necessary to better achieve goals

The PATH model is not a revolutionary concept intended to overhaul existing planning processes. It is an evolution of conventional processes, designed to help planners and decisionmakers comply with federal and state regulations, while still providing their respective communities with opportunities for equal access.

"Ultimately, social equity means that access to all aspects of the community (including health, safety, open space, transportation investments, and economic development) is fair for all residents - regardless of socioeconomic status, race, class, ethnicity, gender, age or ability."

- International City/County Management Association, *Active Living and Social Equity: Creating Healthy Communities for all Residents*, 2005



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Next Steps

In the last decade, a broad effort was made to incorporate the words ‘pedestrian’ and ‘bicycle’ into standard transportation planning documents, manuals and actions. The PATH project proposes a next step in the U.S. transportation paradigm: **incorporate transportation equity into those documents, manuals and actions.**

It takes time to evolve standard decisionmaking processes. Working toward proactive planning, design and implementation of transportation systems that promote improved social, economic and public health will require further experimentation, innovative perspectives and, most importantly, **new multi-disciplinary partnerships.**

What matters most is that **individuals working at every level** of the process ask critically how their respective efforts can more functionally promote equitable transportation decisionmaking. Such an achievement is by no means an unattainable goal, especially when approached strategy by strategy, and if it is acknowledged as a priority at every level of government, with the support and participation of community stakeholders and the community as a whole.

