



# Oregon Metro's Strategy for Incorporating Racial Equity Focus into TSMO

By Oregon Metro

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## Benefits Statement

Asking new questions helped Oregon Metro and partners put a racial equity focus into TSMO conversations as the region drafted an updated strategy. Stakeholders developed TSMO-related questions that were organized into a one-page equity "tree" document. This created a method the region returned to at different stages of the planning process and will continue to use through implementation.

## In this case study you will learn:

1. Why Diversity, Equity and Inclusion policies should be part of TSMO thinking.
2. How an Equity Tree process can be applied to TSMO Strategy.
3. How Oregon Metro used an Equity Tree process to ask a broad set of questions that span historical context, workforce, and data gaps to develop a more inclusive TSMO strategy.

# NOCoE Case Study

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

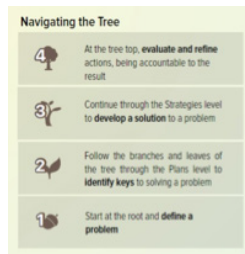
## BACKGROUND

Oregon Metro’s 2016 Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) policy establishes that, “By addressing the barriers experienced by people of color, we will effectively also identify solutions and remove barriers to other disadvantaged groups.” National statistics highlight the disproportionate experience people have with our transportation system. Pedestrian fatality rates for African Americans are 60% higher than for non-Hispanic whites and 43% higher for Hispanics than whites. Nearly 1 in 5 Americans rely on accessible transportation infrastructure (i.e. curb ramps, wheelchair-accessible transit, etc.) for daily travel. Nearly 20% of African-American households, 14% of Latino households, and 13% of Asian households live without a car. Racial minorities are 4x more likely than Whites to rely on transit for their work commute. Households in the bottom 90% income bracket spend twice the amount on transportation that households in the top 10% income bracket spend each year. After 10 years of regional TSMO progress, the 2021 update to the regional Transportation System Management & Operations Strategy began with reframing the discussion to be rooted in equity. Ten years back, the region’s TSMO vision statement included equity but other than a few suggested projects, equity was not carried throughout the goals and proposed actions. 2010 TSMO goals are still important today, but acknowledge there are still needs in dealing with the disproportionate impacts in our transportation system. Asking questions helped Oregon Metro and partners put a racial equity focus into TSMO conversations as the region drafted the strategy. Stakeholders developed TSMO-related questions that were organized into a one-page equity “tree” document. This created a method the region returned to at different stages of the planning process and will continue to use through implementation.

## TSMO PLANNING, STRATEGIES AND DEPLOYMENT

Using an equity tree development process reframes the discussion on TSMO strategy. Rather than applying equity as a lens to evaluate solutions, the tree starts at the root of hearing and growing awareness of problems. The roots of the tree asks for:

- Context: What are the transportation disparities or inequities that exist in the context of TSMO that affect quality of life?
- Choices: How can TSMO affect transportation choices broadly and meet individual needs in historically marginalized communities, expanding access to economic, health and recreational opportunities.
- Voices: Who is voicing a problem and related impacts? What steps can we take to help ensure that participation is broad enough to include those who lack formal organization or influence?



The Tree helped the region identify problems and grow the roots of conversations about equity. Continuing the tree process, additional questions are asked about inclusivity in TSMO for professionals

and participants to fill in the middle, or trunk of the tree. The process asks about those who are involved in making decisions, as well as about data and where equity related data gaps fall.

Once TSMO stakeholders define steps towards a solution, they are better prepared for implementation. The top of the tree focuses attention on evaluating results and holding solutions accountable for improving equity. Does the solution create, reinforce or remove barriers to travel for Black, Indigenous, people of color (BIPOC) and people with low incomes? To be accountable, TSMO stakeholders need to ask if the outcomes help or have unintended consequences.

## COMMUNICATIONS PLANNING AND EXECUTION

The equity tree was developed in conjunction with several agencies within the greater Portland Metro region, who helped raise important questions. Drafts of the tree were distributed to representatives from community-based organizations serving people of color and immigrants for their feedback and edits. Once the equity tree aligned with the other regional equity efforts, it was used through a series of stakeholder working groups to develop and evaluate possible solutions. Stakeholder working groups were comprised of transportation professionals from agencies throughout the region, as well as representatives from community-based organizations. Stakeholder working groups used the tree to help develop the updated Strategy Vision and Goals, Objectives, and draft TSMO actions.

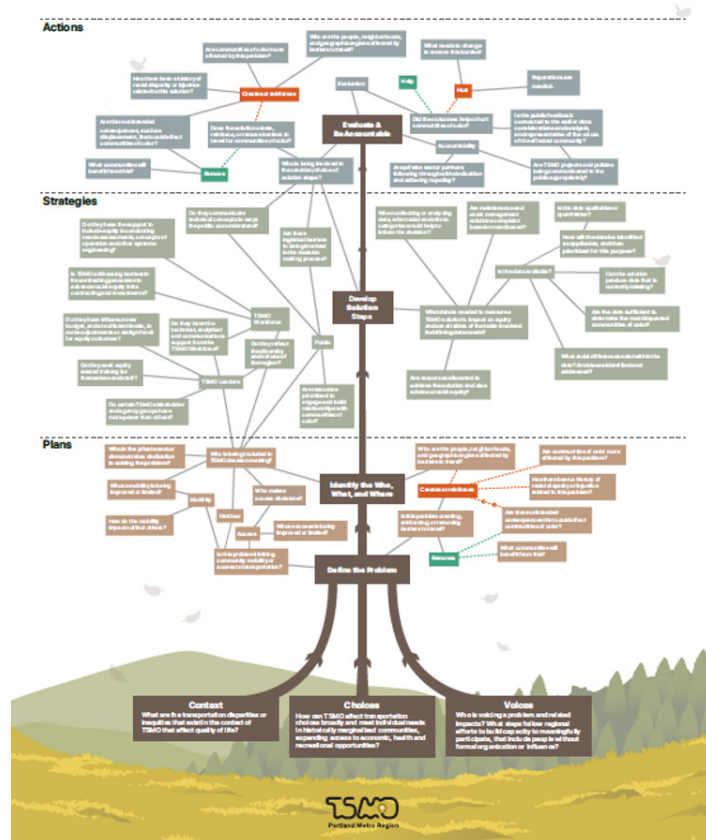
In addition to the stakeholder working groups, the equity tree was developed with input from TransPort, a subcommittee of the regional Transportation Policy Alternatives Committee charged with advancing TSMO Actions. TransPort also gave feedback on Performance Metrics and Actions as the strategy was completed. Throughout the process the consultant and Metro staff also held one-on-one discussions and focus groups with different organizations and agencies.

## OUTCOME, LEARNINGS AND PUBLIC BENEFIT

The equity tree weaves equity through all pieces of the TSMO Strategy. Goals were added to emphasize the need for equity in the region. In particular the goal 'Eliminate Disparities' focuses on equitable TSMO strategies and actions, calls out specifically that TSMO can and will work to further transportation equity in the region. In the goal, 'Keep everyone free from harm,' stakeholders incorporated Vision Zero policy with the understanding of safety to include the harm that comes from experiences our residents have shared traveling at night; not feeling comfortable

riding transit or waiting for a bus; or hearing racist or sexist remarks while walking.

Four objectives were identified to achieve an 'Eliminate Disparities' goal. The first objective focuses on key TSMO strategies to provide traveler information, but the focus shifted to who is being reached and how TSMO can remove barriers to accessing the information. Does someone need a smartphone or a bank account to access information or a specific travel mode? Should information be provided in multiple languages or in new or different locations to reach the communities that are not currently being reached? For the performance metric "Number of crashes by severity," a key performance indicator is a fairly standard one – total crashes factored by vehicle miles traveled and per capita. Thinking through the equity tree, we asked who is most affected and what data is needed to understand that question? This resulted in identifying the need for data on crash demographics and risk, as well as average miles biked or walked. At this time Oregon Metro has the ability to look at the geography of where these crashes happen. This indicates that there are a disproportionate number of crashes occurring in identified equity focus areas. We also know that those living in the equity focus areas have longer commutes, walk further to transit, and have a lack of adequate nonmotorized facilities. Understanding crashes and near-misses that have greater impact for BIPOC and people with low incomes has been identified as a data need. An action from the new strategy is to deploy a regional traveler information system in an equitable way, starting with BIPOC, low-income, and limited English proficiency communities. One of the specific outcomes to achieve with this action is to evaluate a method for deploying traveler information in a way that does not require personal smart technology, such as screens in public buildings, major destinations and regional centers.



## INDUSTRY RESOURCES

Project Managers considered developing an equity focus as a companion to the V-diagram Systems Engineering process (<https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/cadiv/segb/>). Since the V-diagram is most applicable to the project development process rather than at the TSMO-planning level, the project managers decided against it. Nonetheless, while the format is not the same, the equity tree can be applied in the course of the V-diagram’s Needs Assessment and Concept Selection, through Operations and Maintenance and so on. Project Managers had also considered an approach to create a flow chart with built in decision-points but soon encountered the limitations of a reductive approach. One similarity the equity tree has to the V-diagram is the comprehensive approach for areas of discussion as project leaders develop a project. The equity tree, suited to TSMO planning, leads to a broad set of questions that span historical context, workforce, data gaps and more.