

Racial Equity Pocket Questions – Submittal of Transportation Projects for Consideration in SPOT Process P7.0

What are the racial impacts?

Carrboro has an opportunity to identify transportation needs within the community and to submit projects for consideration for state and federal funding. The selection of transportation projects can have a significant impact on quality of life. Public engagement is essential to understand transportation needs, to identify projects, and to determine appropriate and thoughtful enhancements such as benches and art. Both need and access to opportunities to engage are exacerbated by existing racial inequities. The Town's selection of projects can eliminate/diminish transportation barriers BIPOC community members face.

Who is or will experience burden?

It takes time and energy to learn about and follow discussions on transportation projects. Technical language and drawings can be difficult to understand. Shift workers and people who have limited time, transportation choices, and/or children may have difficulty learning about or providing input on a project. Some residents face a language barrier. Gender and race provide a barrier for some residents; transportation consultants and NCDOT representatives are still predominately white men. Projects may require easements/right of way acquisition before completion. Property owners may be asked to donate or sell land for a project to move forward. Construction noise/dust, etc. can create inconveniences during construction.

Who is or will experience benefit?

Residents and property owners living near bike/ped projects can most readily make alternate transportation choices. But, when a project completes a missing segment in the overall network, residents living farther out can experience make this change as well. For example, residents living in the Canterbury Townhomes and Berryhill neighborhoods, will have easy access to the Morgan Creek Greenway, but once the signalized pedestrian crossings improve access across NC 54 (also underway), residents in the apartments along NC 54 and in the Lincoln Park neighborhood will be able to experience the greenway system, to enjoy nature, and to eventually walk/bike to University Lake and local schools. Multifamily residents on Smith Level will be able to head into downtown Carrboro off-road. This improves environmental, public health, and economic outcomes by lowering emissions and household expenses (particularly for BIPOC or low-income residents in qualified census tracts) on gas and vehicle maintenance if households choose not to have a car.

What are the root causes of inequity?

Lack of representation among decision makers, lack of a seat at the table, lack of information and notice about transportation funding and calls for projects. Structural racism in government decisions, particularly those relating to land use, as well as residents' personal experiences with government, can further alienate those that may find it difficult to attend meetings—like working individuals and families—and contribute to a reticence by historically marginalized people to speak in a public setting. Communities of color have historically fared poorly in decisions relating to transportation improvements. Dedicated funding sources are used to enhance predominately white neighborhoods while communities of color remain without basic infrastructure such as sidewalks.

What might be the unintended consequences of this action or strategy?

Changes to land use regulations can affect land values and quality of life experiences for surrounding property owners and occupants in ways that can be beneficial and, albeit for some, less desirable. The construction process for a transportation project can involve a loss of trees/shading and screening and privacy. People may be walking/bicycling in close proximity to someone's property, business or home. The character of a neighborhood, the quietness of a low-traffic street can change.