

Poverty Solutions Engagement Series:  
**The Road Out of Poverty**  
*A transportation and economic mobility symposium*

Thursday, March 15, 2018

## AGENDA

- Keynote Speaker
- Breakout Sessions
  - [1. License to Drive: How Legal Structures Impact Mobility](#)
  - [2. Getting to Work & School: Barriers to Meeting Basic Mobility Needs](#)
  - [3. The Future of Transportation: Engineering Systems to Enhance Equity](#)
  - [4. Transportation Security: Measurement Tools to Understand Needs](#)
  - [5. Accessibility Across County Lines: Regional Approaches to Transportation Barriers](#)
- [Advocacy Panel](#)

## License to Drive: How Legal Structures Impact Mobility

*When resources are scarce, not paying a small fee or fine like a parking ticket can quickly escalate to driver's license suspension. Small fees and fines can also quickly amount to major debt and deprive drivers of the ability to travel. This panel will highlight how our courts can disproportionately punish low-income drivers.*

### PANELISTS

JJ Prescott, U-M Law School  
Phil Telfeyan, Equal Justice Under Law  
Damien Siwik, Poverty Solutions  
Moderator: Luke Shaefer, Poverty Solutions

### PANEL OVERVIEW

JJ Prescott's work is to use technology to make the court system more accessible. In the State of Michigan, any unpaid court debt that lasts six weeks leads to a suspended license. To pay fees, one must physically go to the courthouse – made harder by the fact many cannot take time off work, and that they have a suspended license. Prescott created an online portal connecting people to the courts to lessen the burden of fines by making it less costly to engage with the system.

Phil Telfeyan, the founder and director of Equal Justice Under Law is dedicated to achieving equality in our justice system and helping to end the cycle of poverty by challenging wealth-based discrimination. His initiative has legally challenged the process in the State of Michigan that suspends a person's license if their court debt goes unpaid. Many of his clients recognize they committed the offense; they simply cannot afford to pay the fine. This creates a cycle where debts are unpaid and individuals cannot get to work to earn the necessary money to pay it back, and a suspended license exacerbates this.

Damien Siwik added to this by explaining Driver Responsibility Fees in the State of Michigan. Essentially, the state is making money off of bad drivers. In addition to paying the court for traffic citations, one must also pay a Driver Responsibility Fee to the Secretary of State to reinstate their license. The inability to pay this fee can also lead to one's license getting suspended.

#### *Takeaways*

The panelists discussed alternative ways to charge fees associated with citations to enhance equity. Individuals could be put on payment plans, a non-traditional probation system (i.e. assignment to GED courses, or job training.). The panelists also agreed that there is potential value in working to create a simple and easy model to solve issues like suspended licenses; an integrated model that works with both the courts and the Secretary of State.

#### *Learn more:*

- More information on JJ Prescott's [online court project](#).
- [Equal Justice Under Law](#)

## Getting to Work & School: Meeting Basic Mobility Needs

*Research has shown that education and having a job are two key drivers of economic mobility. Transportation is a critical consideration in either reducing or reinforcing socioeconomic inequalities. Panelists will discuss the ways transportation access impacts economic mobility and will explore strategies to support people getting where they need to go.*

### PANELISTS

Joe Grengs, U-M Taubman School of Architecture and Urban Planning  
Kristin Blagg, Urban Institute  
Ryan Buck, Washtenaw Area Transportation Study  
Teresa Gillotti, Washtenaw County Office of Community and Economic Development  
Moderator: Josh Rivera, Poverty Solutions

### PANEL OVERVIEW

Federal funding for transportation initiatives has decreased over time, causing local governments to focus on maintaining infrastructure rather than transforming their transportation system. The effects of funding constraints disproportionately impact black and low-income individuals and communities. A recent Urban Institute study showed that black K-12 students were traveling farther than their non-black counterparts to attend school in choice-rich districts. Likewise, data from Washtenaw County show that majority-minority and low-income communities experienced a loss in jobs over the last 20 years, but lack of transit connections between eastern and western parts of the county prevent these residents from commuting to opportunity-rich areas.

#### *Discussion*

Distinguishing between active transportation, and public and private transportation emerged as an important question for considering innovative policies.

#### *Takeaways*

Traditionally, engineers and planners have been thinking about transportation innovation from a *mobility* standpoint, or how to create faster moving vehicles. Approaching the question of transportation from an *access* perspective, however, asks how to get people to their desired destination. Measurement tools of transportation *accessibility* can help the transportation field transition to this more equitable mindset.

#### *Learn more:*

- [The Road to School: How Far Students Travel to School in the Choice-Rich Cities of Denver, Detroit, New Orleans, New York City, and Washington, DC](#): Study conducted by The Urban Institute
- [Washtenaw Opportunity Index](#): Created by Washtenaw County Office of Community and Economic Development

## The Future of Transportation Engineering Systems to Enhance Equity

*Engineering transportation systems that promote economic mobility is a critical piece in the transportation equity conversation. Proper design helps to ensure that transportation innovations distribute their benefits across all income levels. Panelists will discuss promising engineering solutions, from gathering public input to bringing resources to where low-income individuals live to solving the first-mile last-mile challenge.*

### PANELISTS

Tierra Bills, U-M College of engineering and Michigan Society of Fellows

Pascal Van Hentenryck, Michigan Engineering

Geoffrey Thün, U-M Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning, Urban Collaboratory

Moderator: Curt Wolf, Urban Collaboratory

### PANEL OVERVIEW

Researched on this panel discussed ways to better address low-income individuals' needs, which can be left out of the conversation due to the rapidly changing technological landscape. Dr. Bills focuses on using data to model how travelers use transit, and how to prioritize improvements so that they meet everyone's needs. Her household travel survey provides insight into these needs, in an effort to understand the various dimensions of travel. Using the demand model, the survey assesses improvements that can result in the most desirable outcomes, such as improving accessibility and advancing equity.

Van Hentenryck discussed his program Reinventing Urban Transportation and Mobility (RITMO). RITMO seeks to solve the first-mile last-mile problem so that everyone can access healthcare, jobs, and healthy food by making on-demand transportation ubiquitous, and no more expensive than a bus ticket. He is currently piloting this in Ypsilanti and Detroit.

Geoffrey Thün seeks to understand mobility systems and creating multiple uses of a particular space to solve problems of inaccessibility. He uses an interdisciplinary approach, involving more voices in the planning system to better serve all. He seeks to better engage with public participation and provide equitable access to data.

#### *Discussion & Takeaways:*

Panelists discussed the issues that remain in equity: access to technology, lack of government investment in equity, over-reliance on single-occupancy vehicles, transportation for all, and delivery of social services. Lack of government investment is a part of reason the advancements are so unequally distributed - change can be slow. There is also a need to incorporate more voices into work being done to better assess needs.

#### *Learn more:*

- [Reinventing Urban Transportation and Mobility \(RITMO\)](#)
- [Urban Collaboratory](#)

## Transportation Security: Measurement Tools to Understand Needs

*Understanding the barriers to reliable transportation is a critical first step in supporting low-income commuters. Reliable measurement tools that give voice to those most in need have the potential to inform real-world strategies and practices, particularly when utilized by key stakeholders who serve to benefit from transportation equity. Panelists will offer research methods and results for better defining transportation challenges; address issues such as economic inequality, racism, and suburban sprawl; and propose strategies for using research to inform transportation design.*

### PANELISTS

Alexandra K. Murphy, Assistant Professor in Sociology, Faculty Associate of the Population Studies Center, U-M LSA; Institute for Social Research  
Rachel Tronstein, Board Chair, New Detroit; President, Gardner-White Furniture  
Shirley Stancato, President and CEO, New Detroit  
Moderator: Rob Pfaff, Co-Organizer, Detroit School Series

### PANEL OVERVIEW

Inspired by the success of the USDA food security index and how it placed food insecurity and hunger on the map, Alex Murphy's transportation security index (TSI) asks respondents basic questions about their interactions like wait times and feelings like embarrassment regarding transportation use in the last 30 days. At-risk populations of transportation-insecure have not been researched explicitly by social scientists because this kind of national data does not currently exist.

Shirley Stancato and Rachel Tronstein represent the coalition of 60 civic and business leaders comprising New Detroit, a 50-year-old racial justice organization advocating for income, education, health, and safety. Stancato criticized Southeast Michigan's regional transit opt-out policy that allows wealthy cities to actively remove themselves from a bus system and leave a patchwork of bus routes that cannot adequately serve low-income populations commuting into the suburbs for work. She remarked that even though Macomb and Oakland counties did not pass the 2016 regional transit ballot initiative, all four counties with Wayne and Washtenaw have people who would benefit from a connected system. As an employer hiring for 10 Gardner-White Furniture stores and one 24-hour distribution center, Tronstein highlighted an alarming statistic: 30,000 disconnected metro Detroit youth ages 18 to 24 who are out of school and not actively working. She spoke of being in a powerful position to give those emerging adults credentials and income through sales jobs in her stores, but she cannot get them to work without stable commutes via current transportation options.

#### *Discussion*

Looking back on the history of Detroit, a meeting of federal and local leaders created a promise of \$600 million toward public transit, but the money was never used because the region never created a comprehensive transportation plan to activate the grant offer.

Alex Murphy hopes to have her transportation security index online soon, with the data to be accessible to the public. As more spatial data is collected, researchers can use geographic maps to see where clusters of transportation insecurity exist and track outcomes as communities experiment with transit intervention.

Transportation inequity is inherently linked to a lack of affordable housing near jobs and public services, but a panelist suggested this warranted private sector institutional change away from real estate steering, rather than a transit-based policy intervention.

The Ride, the Ann Arbor Area Transportation Authority, legally cannot provide school bus routes, though many students ride the bus on their way to class. It and other Michigan transit agencies are funded by property taxes, a revenue source that solidifies income inequality. When the Ann Arbor Social Security office and Center for Independent Living relocated away from existing bus lines, they expected the bus system to adjust rather than trying to move to another bus-friendly location.

### *Takeaways*

The idea of a “20-minute neighborhood” — a safe, walkable or bikeable residential area with access to grocery stores, parks, and schools within 20 minutes — might not be the best model in Southeast Michigan. The reality is that Detroit currently lacks sufficient residential density to sustain this idea.

Transportation demand is very easy to track with modern data, but need is much harder to determine even though it is more crucial for allocating services fairly. In addition to scholars, transit planners and consultants continue to rely on less specific Census data and outdated papers to inform their work.

Given that suburban job opportunities are clustered near each other in industrial office parks or distribution center hubs, businesses could coordinate their shift schedules and join together to provide employee shuttles to and from Detroit. By combining efforts, they could operate at the scale of Google buses in Silicon Valley.

Despite young adults increasing tendency to not purchase personal cars, this population is not turning out to vote in local elections to elect officials that make decisions about zoning and public transportation. For instance, by eliminating parking, drivers would be disincentivized to drive everywhere in personal vehicles.

### *Learn more:*

- Viral newspaper stories like those of [Ashley Williams](#) in 2018 and [James Robertson](#) in 2014 have raised awareness of challenged riders from Detroit.
- The [National Equity Atlas](#) is produced by PolicyLink and the USC Program for Environmental and Regional Equity. It includes indicators on disconnected youth and emerging adults, populations that stand to benefit from increased job access through connected transportation systems.
- [Transit Access and Zero-Vehicle Households](#) from the Brookings Institution’s Metropolitan Infrastructure Initiative in 2011 provided a transit coverage index. One key finding was the excessive sprawl and subsequent low transit access in Atlanta.
- [RITMO](#) is an experimental, on-demand multimodal transit system in Ann Arbor that seeks to solve the first-mile, last-mile problem of complete commute and journeys.

## Accessibility Across County Lines Regional Approaches to Transportation Barriers

*Regional transportation gives people access to jobs, healthcare, schools, and other critical services that aren't distributed equally across regional lines. However, building regional transportation systems requires broader coordination and cooperation across municipal lines. Major questions include: Who pays? Who decides that it should happen? How is it implemented? This panel highlights regional transit systems across rural, urban, and suburban geographies in Michigan and seeks to answer these questions.*

### PANELISTS

Edgar H. Benning, Flint Mass Transportation Authority  
Bill Kennis, Benzie Transportation Authority  
Richard Murphy, Michigan Municipal League (former Board Member of the RTA)  
Moderator: Joel Batterman, Motor City Freedom Riders

### PANEL OVERVIEW

The panelists discussed the mobility challenges facing urban, suburban, and rural communities. Despite the different contexts that they work in, they all touched on several common themes in their opening remarks, including what drives decisions about the routes and services transportation agencies offer, the challenges of providing transportation options across city and county lines, and the funding sources they draw upon to support such services.

#### *Discussion*

Much of the discussion concerned the challenges of moving towards a regional approach to transportation in a state that has been slow to embrace public transportation. Panelists and audience members discussed the importance of adopting a systems-planning approach where the focus is on sidewalks, bikeshares, housing, and employment centers, instead of almost exclusively on roads, potholes, and cars.

#### *Takeaways*

Advocates of regional transportation systems need to make public transportation both relevant and feasible. Even though Detroit did not make Amazon's short list for HQ2, the RFP elevated the conversation about the need to strengthen the region's transit network. Transit advocates should go after small wins to convince the broader public to make larger investments in regional transit.

#### *Learn more:*

- The Prosperity Region 9 [2016 report](#) was referenced during the session.
- [RefleX/FAST](#): a high frequency, limited-stop service on Gratiot, Woodward, and Michigan.

## Advocacy Lightning Panel

*Viewing transportation as an issue of equity means that groups across the state are advocating for change at multiple levels. This “lightning panel” will highlight the key issues and strategies that groups are addressing and offer suggestions for how to get engaged.*

### PANELISTS

Renard Monczunski, Transit Justice Organizer, Detroit People’s Platform

Alexis Blizman, Legislative and Policy Director, Ecology Center

Joel Batterman, Ph.D. Candidate, Urban and Regional Planning; Motor City Freedom Riders

Madison McKenzie, B1G Voting Challenge Graduate Assistant at the Ginsberg Center

Moderator: Julia Weinert, Managing Director, Poverty Solutions

### PANEL OVERVIEW

Viewing transit is a fundamental right rather than collective complaining about bad buses, social justice activists see the opportunity to organize bus riders for policy reform. Transit justice also intersects with the issue area of energy poverty and adverse environmental impacts on low-income communities. During the time of the panel, the Regional Transit Authority of Southeast Michigan — Wayne, Washtenaw, Macomb, and Oakland county representatives — convened for its board meeting.

#### *Discussion*

Low-income bus riders are a population unable to meet together as a large group after hours because of limited transit lines and work schedules. Advocates use on-the-bus organizing through 1:1 conversations or canvassing at transfer centers and hubs to build commitment and empower riders with flyers and t-shirts. They also travel directly to soup kitchens to reach those bus-dependent, car-less individuals and help them organize for greater political clout. Despite recent excitement about technological innovation and automated vehicles, the need for fixed route transit services, most commonly via buses, will always persist.

The nearly one-year-old QLine streetcar was criticized by panelists as a privately owned service that redirected the Detroit Department of Transportation’s Woodward #53 Line. It was built and financed with some public funds without a community benefit agreement, a contract between private developers and local residents to provide some amenities in the neighborhoods.

#### *Takeaways*

In their final statements, panelists called on attendees to organize, to vote to renew milages investing in transportation systems and infrastructure, and to join advocacy organizations like Detroit People’s Platform and Motor City Freedom Riders. Everyone emphasized calling one’s elected officials, following up, tracking their votes, and voting with a buddy.

#### *Learn more:*

- [Detroit People’s Platform](#)
- [Regional Transit Authority Connect Southeast Michigan Framework presented on March 15, 2018](#)
- [Motor City Freedom Riders](#)
- [Ecology Center](#)
- [B1G Ten Voting Challenge](#)