visualize 2045

A long-range transportation plan for the National Capital Region

Voices of the Region 2021
Focus Group Report

November 2021

VOICES OF THE REGION FOCUS GROUP REPORT 2021

ABOUT VISUALIZE 2045 & THE TPB
Visualize 2045 is the federally required long-range transportation plan for the National Capital Region. It identifies and analyzes all regionally significant transportation investments planned through 2045 to help decision makers and the public "visualize" the region's future.

Visualize 2045 is developed by the National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board (TPB), the federally designated metropolitan planning organization (MPO) for metropolitan Washington. It is responsible for developing and carrying out a continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive transportation planning process in the metropolitan area. Members of the TPB include representatives of the transportation agencies of the states of Maryland and Virginia and the District of Columbia, 24 local governments, the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, the Maryland and Virginia General Assemblies, and nonvoting members from the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority and federal agencies. The TPB is staffed by the Department of Transportation Planning at the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG).

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the winter of 2021, the Transportation Planning Board conducted 11 virtual focus groups with 112 residents from around the Washington region. Each session was created with a specific demographic or geographic focus to better understand the perspectives of different population groups of the region. The groups discussed the participants' lived experiences, challenges, and opportunities associated with transportation equity, safety, and climate change. Through the lens of these three topics, insights were provided across a range of TPB policy priorities, such as addressing congestion, improving transportation reliability, and access.

These "Voices of the Region" focus groups were designed to be part of a wider package of public engagement activities that supported the update of Visualize 2045, the TPB's long-range transportation plan. Other activities included the Voices of the Region Public Opinion Survey (Fall-Winter of 2020-2021) and a poster campaign using QR codes called "Aspirations to Implementation" (Summer 2021).

Background

The purpose of the focus groups was to gather qualitative and in-depth data that contextualizes and informs how different population groups understand and experience transportation equity, safety, and climate change. The project prioritized recruiting and selecting participants from historically underrepresented population groups.

The groups included:
- People with low-income
- Young adults (18 -25 years old)
- Older adults (60+ years old)
- People of color
- People with long-term disabilities
- People from the outer suburbs
- People from the inner suburbs
- People from the core of the region
- People of color (2nd session)
- People with high school degree, GED, or no degree
- Spanish-speaking people

The focus groups were designed and implemented using qualitative research methodology. TPB staff used purposive sampling to recruit and select participants. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, staff conducted the sessions via Zoom.

Summary of Focus Group Input

It is important to note that many opinions expressed in these sessions were specific to individual groups. A key purpose of this project was to highlight those distinct needs and voices, which are quoted and described in the individual session descriptions included in the full study report.

However, the study did identify common themes across multiple sessions. These recurring patterns provide opportunities for multi-jurisdictional regional planning as part of Visualize 2045, as well as future TPB planning activities.

Common themes are summarized below:

EQUITY

- *Transportation costs are a burden.* On the topic of equity, most conversations centered on questions of affordability. The cost of riding the train and bus was highlighted, particularly among transit-dependent participants. "You have to pick and choose," said one participant. "Do you go to work?... Do you put food on the table?" Other concerns about affordability focused on the high cost of tolls and the cost of housing close to transit.

- *Inadequate services for disadvantaged communities.* Participants noted that transit services do not seem to be planned with the concerns of people with real economic needs in mind. For example, transit-dependent individuals spoke about the infrequency of bus services, which is particularly problematic for service workers working night hours. Participants with disabilities said that that services are not reliable.

- *Geographic inequities in transportation options.* Focus group participants also spoke about geographic inequities in the supply of transportation services in different parts of the region. In suburban areas, people spoke about the lack of transit services, which makes them more dependent on driving.

- *Feeling left out.* In various ways, many participants said they felt denied access to opportunities because of inequities in transportation services. Some said they felt like "second-class citizens" when comparing their transportation options with more advantaged communities.

SAFETY

- *Ped/bike infrastructure is missing.* Participants in numerous sessions said that walking and biking often feel like life-threatening activities. They noted the absence of sidewalks, crosswalks, and bike lanes. "No one wants to die on their way to work or their way home, said a suburban participant. "... Protected bike lanes— not just like plastic barriers, but truly, truly protected bike lanes— that would be a huge thing."

- *After-hours fears.* Concerns about safety often focused on traveling in the evenings and at night. Many of these participants work in the service industry and do not have 9-to-5 schedules. Participants expressed fears about walking on dark streets with the presence of fast-moving cars and fears about crime. Others expressed concerns about personal safety while using transit. Suggestions for improvement included better lighting and more security cameras.

- *Aggressive driving.* Many participants, particularly from suburban locations, spoke about feeling unsafe when they drive, particularly when encountering aggressive drivers, when driving on poorly lit roads, or driving in congestion.

CLIMATE CHANGE

- *Environmentally friendly options are often not feasible.* Many expressed an understanding that their individual travel choices have an impact on greenhouse gas emissions, but they also noted that environmentally friendly options are limited or not available. For example, some noted they would like to live in a transit-oriented community, but such places are not affordable. Many participants offered suggestions for improving the supply of options, including making transit more frequent and convenient, making housing close to transit more affordable, and expanding electric vehicle infrastructure.

- *Climate change is not an immediate personal priority.* In many cases, participants were blunt in saying that climate change was simply not a priority in their already challenging lives. While most participants seemed to accept the reality of climate change, they emphasized that they had more immediate concerns. When discussing large-scale global threats, the COVID-19 pandemic was a bigger worry to many and some said the health emergency caused them to drive more, which they admitted was not good for the environment. One participant from a core jurisdiction said that when a person is in a "gas-guzzling car of whatever kind, you're in your own little enclosed bubble and you're safer."

Key Takeaways

TPB staff identified the following key takeaways from the focus group input. These suggestions represent potential practical actions for enhancing equity and safety, and mitigating climate change.

EQUITY

Transportation agencies can respond to some of the concerns reported on equity by:
- Expanding service windows or provide alternate types of services to accommodate late-shift workers and others that don't work 9-5 hours.
- Improving reliability, frequency, and service areas for buses.
- Minimizing transportation costs to lower-income individuals, including tolls and transit costs, especially distance-based Metro fares.

SAFETY

Transportation agencies can respond to some of the concerns reported on safety by:
- Recognizing that details matter, such as placement of transit stops and providing sufficient lighting around transit stops and stations
- Investing in transportation infrastructure that separates modal uses that travel at different speeds, such as protected bicycle lanes.
- Investing in infrastructure design, policy, and enforcement that limits aggressive behavior on roadways

CLIMATE CHANGE

Transportation agencies can respond to some of the concerns of reported on climate change by:
- Recognizing that strategies and solutions to mitigate climate change are in competition with the immediate challenges of everyday lives, therefore solutions must be realistic and made feasible to be implemented broadly.
- Improving the supply of low-carbon transportation options, including making transit more frequent, reliable and convenient, making housing close to transit more affordable, and expanding electric vehicle infrastructure and access to electric vehicles.

OVERVIEW

In the winter of 2021, the Transportation Planning Board conducted 11 virtual focus groups with 112 residents from around the Washington region. Each session was created with a specific demographic or geographic focus to better understand the perspectives of different population groups of the region. The groups discussed the participants' lived experiences, challenges, and opportunities associated with transportation equity, safety, and climate change. Through the lens of these three topics, insights were provided across a range of TPB policy priorities, such as addressing congestion, improving transportation reliability, and access.

These "Voices of the Region" focus groups were designed to be part of a wider package of public engagement activities that supported the update of Visualize 2045, the TPB's long-range transportation plan. Other activities included the Voices of the Region Public Opinion Survey (Fall of 2020) and an open outreach campaign using QR codes called "Aspirations to Implementation" (Summer 2021).

The purpose of the focus groups was to gather qualitative and in-depth data that contextualizes and informs how different population groups understand and experience transportation equity, safety, and climate change. The project prioritized recruiting and selecting participants from historically underrepresented population groups.

This report documents how the focus groups were designed and implemented. It also provides a summary of the findings for each session.

PURPOSE

The 2021 focus groups were designed and implemented to meet the five following objectives:

1. Understand the issues of transportation equity, safety, and climate change through the perspectives of different population groups.

2. Empower residents of the region to share stories about their transportation experience.

3. Gather firsthand narratives to directly incorporate the voices of the region directly into the public opinion research process.

4. Provide qualitative context to the issues of transportation equity, climate change and safety so that these issues can be considered in an equitable way.

5. Supplement the quantitative data from the Voices of the Region survey.

METHODOLOGY

The Voices of the Region focus groups were designed and implemented using qualitative research methodology. TPB staff used purposive sampling to recruit and select 112 participants to participate in virtual focus groups conducted via Zoom. This section reviews the research design and methodology that were used to design and conduct these focus groups.

Qualitative Research and Focus Groups

Qualitative research is conducted to understand people's beliefs, experiences, behavior, and perceptions about complex social issues. Qualitative research analyzes nonnumerical data that comes from methods such as interviews, participant observations, or focus groups. The data gathered provides in-depth narratives, explanations, and observations that allows researchers to understand the meaning and explanations behind different social issues through the perspectives of different groups of people.

Conducting focus groups is one of the primary methods used in qualitative research. Focus groups consist of having loosely- structured discussions with groups of roughly 8 to 12 participants. A trained moderator uses a discussion guide to focus the group's attention on a particular topic and facilitates an open-ended, free-flowing discussion about a specific topic.

There are three primary benefits to conducting focus groups:

1. Ability to have a group discussion about issues in similar ways
2. Ability to create homogenous groups in which people can feel comfortable sharing their input and experience
3. Ability to supplement and contextualize quantitative data gathered from other research methods, in order to tell a more equitable story about a social issue

These benefits were important for the engagement goals that guided TPB staff in the process of updating Visualize 2045:

- Most residents have at least some experiences dealing with transportation equity, safety, and its relationship to climate change. However, in some cases they do not interpret these experiences explicitly through these angles. By conducting focus groups, TPB staff created awareness of these transportation issues by providing a platform in which people could process their transportation experience in the context of these topics. Simultaneously, having these group discussions allowed people to learn more about these issues through the stories of other people with similar backgrounds.

- The homogenous nature of focus groups allowed TPB staff to provide a safe and comfortable platform for people to share their stories with people who look and speak like them and come from similar demographic backgrounds. This was particularly important when requesting input from historically underrepresented groups that have often been skeptical of engagement activities through long survey, public meetings, and scientific studies. By being

part of a homogenous group, people could feel more at ease to participate and to provide genuine input, even if such input speaks negatively about other demographic groups, institutions, or organizations.

- While quantitative data can provide statistical findings that can be generalized to broader population groups, qualitative findings tell the end of the story. For example, in the Voices of the Region Survey, 84 percent of residents agreed that they wanted elected officials to consider climate change in the planning of transportation. While this data point gives significant support for the prioritization of climate change in transportation planning, it does not provide context as to *how* residents want to see this happen and it does not provide information about competing interests within this 84 percent of people. More importantly, it does not provide information about the 16 percent of the people who do not want climate change to be considered climate change in transportation planning and their rationale for choosing this opinion. Qualitative data can provide input to help address the *why* and *how* of the regional transportation story to foster more equitable and holistic planning.

Designing the Sessions

Selecting the groups of interest

As previously mentioned, TPB staff prioritized the recruitment and selection of participants from historically underrepresented population groups because their voices often can be left out of discussions about transportation equity, safety, and climate change. The groups included:

- People with low-income[1]
- Young adults (18 -25 years old)
- Older adults (60+ years old)
- People of color
- People with long-term disabilities
- Spanish-speaking people

The TPB also understood that the issues of transportation equity, safety, and climate change can be experienced differently based on the geographic location of individuals. Therefore, participants for three sessions were selected according to where they live, based upon subregional categories typically used by the TPB:

- People from the outer suburbs
- People from the inner suburbs
- People from the core of the region

In addition, TPB staff used the focus groups to compensate for underrepresentation in the Voices of

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[1] A person is considered low-income if their household income is less than one-and-a-half times the federal government's official poverty threshold which varies by household size.

the Region public opinion survey that the TPB conducted at the end of 2020. Two focus groups were added because of gaps in survey participation:

- People of color (2nd session)
- People with high school degree, GED, or no degree

Participant Recruitment and Selection

Purposive sampling was used to recruit and select participants. Purposive sampling consists of recruiting participants with specific demographic characteristics that align with the group of interest for a specific study. Unlike quantitative research that uses random sampling, purposive sampling does not select participants from a population in a random way. As a result, findings from focus group studies that use purposive sampling should not be characterized as statistically representative of a whole population.

Purposive sampling was the most appropriate method to approach participant selection because the TPB staff specifically sought input from underrepresented communities. Consequently, participant recruitment and selection needed to identify individuals with specific demographic characteristics.

Social Media Recruitment

TPB staff partnered with ICF consultants to conduct a two-week recruitment period on Facebook, Instagram, and Craigslist. Based on best practices in social media marketing, the ICF digital strategy team established a marketing plan to carefully target each demographic group of interest while maintaining regional representation in the recruitment process. The social media campaign consisted of sharing advertisements on these social media platforms concurrently between December 7 and December 21, 2020.

The social media ads were designed to catch the eyes of users scrolling through their news feed or browsing ads on Craigslist. The ads were created based on customer psychographics and audience segments to encourage engagement. All the ads had an embedded link that directed potential participants to a screening form designed using Microsoft (MS) forms.

For Facebook and Instagram, TPB staff provided zip codes for the TPB planning area, which were used by ICF to target each demographic group of interest. ICF used the zip codes to directly manage the social marketing dashboard to assess how different groups were engaging with the ads. Staff continually reviewed the click rates and engagement levels of the social media ads. If a target population was not engaging, staff would adjust the ad variables.

At the end of the screening process, TPB staff was able to recruit approximately 703 eligible participants. TPB staff used this pool of participants to select final participants and waiting-list participants.

Participant Screening and Selection

At the screening stage, potential respondents provided additional information about the focus groups, including information about the TPB, incentive for participating, and the approximate date(s)

when they would need to be available (January 2021). The screener disclosed upfront that background information respondents provide in the form would only be shared with the research team for analysis purposes if they were selected to participate in a specific session.

Potential participants were be asked questions about their background and other items to determine their eligibility, including:

1. Home ZIP Code
2. City
3. Age
4. Gender
5. Education
6. Race/ethnicity
7. Disability
8. Transportation experiences
9. Available days and times
10. Willingness to be on the waitlist
11. Contact information

The MS Form included built-in logic to align respondents to potential sessions they were eligible for and available to attend, but ICF staff reviewed the pool of participants to confirm their eligibility and suitability for the group in question. If a respondent was eligible and available for multiple groups, staff looked at other factors, such as how quickly a group was filling up or the demographic characteristics of existing participants. These factors were used to prioritize selection for sessions that were behind with recruitment goals. If there was an overwhelming number of eligible and available candidates for a specific group, staff randomized the list of candidates and selected participants using a random method to avoid any selection bias.

Total Participation

In total, 112 participants participated in the focus groups. This final number takes into account those participants who were able to fit the sessions into their schedules and ultimately participated.

Key demographic and geographic characteristics for the 112 participants are noted below:
- 26 participants were between 18-24 years old; 29 participants were 25-34 years old; 20 were 35-44 years old; 5 were 45-54 years old; 8 participants were 55-64 years old; and 24 were 65+ years old.
- 43 participants identified as Black or African American; 39 identified as White; 15 identified as Latino/a/x/Spanish origin; 11 identified as Asian; 1 as Middle Eastern; 1 as multi-racial; and 3 preferred to not report their race.
- 57 came from the core, 39 from the inner suburbs, and 15 from the outer suburbs.

Figure 1: Participants divided by subregion
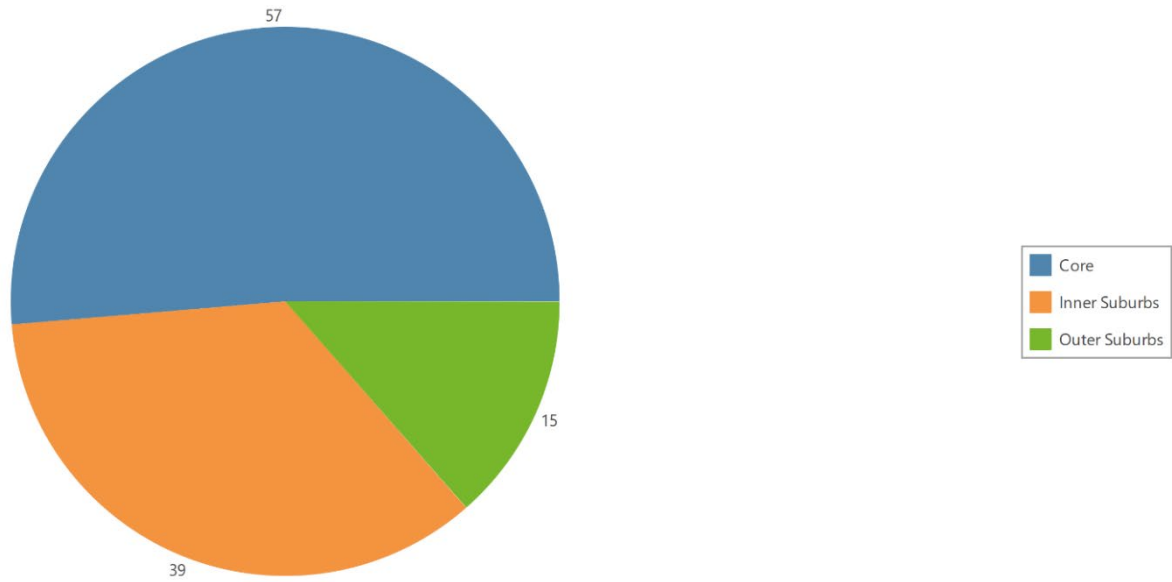
Figure 2: Participants divided by age
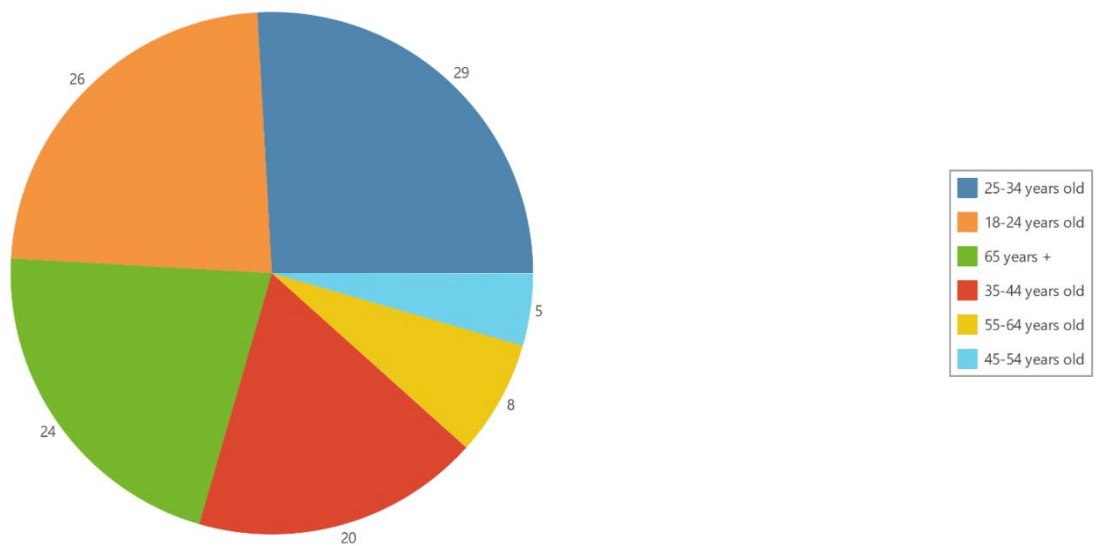
Figure 3: Participants divided by Race

Session Format

The focus group sessions each lasted 90 minutes and because of the COVID-19 pandemic, they all were conducted virtually via Zoom. Each session was led by a facilitator from COG/TPB staff who was trained in conducting qualitative research through focus groups. A co-facilitator from COG staff took notes, kept time, and acted as general host for each session.

The facilitator opened each session by explaining that feedback from participants would be used to inform the update of Visualize 2045, the region's long-range transportation plan. Part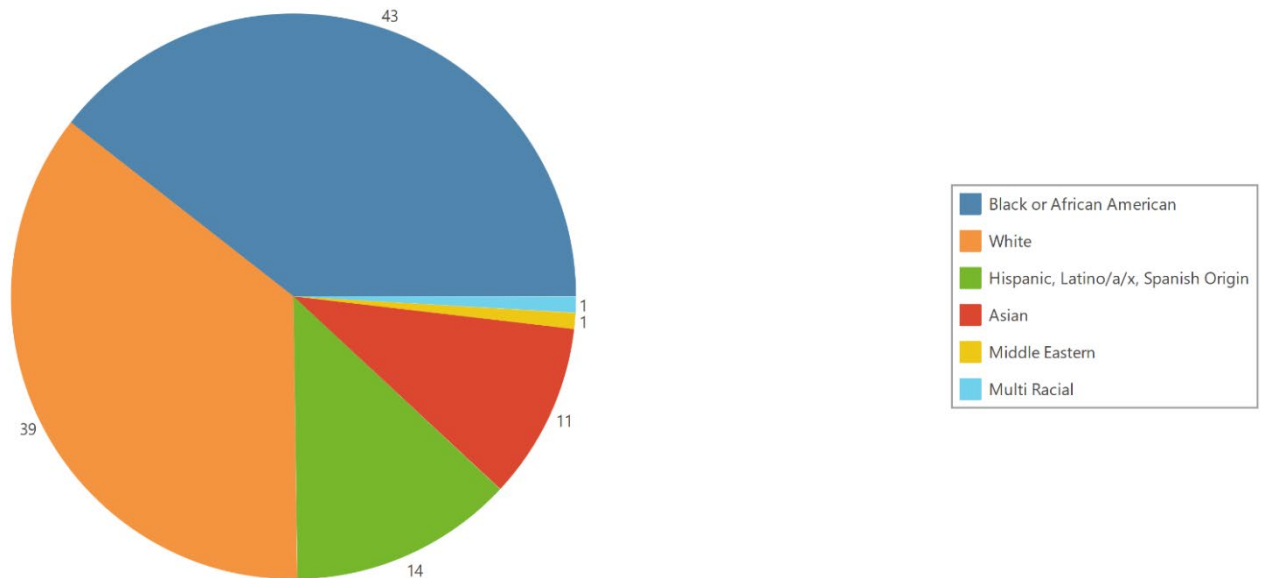icipants were encouraged to openly share their opinions and to be respectful of each other. The facilitator also informed the group that the sessions were being recorded and explained that everything said would be kept confidential. The facilitator then asked participants to verbally confirm their agreement to these conditions.

The time on the agenda was divided roughly equally among three topics that will be addressed in the TPB's long-range plan update: equity, safety, and climate change. The facilitators were careful not to define these terms, but rather to let participants describe in their own words what these concepts mean to them.

Two primary questions were used for each of the three topics:

Equity Questions:
- Based on your experience and/or observations, what are some equity issues that you believe should be getting addressed in transportation?
- Tell me about things that transportation officials should consider in order to ensure equity in transportation?

Safety Questions:
- Imagine that you are going to your job, school, to the store. Can you describe what makes you feel safe when using your preferred method of transportation?
- What can transportation officials do to make you feel safe while using your preferred method of transportation?

Climate Change Questions:
- Imagine you have a magic wand that lets you do/have anything you want to reduce your transportation impact on climate change. Can you tell you about any transportation choices that you would make to reduce your impact on climate change?
- We talked about changes that you would make with your wand. Can you tell me how transportation officials can help make these choices a reality?

Each participant who completed a session was financially compensated $90 as a gratuity for their time. Participants who were on the waiting list, but did not needed for a session, were compensated $15 for the time they spent waiting.

ANALYSIS

Transcripts and Recordings

All participants consented to being in a virtual session that would be recorded for the purpose of transcribing the discussion for analytical purposes. At the end of all of the sessions, TPB staff gathered 16 hours of recordings that were transcribed into approximately 600 pages. The transcripts provided the raw data that was analyzed through qualitative data analysis software (QDA).

MAXQDA

TPB staff used qualitative data analysis software called MAXQDA to break down the raw data, detect primary themes, and to compare and contrast findings between different focus group sessions. MAXQDA stores and analyzes data all in one platform, which permits a research team to identify emerging codes, code the data, and to conduct systematic comparison of the codes.

Coding

In order to understand the raw data, the data was coded to identify primary themes and topics. Coding is the process of applying different themes or key words to smaller segments of the raw data in order to analyze the data by counting the most cited codes, conducting systemic comparisons of the codes, and understanding the context in which the data are being analyzed.

Analysis Process

The analysis of the raw data was conducted in three different stages which include 1) breaking down the data into general codes; 2) begin assigning more analytical codes; 3) compare and contrast codes to determine the main findings of each session. The following graphic provides more details about the analysis process.

Divide Raw Data into General Codes

The researcher organizes raw data to allow frequent topics and themes to emerge. To accomplish this, all transcripts are read and general topic codes are assigned to different segments. Examples of general codes include "Transit," "Comfort," "Electric Vehicles."

Assign Analytical Codes

The second stage is used to begin analyzing the general codes. The transcripts are read with the purpose of explaining the story behind the general codes. Sub-codes or additional codes are added. Examples include "Electric Vehicles" with the subcodes "Affordability" and "Social Status."

Main Findings per Session and in General

The third stage is to compare and constrast the codes that have codes that been formalized and to determine the main codes coming from each session and as a whole.

SUMMARY OF FOCUS GROUP INPUT

The purpose of the focus groups was to gather qualitative and in-depth data that contextualizes and informs how different population groups understand and experience three separate, but related, transportation topics: equity, safety, and climate change. Many concerns expressed in these sessions were specific to individual groups, and an important purpose of these discussions was to highlight those distinct needs and voices, and not focus exclusively on commonalities.

But nonetheless, it can be useful to identify common themes that emerged across multiple sessions, particularly as a way to understand recurring patterns that might be addressed through multi-jurisdictional regional planning.

Equity

Focus group facilitators purposely did not define "equity" during the opening conversations, but rather let participants share their understanding and experiences. Some common themes emerged.

- *Transportation costs are a burden.* On the topic of equity, most conversations centered on questions of affordability. The cost of riding the train and bus was highlighted, particularly among transit-dependent participants. "You have to pick and choose," said one participant. "Do you go to work?... Do you put food on the table?" Other concerns about affordability focused on the high cost of tolls and the cost of housing close to transit.

- *Inadequate services for disadvantaged communities.* Participants noted that transit services do not seem to be planned with the concerns of people with real economic needs in mind. For example, transit-dependent individuals spoke about the infrequency of bus services, which is particularly problematic for service workers working night hours. Participants with disabilities said that that services are not reliable.

- *Geographic inequities in transportation options.* Focus group participants also spoke about geographic inequities in the supply of transportation services in different parts of the region. In suburban areas, people spoke about the lack of transit services, which makes them more dependent on driving.

- *Feeling left out.* In various ways, many participants said they felt denied access to opportunities because of inequities in transportation services. Some said they felt like "second-class citizens" when comparing their transportation options with more advantaged communities.

Safety

Participants in the focus groups addressed the topic of safety from a number of angles, including roadway safety, unsafe ped/bike conditions, and fears about crime.

- *Ped/bike infrastructure is missing.* Participants in numerous sessions said that walking and biking often feel like life-threatening activities. They noted the absence of sidewalks,

crosswalks, and bike lanes. "No one wants to die on their way to work or their way home, said a suburban participant. "... Protected bike lanes— not just like plastic barriers, but truly, truly protected bike lanes— that would be a huge thing."

- *After-hours fears.* Concerns about safety often focused on traveling in the evenings and at night. Many of these participants work in the service industry and do not have 9-to-5 schedules. Participants expressed fears about walking on dark streets with the presence of fast-moving cars and fears about crime. Others expressed concerns about personal safety while using transit. Suggestions for improvement included better lighting and more security cameras.

- *Aggressive driving.* Many participants, particularly from suburban locations, spoke about feeling unsafe when they drive, particularly when encountering aggressive drivers, when driving on poorly lit roads, or driving in congestion.

Climate Change

The third topic of the focus groups, climate change, was harder for participants to discuss within the context of their personal experiences. In many cases, participants used this topic to reinforce previously expressed concerns about safety and equity.

- *Environmentally friendly options are often not feasible.* Many expressed an understanding that their individual travel choices have an impact on greenhouse gas emissions, but they also noted that environmentally friendly options are limited or not available. For example, some noted they would like to live in a transit-oriented community, but such places are not affordable. Many participants offered suggestions for improving the supply of options, including making transit more frequent and convenient, making housing close to transit more affordable, and expanding electric vehicle infrastructure.

- *Climate change is not an immediate personal priority.* In many cases, participants were blunt in saying that climate change was simply not a priority in their already challenging lives. While most participants seemed to accept the reality of climate change, they emphasized that they had more immediate concerns. When discussing large-scale global threats, the COVID-19 pandemic was a bigger worry to many and some said the health emergency caused them to drive more, which they admitted was not good for the environment. One participant from a core jurisdiction said that when a person is in a "gas-guzzling car of whatever kind, you're in your own little enclosed bubble and you're safer."

FINDINGS BY SESSION

How to Navigate this Section

The breakdown of findings below should be read as brief stories of transportation equity, safety, and climate change. The report provides demographic data to contextualize these stories as the reader goes through them. As narratives, these breakdowns will simply share how people perceive and experience fundamental challenges in our transportation system. The examples or quotes were generally picked to represent predominant attitude or opinion in a session. This report uses pseudonyms for the quotes and examples.

These narratives are not meant to provide concrete solutions to each of these topics. Rather, they can serve as a way for transportation officials to hear the voices of different people as they talk about transportation issues in the context of their personal lives. Having this context can help transportation decision makers better understand how they might apply considerations of equity, climate change, and safety into their work.

Session 1: People with Low Income

Pseudonym	Gender	Race	Age	Location
Demi	Female	Black or African American	45-54	Alexandria, VA
Dennis	Male	Black or African American	65+	Alexandria, VA
Jerry	Male	White	65+	Arlington, VA
Melani	Female	Hispanic/Latino/a/x	18-24	Hyattsville, MD
Amara	Female	Black or African American	25-34	Laurel, MD
Kimberly	Female	White	18-24	Leesburg, VA
Adan	Male	White & Hispanic/Latino/a/x	18-24	North Bethesda, MD
Romain	Male	Black or African American & White	18-24	Rockville, MD
Scott	Male	White	35-44	Silver Spring, MD
Gladys	Female	Black or African American	65+	Landover, MD
Mary	Female	White	18-24	District of Columbia

Equity

Affordability: Transportation costs affect job accessibility

The primary concern for this session was whether participants would be able to afford reliable transportation choices to get to work. Participants said the cost of transportation affects the type of jobs that they are able to take. For example, Gladys explained that when contemplating job offers, she has to calculate if her net income will be higher than her transportation costs to commute to work. In most cases, the transportation costs surpassing her expected income prevents her from getting the jobs that she wants to get. Gladys also explained that most minimum wage jobs do not provide transit subsidies that help employees subsidize their transportation costs. Similarly, two college students in this session said that because of the distance and cost of commuting, they feel constrained in the jobs they can pursue.

> "For folks that don't have subsidy it's so expensive for you to get to work and it's so unfair if you're not making—you're making below the minimum wage. So, it's like what do you do? You have to pick and choose—do you go to work, do you call out, do you put food on the table? So, for me it's the cost. It's so unfair. Like there's no subsidies for people that make below a certain income, and it's truly, truly unfair.
> - Gladys

Housing Affordability: It's expensive to live close-in

Jerry, who moved to Washington to reduce the cost of transportation by living closer to his job and Metrorail, suggested to the group that one way to cut expensive transportation costs is by moving closer to the core of the region. The comment caused commotion in the group. Most participants said they would not be able to afford living in a place near Metrorail, as these places are becoming less financially attainable for people with minimum wage jobs.

Some people from Maryland said they moved to their current homes looking for more affordable housing, but ultimately, they feel "isolated" because jobs are not coming to their area and development is happening in Northern Virginia. Ultimately, these participants expressed feeling trapped between not being able to afford transportation from their homes to their places of work and not being to afford housing closer to jobs and Metrorail.

Safety

Late-Night Commuting: Fears about safety at stations and bus stops

The conversation about access and commuting to jobs and school continued throughout the safety conversation. Similar to how participants explained that their transportation costs affect their access to jobs, participants explained that they will pick jobs depending on whether they have to commute late at night. To feel safer while commuting at night, five participants identified needing better lighted roads, crosswalks that also have stop signs for cars, and making areas around bus stops and train stations more vibrant and busier.

Pedestrian and Biking Safety: Concerns about shared space for peds and bikes

Participants commented that more pedestrians and bikers have been sharing sidewalks during the pandemic. As a result, they believe that more infrastructure must be put in place to make sure bikers and pedestrians each have their space. Participants identified wanting to see more protected bike lanes and creating more connected sidewalks.

Climate Change

Participants in this session struggled to explicitly talk about climate change in relation to their transportation choices. Even when the facilitator probed questions about climate change, participants used the allotted time to continue talking about job accessibility and transportation affordability, potentially signaling that the participants place higher importance on these issues than climate change. An interaction with a participant exemplifies this:

> Gladys: *I've lived in California when there were earthquakes. Down in Miami, now there's a pandemic. There's nothing you can do about global climate change but pray.*
>
> Moderator: *So, Gladys you mentioned making walking more accessible. Would that be one way for you to reduce your impact on climate change personally?*
>
> Gladys: *Well, I don't know about climate change, but it would definitely improve people's ability to commute to a job. That's what most people get out for, to go to work. [...] It is unacceptable when you have a job that says it is not Metro-accessible. You know that something that should be called to the attention of officials immediately.*

While it was hard to foster a conversation about climate change, two topics were indirectly brought up about climate change:

Convenience: Environmentally friendly modes are less convenient

Those who classified themselves as drivers said that their lack of interest in alternative modes of transportation results from the lack of convenience. For example, Adan explained that a 10-minute drive to the nearest grocery store would take 35 minutes on a bus because of frequent stops and

delays. For Amara, the lack of flexibility of commuter buses service hours pushes her to use a car. Overall, the participants said that fewer bus delays and more reliable and frequent bus schedules would make using public transportation more convenient for them.

Not an immediate priority: Connections between personal action and climate change are not clear

Participants generally expressed a desire for more safe walking and biking options and affordable housing near Metrorail or jobs. However, most participants failed to identify how these changes would help mitigate climate change. They did not articulate the relationship between access to jobs and the development of walking, biking, and transit-accessible communities and the multiple benefits that these improvements can bring to people.

"Density is important. I think if I were a transportation official, I would focus on developing land around the stations to provide more housing and more services, like a grocery store, for example. And need to go far to get the things I needed. That would also make car-free living a lot easier. It would also make living in the suburbs car-free easier than it is now. "

-Adan

Session 2: People from the Inner Suburbs

Pseudonym	Gender	Race	Age	Location
Albert	Male	White	45-54	Annandale, MD
Lorraine	Female	Black or African American	18-24	Burtonsville, MD
Stanley	Male	White	18-24	Chevy Chase, MD
Miranda	Female	Asian	35-44	Fairfax, VA
Kenneth	Male	Black or African American	25-34	Falls Church, VA
Alexis	Female	Black or African American	65+	Gaithersburg, MD
Clayton	Male	Black or African American	18-24	Hyattsville, MD
Louise	Female	White	65+	Oakton, VA
Alvin	Male	Multi-Racial	25-34	Rockville, MD
Cailyn	Female	Hispanic/Latino/a/x	25-34	Silver Spring, MD
Phillip	Male	White	55-64	Vienna, VA

Equity

Affordability: Concerns about the cost of getting to transit

The main concern identified by people for this topic was the cost of getting to transit stations. People explained that they lived in areas in which biking and walking biking to transit did not feel safe. As a result, people had to take buses to get to train stations. The cost of taking the bus plus the train made their commute cost high to the point that was no longer feasible. Similar to the experience from people with low-incomes, people from the inner suburbs also said that they are forced to decline jobs because the commuting cost would exceed the income that they would bring home.

Affordability: Tolls are expensive and inequitable

Those who identified themselves as frequent drivers said that they were pushed to drive because the cost of transit was too high, and it was too inconvenient. However, drivers in this session also expressed feeling resentment about tolls, noting in particular that express lanes are a burden for those with limited income. Participants said this was an issue that could easily be explicitly seen in their everyday routines, as those with limited income must stay in traffic lines for long period of times, while those with higher incomes choose to take the express lanes right next to them.

> "The EZ pass lanes, HOV, [...] lanes that the price changes depending on the amount of traffic. That is definitely an equity issue because if they were people who have more money, they can go place quicker than someone who doesn't want to pay $40 to go five miles on 66. [...] So, yah, those who have the money can and will pay for that.
>
> -Louise

Safety

Biking to Transit: Infrastructure not sufficient to make it safe

The issue of getting to transit extended to the safety portion of the session. The primary safety concern was being able to safely walk or bike to bus stops and transit stations, especially after coming from work at night. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, four participants in this session expressed interest in biking to and from transit. However, they felt that sufficient infrastructure was in place -- such as connected trails or protected bike lanes to use at night-- to make them feel safe to do that. People explained that they would lose interest in biking if this infrastructure was not put in place.

Driving on congested roads: It feels scary, particularly at night

While driving is more convenient than taking transit for some people, drivers said that they feel scared to drive on congested roads. Participants explained that for commuters driving after long days of work, it is hard to keep the attention needed to drive in congestion. The fear of driving on these roads is what is making the drivers in this session contemplate their transit options again.

> "A huge thing that people are intimidated by is you don't to be on the roadways to be on the roadways battling for space with cars. You don't want to feel like you're going to be struck on your way to work. No one wants to die on their way to work or their way home. [...] So, if people had truly protected bike lanes, you know, not just like plastic barriers, but truly, truly protected bike lanes, that would be a huge thing."
>
> -Cailyn

Climate Change

Convenience: Willingness to use transit– if it were more convenient

All participants expressed that they would willing to use more public transportation to decrease their impact on climate change if it became more convenient. Convenience was described as having more direct routes, more affordable options, and having better service hours. Stanley said that for him to use Metrorail as his primary mode of transportation, he would need to know that it will be reliable for commuting purposes as well as for leisure trips.

> *"There's times where I plan on going into D.C and I know I'm going to stay past 11:00 and a ride share option is just out of my price range a lot of time to get back to Bethesda from DC. I'm looking at a $40 Uber and it's just out of the question. Metro hours end early. So, my only option is to drive."*

Other participants admitted that getting to Metrorail would continue to be difficult due to the location of their homes. However, they suggested expanding commuter bus routes with extended service hours to serve people working night shifts.

Living Closer to Jobs: Not so simple to achieve

All participants said that they would not explicitly object to living closer to work or transit stations, but they identified a variety of reasons that it may not be feasible. Some noted the high cost of living near Metro stations or in the region's core jurisdictions, although others noted that transportation expenses were greater for those living farther out.

For households with more than one worker, jobs may not be close to each other. For example, Louise explained *"You also have to consider if there's more than one person it's a different answer for every person. So, one person might end being close and the other one isn't."*

Participants also expressed concern that putting too much emphasis on living closer to work as a climate change mitigation strategy could undermine actions in the suburbs, such as better transit connections, to address climate change.

More broadly, participants said that living in the suburbs is chosen because of lifestyle implications, including having bigger living spaces for families, having more privacy, and actually having distance from work, which some people like.

Session 3: People 60+ Years Old

Pseudonym	Gender	Race	Age	Location
Gary	Male	White	65+	Arlington, VA
Janet	Female	White	65+	Bethesda, MD
Diane	Female	Black or African American	65+	Bladensburg, MD
Wyetta	Female	Black or African American	65+	District Heights, MD
Carol	Female	White	65+	Falls Church, VA
Isabella	Female	White	65+	Olney, MD
Tom	Male	Black or African American	65+	Takoma Park, MD
Kaine	Male	White	65+	District of Columbia
Abraham	Male	Hispanic/Latinx	65+	District of Columbia
Brenda	Female	White/Black or African American	65+	District of Columbia
Fred	Male	White	65+	District of Columbia
George	Male	White	65+	District of Columbia

Equity

Geographic Inequality: Transit-dependent communities are poorly served

The primary equity concern in this session was geographic inequality in the frequency of bus and train service. Participants in this session believed that communities that depend on public transportation the most are being forced to wait longer times than other areas in the region. Most of the time, the people dealing with delayed service are those in jobs that lack flexibility and are more likely to be reprimanded by employers for being late.
Gary explained how he has observed this issue:

> *"I usually go to Mt. Pleasant Avenue and take the 42 or 52. And what amazed is that there are some people who are trying to get downtown. And the frequency of that line, when they say it's going to arrive in 10 minutes, arrives in 40 minutes. And these people are trying to work down in hotels. [...] They sit there, and they get so angry. And they will finally find an uber or something to take them downtown. And that more money that they shouldn't be spending. I think that's, in my sense, equity when we talk about this situation."*

Accessible amenities: Unreliable services for people with disabilities

Participants also said that transportation services are unreliable for people with mobility problems and physical disabilities.

Tom, a caregiver for someone who is wheelchair-bound, said he finds that there is inconsistency in how transportation services support those with wheelchairs. He explained that when they are using the

"I think service is a big [equity] thing because one of the things that attracts people to transit is convenience. People value their time. But it's also bounced off with the number of people that are out of there and willing to ride the services. While you can't provide a service that is just for one or two people who are riding, I think it's important to look at the service level to all communities, so everybody has an equal chance to either ride the bus or ride the Metro"

-Gary

bus, they never know whether the braces to lock in wheelchairs will work. When using Metrorail, they often do not know whether the elevators will be functioning. Additionally, Tom explained that aside from physically accessing a bus or train, the biggest issue for someone with a disability comes from the uncertainty about what kind of treatment you will receive from a bus rider or station employee. He explained that some staff are not trained to respectfully respond to the needs of people with disabilities, and ultimately, end up rushing them into the bus, not stopping for them, or refusing to lower the ramps.

Isabella explained that she is a "diehard" Metro rider, but as she is growing older, she is finding that the system is not built for people of her age. She is finding that more elevators and escalators are out of order and it is becoming difficult to navigate the Metrorail system. With these kinds of obstacles, she is beginning to tell herself "Maybe I need to get a car to drive once in a while."

Suggestions for these problems included prioritizing the upkeep of elevators, escalators, and bus ramps. Participants also asked for better ways to communicate that things are out of service. Participants spoke about the frustration of making a trip to a station just to find out elevators are not working. Finally, participants suggested that transportation agencies keep track of people who will be primarily working with individuals with disabilities and offer them training in how to engage with these communities.

Safety

Deliveries blocking sidewalks: Particularly dangerous for older adults

Participants said that pedestrians are being put in danger by being forced to walk on the roads because delivery trucks are constantly blocking sidewalks or crosswalks. Participants explained that people who are older feel particularly vulnerable because they are not able to move as fast as other pedestrian if they encounter bikers or cars on the road.

Janet described her bus stop, which is often blocked by a delivery truck, which results in her missing her bus because the bus drivers are not able to see her behind the trucks. Janet explained that most people think these issues are just a five-minute delay in someone's schedule, however, she has experienced significant delays because of these issues. Ultimately, when the buses are unable to see her or she encounters construction trucks blocking her sidewalk, she feels like the system is not for her but instead she says

> *"the whole movement seems to be for the car, to get the car through quickly. You feel like the car is the top-level echelon here. [...] it makes it unpleasant to walk in the areas like that, and it make you definitely feel like a second-class citizen."*

Walking to Transit: Unsafe even for short distances

Feeling like a second-class citizen was a sentiment re-emphasized in the conversation about safe walking or biking to transit. Some participants said they felt like they actually do have the bus stops

> "In urban areas you'll see delivery trucks pull in. And they'll go to the loading ramp. They won't pull all the way in, or they can't pull all the way in. They completely block the sidewalk. [...] I'm trying to cross the street to get over to the Metro, and there's a delivery truck that's blocking the crosswalk so that pedestrians have to very carefully try and come into the street and see if anything is coming."
>
> -Gary

and Metro stations that they need but they did not think that they had the ability to get there safely. For example, Diane explained that she lives in front of a bus stop, however that bus stop is near a hill and cars are not able to see people walking to the bus stop. She said:

"If there was a crosswalk or something there to help people get across the street [that would help. Those are not here because we live in a transportation desert. [...] So most of the residents [in the senior development] take uber or taxi because it is not safe crossing the street. And it's not a real thoroughfare, it's just a street. But when somebody doesn't see you and they're coming down off the top of that hill, and you can't run, you're in trouble."

Climate Change

Increased Bus Frequency: Practical improvements make environmentally friendly options attractive

Half of the participants said that climate change was not a priority when making transportation choices. However, they did prioritize reliable bus frequency and they acknowledged that bus frequency is critical in getting more people on buses and reducing the amount of people in single occupancy vehicles. George explained the significance that reliable bus service can have in reducing the transportation impacts on climate change.

"Every bus takes like 30 cars off the street. I mean, if there's 20 people on a bus, that's 19 that get off the road. 19 cars. So, any time you can get someone to switch from a car to a bus, even if they own the car, you are making a huge impact on climate change."

Bus shuttles and BRT lines: Increasing alternatives to solo driving

Residents explained that they would like to see bus shuttles that are specifically designed to take people from certain neighborhoods, areas, or retirement centers to Metro stations. Having access to a shuttle that would take them to the stations would reduce the uncertainty of how to make it to a station safely. They explained that this would make people ride buses more. Additionally, participants said they would like to see dedicated bus lanes to create faster and more reliable bus services for those who are not able to access Metro stations.

Session 4: People from Outer Suburbs

Pseudonym	Gender	Race	Age	Location
Julie	Female	White	35-44	Ashburn, VA
Diana	Female	White	35-44	Ashburn, VA
Frank	Male	White	35-44	Frederick, MD
Margaret	Female	White	35-44	Frederick, MD
Joyce	Female	White	35-44	Frederick, DC
Lydia	Female	White	25-34	Frederick, MD
Owen	Female	White and Asian	35-44	Gainesville, MD
Pablo	Male	Hispanic/Latino/a/x	35-44	Gainesville, MD
Andrew	Male	Asian	25-34	Manassas, VA
Brianna	Female	Black or African American	25-34	Manassas, VA

Equity

Geographic Inequality: Outer suburbs lack transit

People from the outer suburbs said they believe there is geographic inequality between the transportation services they receive and what is available in the region's more central jurisdictions. Participants specifically said that their areas are disconnected from the rest of the region because transportation officials are not prioritizing the development of transit in the outer suburbs. As a result, options for transit are limited as most people live far away from transit stations, have unreliable bus service and are forced to drive. To people in this session, the equity problem is geographically based, but they also said that the lack of options leave people with low-income extremely vulnerable, as they may not be able to afford a car.

Affordability: The cost of driving is high

People with fewer economic resources move to the outer suburbs seeking more affordable housing. However, once settled in the outer suburbs, people begin to encounter high costs associated with transportation, particularly associated with driving. Yet, similar to the session with inner suburban residents, participants in this session indicated that express toll lanes, which could provide reliable and short commutes, seem to be intended mainly for the wealthy who can afford to pay.

Safety

Lack of connected trails: Facilities are fragmented

Participants felt that bicycling was not a safe option for them because of the lack of connected trails. The conversation was started by people who had just moved to the suburbs and explained feeling surprised by not being able to bike long distances because of the lack of trails. Participants shared their experiences trying to bike near expressways or very busy streets. As Diane explained:

"We were on the trails in Ashburn Village but then it came to where we have to cross this road and there's no crosswalk, it was like the trail just ends with the community end and then it's like the city hasn't provided anything. There's nowhere safe to ride on the road, there's no crosswalks, there's like nothing. And we actually turned around and went home. I was like, we can drive over to see them. But you know, she's only five. She couldn't handle riding on the road as a five-year-old." -Diane

Lack of bike lanes: Biking largely seen as recreational

Following on the conversation about connected trails, participants shared that protected bike lanes are hard to find in their areas. The lack of safe infrastructure forces people to see biking as a recreational activity rather than a method of transportation to get to work, run errands, and move around the region. And while participants in this session agreed that bike lanes are important and needed, they feel like they continue to be in a lose–lose situation with the transportation system. This was described by Diane

"There's not enough bike lanes. Most of the trails are within housing communities and they're great for pleasure riding but there's not like a good way for a biker to get across 7. Like he works on the other side of 7 from where we live, and that would make me really nervous. I don't actually let him bike right now. He thought about it, and it makes me too nervous. And I've been the other side too, as someone biking. Like even if you get on the W&OD trail, there's times where cars should stop for you on some of those roads, you know if they see you there, and they just don't. Or like, I don't know, there's just some places you cross where it can be scary to be a cyclist." -Diane

Climate Change

Better Telework Options: Increased telework could become an excuse for not improving transportation in the outer suburbs

The COVID-19 public health crisis allowed more people in the outer suburbs to experience working from home. The majority of the participants explained that this was a way to address the affordability, traffic, and safety issues that people from the outer suburbs face because of their dependence on cars. However, participants said they fear that an increase in teleworking could be a justification for not making improvements to connect the outer suburbs to the rest of the region with reliable transportation choices.

Better Service Hours: Sustainable options are largely available only for 9-to-5 commuters

Participants believe that without the option to work from home, the only people who engage with sustainable transportation will be those with 9-to-5 jobs and higher incomes. The most cited example was that commuter buses only run during the day and fail to serve those who work night shifts. Additionally, those who have conformed to driving said that the best way to reduce their impact on climate change would be to purchase electric or hybrid vehicles. However, they said that either they cannot personally afford that option or acknowledged that purchasing those vehicles requires having a higher income.

Session 5: Young Adults 18-25 Years Old

Pseudonym	Gender	Race	Age	Location
Elliot	Male	White	18-24	Arlington, VA
Eden	Female	White/ Latina/o/x	18-24	Arlington, VA
Kara	Female	Middle Eastern	18-24	Manassas, VA
William	Male	Asian	18-24	Rockville, MD
Emerson	Transgender	White	18-24	District of Columbia
Hayden	Transgender	White	18-24	District of Columbia
James	Male	Asian	18-24	District of Columbia
Mila	Female	Asian	18-24	District of Columbia
Aliya	Female	Black or African American	18-24	District of Columbia
Craig	Male	Black or African American	18-24	District of Columbia
Abena	Female	Black or African American	18-24	District of Columbia

Equity

Service Hours: Limited hours disproportionately hurt low-income populations and people of color

While other groups identified service hours as an equity issue, this session was the only one to explicitly point out the connection between race, income, and service hours. They explained that failing to prioritize night hours for people ultimately ends up failing people of color and people with low incomes because people within these groups make up the majority of workers in hotels, restaurants, and other service industries.

Geographic inequality: Biking facilities are better in higher-income places

The majority of participants in this session were or had previously been people who actively bike. Participants said that biking is an issue of equity because biking infrastructure, such as bike lanes, protected bike lanes and speed bumps to slow traffic near bike lanes, were prioritized in neighborhoods with people with that have higher incomes. They explained that once you enter a low-income neighborhood, they feel unsafe biking and are forced to think of other options to commute.

> "I feel like equity-wise people who are more likely to work during the weekend and need that train are more likely to work in service, and a majority of service workers in D.C. are not white. So it disproportionately affects that population where if you know that you can't get a train in a reasonable amount of time you're not going to take the Metro and you're going to end up probably using a ride-share or driving, which ends up more expensive."
>
> - Hayden

Safety

Lighting and Roads: Dangers for drivers

People in this session expressed that they did not feel comfortable driving on roads because that are pitch dark. For example, Elliot described driving on George Washington Parkway:

"On the George Washington Parkway […] some parts are like, 45, 55 miles per hour, but it's almost pitch black. So, on dark nights and stuff like that – and it goes through some woods. So, you can literally see almost nothing ahead of you outside of your car's headlights. And there's a lot of cars going pretty quickly, a lot of merges on the off ramps. So, it can be pretty dangerous there if you're not careful."

Similarly, Kara explained that roads around the Manassas and Fairfax areas are very dark while also being very narrow. She described her fear of driving on these roads:

"There are some small roads where there's one lane and like people going – somebody is going towards you and you're going towards them and it's just like one lane. And it can be really dark at night, and there's some roads that you just turn into them and you're unaware that it's going to be that dark and that cars are coming your way. […] Even if there's not a lot of people there, even, if it's not busy, just does not feel safe."

Biking Infrastructure

The conversation about biking infrastructure and safety from the equity part of the session continued as a safety conversation. In this part of the discussion, participants specifically explained the need to have protected bike lanes. Emerson explained his rationale behind this:

"There's definitely roads where […] it's like two lanes or four lanes, the cars are going 45 miles an hour, I'm just there on my bike … chilling. A protected bike lane would be nice in a lot of places like that because a line on the road just isn't going to protect someone who's maybe wearing a helmet. I usually am now because I learned my lesson the hard way. But I don't think everyone should have to learn their lesson the hard way."

They said that these kinds of experiences stop people from biking around the region. According to Eden, her decision to not bike is because she is intimidated by traffic and the accidents that happen in the area.

"I am not a very aggressive cyclist, I don't feel that confident about bicycling that I could watch for all of those things [bikers getting hit by cars], so I end up just usually not doing it or doing it only on a Sunday afternoon, where there's not many people on the road. And it does make it kind of scary and off-putting, where even people who are – they do bicycle racing and things like that, they are very good and very aware of it still end up getting hit by car doors because there's just not enough space."

Climate Change

Better service hours: Indirectly impacting climate change

Making an indirect link to climate change, participants explained that limited service hours keeps people from using buses and trains, which are more environmentally friendly modes. Similar to the discussions in other focus groups (inner suburbs and outer suburbs), participants said that limited evening service hours is an equity issue that affects people of color and people with low incomes.

Housing affordability: Reasonably priced housing needed near Metro

In this session, people expressed a strong interest in using more transit. However, they said living close to transit was unaffordable for many people. For Elliot, the best way to take cars off the road is getting people to live closer to Metrorail and DC. He asked transportation officials to think about developing new housing close to major transportation hubs. Emerson also explained that future housing development in the outer suburbs should prioritize the creation of 15-minute communities in transit accessible areas.

"I used to live in Loudoun County with my parents, and the first time after I graduated college I lived in Leesburg and had a temp job in D.C. And it was a pretty long – I think it was like $9 on this commuter bus each way, which when I was making like $15 an hour in D.C., you know, a very significant amount of that, you know. And then the commuter buses were pretty restrictive. Like three of them left in the morning, and then three of them came back in the afternoon."

- Eden

Session 6: People with Disabilities

Pseudonym	Gender	Race	Age	Location
Bonnie	Female	Black or African American	65+	Hyattsville, MD
Xavier	Male	Hispanic/Latino/a/x	25-34	Manassas Park, VA
Rebecca	Female	White	55-64	Olney, MD
Judy	Female	White	65+	Silver Spring, MD
Erin	Female	White	35-44	Silver Spring, MD
Amanda	Female	Asian	65+	District of Columbia
Chrissy	Female	White	65+	District of Columbia
Sharon	Female	Black or African American	65+	District of Columbia
Lamar	Male	Black or African American	18-24	District of Columbia
Kianna	Female	Black or African American	25-34	District of Columbia
Larry	Male	Black or African American	65+	District of Columbia

Equity

Affordability: Cost of transit limits opportunities

In this session, multiple people identified depending on disability benefits and struggling to afford public transportation to get to work. Participants described the difficult decisions they have to make when it comes to affording Metrorail, including paying for transportation to get to work instead of getting food. Sharon explained that her disability prevents her from getting jobs that pay more than minimum wage. She explained that minimum-wage jobs usually do not subsidize the transportation fare of their employees. She believes it is an equity issue that some jobs offer transit subsidies while others do not.

Similar to the equity discussion in the session with people with low-income, people in this session, like Chrissy, identified that the cost of transit sometimes prevents her from getting the jobs that she wants to have. She shared her story:

> "Someone offered me a job out in Rockville for home organization, which is what I do for a living. But she was offering 15 an hour, which is minimum wage here, but you add in the cost to me of going out there and coming back, the times plus the wait, it's not worth what I'm going to spend on Metro. The big problem for me is there's other jobs I would like but I can't get because of transit costs"

Reliability: Tough to plan ahead

Participants said that the transportation system is not reliable for people with disabilities. For example, Erin explained that she struggles to navigate a transportation system that is

"For folks that don't have that subsidy it's so expensive for you to get to work and it's so unfair if you're not making – you're making below the minimum wage. So it's like what do you do? Do you go to work or do you – you have to pick and choose – do you go to work, do you call out, do you put food on the table? "

-Sharon

interdependent but does not offer consistency. She explained that her fare is never consistent because it usually depends on how many times she transfers from MARC to Metrorail or Metrorail to Fairfax Connector and the different peak hours. Additionally, she finds it difficult to have to fill out different disability forms because all the different agencies require different documentation.

Judy explained that relying on MetroAccess to get to work is "nerve wracking." She explained that the service hours for MetroAccess are dependent on what is convenient for Metro and not the passengers. She explained that one day she can ask to be picked up at 3 pm and the vehicle will arrive at 2 pm. Or she will be asked to be picked at 4 pm and they will arrive at 5 pm. Regardless of when she gets actually picked up, she is constantly faced with getting to work late and jeopardizing jobs that are very hard to get for people with disabilities.

These inconsistencies were cited as reasons why public transportation is not reliable for people with disabilities. While many people in this session explained that they will continue to rely on public transportation, they also feel like these are reasons that lead to others to switch to driving.

Climate Change

Electric Vehicles: Buses should be electric

People in this session agreed that is important to encourage people to ride buses more often to address climate change in transportation. However, they explained that getting people to use buses will not solve the problem all together. Participants said that transportation officials should be encouraged to electrify bus fleets as well. Electric buses will also help address the emissions caused by single occupancy vehicles, but can also help address other environmental justice issues, such "fighting air pollution in demographic areas where people could have higher rates of respiratory disorders [...] and noise pollution."

Housing Affordability: A way to fight climate change

People in this session said that physical ability affects how people are able to address climate change in their transportation choices. Participants explained that people with disabilities sometimes cannot ride bikes, use scooters, walk long distances, or afford to live near reliable public transportation. With this in mind, they asked for more affordable housing near downtown, jobs, and other necessary shops so they can access all their necessities without depending on cars or buses. As Bonnie explained:

> "I like the ability to be able to have freedom in my shopping because that creates economic equity and the ability to walk to those places puts everybody at the same level. For instance, everybody should have the ability to get to a Whole Foods without catching three buses and a subway to it. "

"Most people with disabilities [...] live in affordable housing and it's not accessible, public transit. So maybe building more affordable housing, you know, lowering rent costs, and developing more walkable communities across the region. Making it a disincentive, you know. Create a system where it's a disincentive for everybody to drive everywhere almost is what we need in our society.

-Judy

Session 7: People of Color (Session 1)

Pseudonym	Gender	Race	Age	Location
Sonia	Female	Hispanic/Latino/a/x	55-64	Alexandria, VA
Marquis	Male	Black or African American	65+	Bowie, MD
Natasha	Female	Black or African American	25-34	Manassas Park, VA
Devin	Male	Asian	35-44	North Bethesda, MD
Jessica	Female	Asian	25-34	Rockville, MD
Preston	Male	Black or African American	55-64	Silver Spring, MD
Javier	Male	Hispanic/Latino/a/x	25-34	Silver Spring, MD
Chester	Male	White	65+	Arlington, VA
Gabrielle	Female	Black or African American	45-54	District of Columbia
Jamar	Male	Black or African American	65+	District of Columbia

Equity

Cost of Buses vs. Metrorail: Perception that rail is for more affluent people

The main equity concern in this session was the cost of using Metrorail. Participants explained that Metrorail offers more reliability and faster service, however, people are forced to use buses because the cost is significantly lower. People who live far away from their schools and jobs often choose a longer bus ride that is a fixed rate rather than having to pay distance-based fares that will add up to something they ultimately cannot afford if they are riding Metrorail every day.

People in this session said that this disparity feeds the stereotype that buses are meant to be used by less affluent people and people of color. Jamar explained this feeling:

> *"Lesser affluent people have always been bus-dependent people. They need it to get to and from essential services and to and from their places of employment. The transit – the rail system, when it opened up, was more affluent. Even though it was not politely said, those that could afford to ride would ride the rail; those who couldn't afford it found a way to use the bus to get to wherever they needed to go. It became a need versus a convenience."*

The cost using Metro is sort of prohibitive for people who maybe have less resources. They will opt to using a bus instead of a Metro – and they might choose to use two buses or whatever because it's a flat fare versus taking a Metro.

-Devin

Geographic Inequity: Transit options for lower-income communities are often lacking

Geographic inequity was the second topic brought up this session. The topic was brought up in two contexts. First, participants believed that the transportation system is not growing along with the region. People described that there are more people coming to the region for jobs and this has resulted in a lack of affordable housing near Metro or in the core of the region. As a result, people are moving to the suburbs, but these suburbs lack the transportation options needed to make transportation affordable, accessible, and reliable for people who moved there because they could no longer afford to live near Metro or the core of the region.

Secondly, people said that Metro stations that serve low-income neighborhoods receive services that are inferior to stations in other areas. Devin explained that stations in lower-income neighborhoods are less clean, customer service is less friendly, and there is significantly more police presence. People explained that these differences in service and maintenance make people feel like they are not a priority for the transit system.

Safety

Bus safety: Concerns about crime

For this topic, participants focused on their sense of not feeling safe while riding the bus, especially late at night. The majority of safety concerns with the bus stem from the crime that happens on buses and near stations. They said they feel like buses lack the security to make it safe to ride the bus, such as a customer service presence around the stops, well-lit stops, safety cameras, and Metro police on buses taking care of safety incidents.

Road speeds: Feels threatening to cyclists and pedestrians

While bike safety was only briefly mentioned, it was the other safety topic discussed aside from bus safety. At least four participants expressed not feeling safe riding their bikes anymore, with one saying that he would only ride his bike on the sidewalks. All the bike safety concerns stemmed from their perceived lack of speed limit enforcement and having to compete for road space with cars that are going 15 to 20 mph above the speed limit. To address this issue, participants suggested better enforcement of speed limits, including installing speed cameras, and placing more speed bumps across residential areas.

Climate Change

Electric vehicles: Seeking a car-oriented solution

People in this session believed that it would be hard to get past the idea that cars are a "status symbol" and their ownership was needed to maintain that status. Within this session itself, people spoke about the value they placed on car ownership and the investment that they had put into buying and maintaining their vehicles. They spoke about "not ever giving them away." It was, therefore, not surprising that the majority of this group said that they would address climate change by eventually buying a zero-emissions car in the future.

Better transit: Make public transportation more appealing

While a majority of the participants expressed interest in electric vehicles, they also acknowledged that investment in public transportation is still needed. Participants explained that they would consider taking transit if the stations, trains, and buses looked inviting, modern, and clean. The theme of status continued in this discussion as participants explained that such improvements would make public transit seem less like a system only for less affluent people.

I hundred percent agree with the zero-emission goal if we could do that. I wanted to clarify something, because we're talking about our personal transportation, but we have to remember that there are other factors that add into air quality, and that's trucks. And trucks, which are essential to delivering items to our stores and this, that and the other, operate on a different set of regulations as far as emissions and this, that and the other. So, my goal would be to make all vehicles compliant to the same standard.

-Jamar

Session 8: People from the Core

Pseudonym	Gender	Race	Age	Location
Cindy	Female	White	45-54	District of Columbia
Colin	Male	Black or African American	55-64	Alexandria, VA
Kiandra	Female	Black or African American	25-34	District of Columbia
Cailyn	Female	White	18-24	District of Columbia
Ellie	Female	White	35-44	Washington, DC
Sebastian	Male	White	45-54	Alexandria, VA
Todd	Male	White	18-24	Alexandria, VA
Chester	Male	White	65+	Arlington, VA

Equity

Accessibility: People with disabilities need reliability

The equity conversation centered on a lack of reliable amenities— including working elevators, escalators, and bus ramps. They said that people with disabilities need to successfully navigate the transportation system. Cindy, who identified having a long-term physical disability, explained that most people think that finding elevators or escalators that are out of service is a five-minute inconvenience. However, she emphasized that for people with low mobility, these issues disturb their entire day schedule because they have to take a long time to go down the stairs slowly or they have walk to the next station with an elevator or escalator.

Affordability: Differences between rail and bus

The second issue brought up was the cost of using the Metro system. Similar to other sessions, participants pointed out that the difference in cost between buses and rail creates inequality between affluent and less-affluent people. People with higher incomes are able to use Metrorail more often without worrying about peak time hours or distance travelled. The less affluent have to stick with less convenient bus rides, even when Metrorail options are near them, because cost is an issue. Participants explained that costs can create barriers for lower-income people in accessing reliable transportation services that help them get to work, doctor appointments, grocery stores, and job interviews.

Safety

Public Health: COVID-19 raised concerns about cleanliness and crowding

The majority of the conversation about safety centered around public health. To people from the core, the primary concern was how crowded buses and trains can get during rush hour. After the COVID-19 public health emergency, people from this session expressed that they have reconsidered what makes them feel safe while riding public transportation. According to this group, people have started to make decisions about whether to ride a bus or train based on whether it's if too crowded and if people are wearing masks. While participants agreed that these issues were more prominent

because of COVID-19, they explained that these are issues that were exposed and will continue to influence their transportation choices in the future.

Bike lanes: Lack of driver enforcement

The second topic for safety included the need for more bike lanes and motor vehicle enforcement. Colin began the conversation by pointing out that "It seems very bike friendly in Northern Virginia and D.C. You see that a lot. They want bikers in the city, they want bikers in Northern Virginia, they want them there. But the drivers haven't gotten that memo yet. They're still driving as aggressively as they were prior to all these changes being made."

However, Chester explained that the enforcement of bike lanes is not sufficient because cities have not decided whether to prioritize their work on congestion, drivers, revenue, or biking safety. He explained that

"there is little if any enforcement. And I think a lot of times the attitude is we're more concerned about parking enforcement, because that's revenue, and we're not concerned about, you know, aggressive driving because a lot of time if we stop that guy, because that becomes a traffic problem also, and we don't want to cause a traffic problem at 6:00 at night and foul up traffic."

Chester said that motorists and bicyclists need to learn to accommodate each other. He said that driving with bike lanes is a "different type of driving and people need to get trained how to think about them. He explained:

"When you're taking a right-hand turn, you've got to think that there is a lane that's coming up here that wasn't there before, that now might have a runner or a bike or something like that in it. And that's when we can get the reminders when we forget that they are there."

Climate Change

Not an immediate priority: Climate change is not a pressing concern

Sebastian, who considers himself someone who cares for the environment, explained that his priorities were put to the test during the pandemic. He said that he realized that, like others, his individual health was his number one priority when he was *in "[his] gas-guzzling car of whatever kind, you're in your own little enclosed bubble and you're safer."* The other participants agreed with Sebastian and explained that any issues that affect individual health and well-being will be prioritized over climate change. Cindy explained that are many issues that need to be solved in transportation but emphasized that none will solve if no one is safe and healthy first.

"Health is your number one. It's kind of like I look at it like if you're in an airplane you can't help somebody else if you don't take the oxygen first. And so you need to be healthy in order to be able to work in the environment for positive results. So you know, if you're deceased or you're incapable of being able to work in it, then you know, two birds is killed there."

-Cindy

Convenience: More immediate concerns usually override climate change

While COVID-19 changed how people prioritized climate change in their transportation choices, some participants explained that climate change was not a priority even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Todd explained

that his transportation priorities do not explicitly align with climate change mitigation, instead his priorities are a "combination of money, time---like the cost-effectiveness of [his] transportation option, and convenience." Most participants explained that they will prioritize their time and money before choosing to change their transportation choices solely to address climate change.

Session 9: People of Color (Session 2)

Pseudonym	Gender	Race	Age	Location
Sharice	Female	Black or African American	35-44	Arlington, VA
Rupa	Female	Asian	25-34	Herdon, VA
Marvin	Male	Black or African American	25-34	Hyattsville, MD
Tamia	Female	Black or African American	18-24	Hyattsville, MD
Marcus	Male	Black or African American	35-44	Takoma Park, MD
William	Male	Asian	35-44	District of Columbia
Natasha	Female	Black or African American	55-64	District of Columbia
Rick	Female	Black or African American and Asian	18-24	District of Columbia
Yvette	Female	Black or African American	18-24	District of Columbia
Mae	Female	Asian/ Latino/a/x	25-34	District of Columbia

Equity

Geographic Inequality: Metrorail's limited reach

This group's primary equity concern focused on how Metrorail is not serving all areas equally as you move away from the core of the region. Many participants said that people in suburban areas were dependent on driving or on buses because of the lack of access to rail transit. This leaves lower-income people, who had moved further from the region for economic reasons, at a disadvantage when looking for jobs or managing their time. Participants said that transportation officials should prioritize expanding Metrorail further out in the region or increasing accessibility to transit stations via BRT or express shuttle options.

However, other people noted that the Metrorail system actually is expanding in very visible ways. For example, Tamia explained that as a Black woman in the District of Columbia, she grew up with very restricted access to Metrorail and opportunities to move throughout the region. She explained that the system that it is in place today is providing better access to all people. Tamia explained:

> "Every time I come home from -- each summer, each break, there's something new on the line that they've done added. I never grew up with the Silver line, I never grew up with no -- all these weird lines."

Tamia might have not explicitly discussed issues of equity. However, she indirectly expressed that she's not bothered by "Metro's geographic inequity" because the neighborhoods she always lived in have always been left out and any improvement is good for her.

Affordability: Distance-based fees hurt low-income riders

This session focused on the cost of Metrorail as an equity issue. The group specifically discussed how a distance-based fee structure negatively impacts people with low-income the most. Similar to the equity discussion from the outer suburbs, people in this session discussed how the increasing price of housing in the core of the region has forced people with lower incomes to move to the outer suburbs, and then they have to pay high prices to commute on Metrorail. In contrast, participants noted, rail systems in other cities have flat fare systems, which they said are more equitable.

Safety

Transit Safety: Fears in using the system alone

Participants identified several reasons they do not feel comfortable navigating the transportation system by themselves. Most women in the session cited gender safety as the main constraint in walking to transit and using ride-sharing options. Rupa explained how this impacts how she navigates the system:

> *"If it gets really late at night and I'm not all that close to my car -- and even if I am all that close to my car -- like walking across a parking lot in the dark is -- ugh, it's just unnerving all around. Like the one trip to my car that night that I don't feel nearly as uncomfortable is walking from -- really out of the Metro station through the garage because it's well lit, and it's still a public place and it's still a Metro station. Like, the safest I could ever feel as a woman going home at night from D.C. after a night of fun -- pre-COVID-19, that is -- ride the Silver line to the terminus station of Wiehle, the walk to my car is fairly safe, then once I'm behind the wheel then I'm safe, of course."*

Bike Lanes: Good for drivers as well as cyclists

Participants who were primarily drivers said that adding bike lanes makes roads safer for drivers as well as bicyclists. Preston explained how the lack of bike lanes does a disservice to both drivers and bikers:

> *"Being a driver and driving in rush hour or just driving when there's a lot of traffic around and then being held up and you realize you're being held up by a bike is incredibly frustrating. Frustrating for me because I'm like I wish the bike had their own lane, and it's frustrating that they're forced to -- you know, bikes move slower than cars do just by nature, so it's frustrating that the traffic's already bad, it's being held up by a cyclist, and it's also frustrating that the cyclist has no other option to get where they're trying to go. So, it's like we're both -- there's a little amount of space and we're both fighting hard for it."*

However, while there was an interest in increasing access to bike lanes, participants said that bikers also carry a responsibility to follow traffic rules and to maintain safety for pedestrians. Yvette explained:

I've almost gotten ran over by a bike, you know. And I walk everywhere. And so, I definitely understand kind of that -- the fact that they are competing for space, whether that's competing with cars on the road or competing with pedestrians on the sidewalk, but then we have to acknowledge the fact -- I think someone said this earlier on the call -- it's like D.C. is but so big, so we can't go adding bike routes everywhere. But there needs to be something that is very clear about the fact that if you are going to be on bikes, you are to a certain extent acknowledging the risks that come along with that, but you can't also endanger others..."

Climate Change

Better Service Hours: Making travel options more appealing

Responding to questions about climate change, the majority of participants explained that they would rely more on transit if the service hours were more extensive. Participants specifically mentioned that they want WMATA to focus on providing more frequent service on weekends and weeknights. Participants believed that if Metrorail focused on expanding service hours and frequency of trains, people would feel like they have a reliable system that they can depend on for day-to-day activities.

Rick mentioned that the lack of reliable and frequent trains is what forces people to use Uber or Lyft:

"I also agree a little bit with [...] and what he said about regular service. Because I live along the Red line, so unreliable service is definitely like a huge thing that happens where I'm sitting at the station for 30 minutes, but I have an interview, I have to get to class, so I end up having to make the choice to either take the bus or end up taking an Uber. So that's something that I would like to change. "

Pedestrian Safety: Dark roads feel unsecure

Half of this session's participants said they wanted to be less car dependent or get rid of their car in order to walk more. However, they explained that their main concern is feeling unsafe while walking around their areas. People cited dark roads as being the main reason for feeling unsafe while walking. Marcus explained this:

"I think for environmental purposes, walking really is the way to go because you're not really -- even with the construction of a bike, you know, you still have to build it, and that still takes energy. Even though it's virtually energy-less once you use it. Walking doesn't take any energy, there's no initial investment. You need a good pair of walking shoes. But I mean, I guess the one thing that really keeps me from walking is the fact that since I've been called back to work, I work two nights a week, and as we all know, it gets dark very early in winter here and just my personal safety, even for a two-mile walk, I really don't feel that safe. I mean, I've had people follow me to the parking garage where we park our cars. You know. I mean, that was a situation where, in downtown Silver Spring, I could run. There's always cops around. I've felt like I could handle myself. But who's really looking on Philadelphia Avenue? "

Session 10: People with High School Degrees or Lower

Pseudonym	Gender	Race	Age	Location
Paul	Male	White	25-34	Takoma Park, MD
Keandra	Female	Black or African American	25-34	District of Columbia
Nina	Female	Black or African American	25-34	District of Columbia
Candice	Female	Black or African American	18-24	District of Columbia
Emmett	Male	Black or African American	25-34	District of Columbia
Amber	Female	Black or African American	25-34	District of Columbia
Tony	Female	Black or African American	25-34	District of Columbia
Molly	Female	Black or African American	25-34	District of Columbia
Keisha	Female	Black or African American	18-24	District of Columbia

Equity

Geographic Inequality: Lower-income neighborhoods get lesser services

Participants believed that the bus service in their neighborhoods in Southeast D.C. is not equal to the service that other areas in the region receive. Participants explained that the most pressing issues are buses are arriving very late, not arriving at all, or arriving with too many people. Amber explained that these issues have deeper consequences than just having to wait longer at a bus stop. For example, late buses result in people getting to work late or getting in trouble in school for picking up their children late.

Participants said that people from D.C.'s Ward 7 are already struggling to meet daily needs and when you add unreliable transportation and geographic inequity to the mix, they face additional barriers that prevent them from getting and/or keeping jobs that are still available to them. In contrast, more affluent communities continue to have reliable transportation options that gives their residents job security and access to more jobs.

Affordability: Bus costs add up

Participants said that affordability was another equity issue. The cost of using the bus with children and teenagers is something that participants said they struggle with because the fees add up. In the case of Keandra, she described a situation where she got on the bus to take her children to school but was unable to pay for all of their fares. She explained that the bus was stopped, the police were called, and she was hand-cuffed for getting on the bus and not having enough to pay it.

Keandra explained that the old paper transfers were something "that should have never been taken from the Black community." She associated the problem of late buses as an issue that particularly affects Black people in D.C., and the paper transfers allowed people

> "I don't know if you've ever been on that side of town, but if you was just – even if you're in your car, you can even witness the long lines at the bus stops and see how there's people just waiting to get on the bus, especially in the winter months like now when it's freezing cold outside. Who wants to miss a bus? I don't care if it's crowded. I need to get on to get warm."
>
> -Nina

to pay for their fixed bus rate and secure their transfer even if buses were delayed. Currently, participants explained that they have to pay more than budgeted because buses are so delayed that their waiting time exceeds the deadline of their transfers.

Participants suggested fixing the transfer problem to accommodate bus delays. But additionally, participants believe that low-income passes or passes that resemble the old flash passes would help less affluent people pay for a fixed amount of time to use the bus, budget properly, and would address the issue of having to take multiple buses because of overcrowding or delays.

Safety

Walking to Transit: Late-night fears

Participants explained that their biggest safety concern is walking to transit late at night. Specifically, participants do not feel safe in areas that do not have enough lights and that are not frequented by a lot of people. Amber explained how she decides how to handle her walk to transit:

> *"I mean, honestly, if I have to leave out at night, I will make sure that the bus stop that I go to is well lit. If it's not well lit or if it's got people around it that may be males -- a lot of males or whatever, I will purposely walk -- even if it's like an extra block to go to another bus stop that's more lit -- it's only because I'd rather be safe than sorry."*

Other participants explained that if their walk to transit does not seem safe, they prefer to ask for a ride to the bus stop or train stop or they decide to pay for an Uber or Lyft when they can afford it.

Waiting for the bus: Concerns about crowds

Participants said that insufficient services and buses arriving late become safety issues because they lead to big groups congregating at bus stops. In particular, participants from this session explained that waiting for the bus has becoming less safe for women as they face harassment from groups of people also waiting for the bus. Large crowds of people at the bus stops lead to fights, drug use and exchange, and physical altercations while people try to get to on the bus as soon as possible.

Participants made suggestions to make waiting for the bus safer. These include having a panic button that will alert Metro police of any incidents that require their presence. Additionally, to deal with stops that are located in very dark spots, participants suggested investing in solar lamps that activate at beginning of the night and get shut down during the day. Finally, they suggested that Metro police do more rounds around these stops to show that these facilities are being patrolled.

Climate Change

Not an immediate priority: Not a consideration when making personal travel choices

Similar to the session with people with low incomes, people in this session did not have explicit thoughts to share about climate change. While none of the participants questioned the validity of climate change, participants made it clear that they do not think about climate change when making their transportation choices and that they do not think climate change is a priority. During the time

allotted to discuss climate change, participants diverged the conversation to talk about bus overcrowding, reliability, and public health. The only brief explicit reference to climate change and transportation was that they would like to see more electric buses as long as this does not interfere with plans to make buses more reliable in Southeast D.C.

Session 11: Spanish-Speakers

(session conducted in Spanish)

Pseudonym	Gender	Race	Age	Location
Delia	Female	Hispanic, Latino/a/x, Spanish origin	25-34	District of Columbia
Mariana	Female	Hispanic, Latino/a/x, Spanish origin	35-44	District of Columbia
Yesenia	Female	Hispanic, Latino/a/x, Spanish origin	18-24	Montgomery County, MD
Karla	Female	Hispanic, Latino/a/x, Spanish origin	25-34	Manassas park
Rosa	Female	Hispanic, Latino/a/x, Spanish origin	25-34	Montgomery County, MD
Marta	Female	Hispanic, Latino/a/x, Spanish origin	35-44	City of Alexandria
Jorge	Male	Hispanic, Latino/a/x, Spanish origin	25-34	District of Columbia
Raul	Male	Hispanic, Latino/a/x, Spanish origin	35-44	City of Alexandria, VA
Delia	Female	Hispanic, Latino/a/x, Spanish origin	25-34	District of Columbia

Equity

Affordability: Choosing mode based on cost

Participants talked about the trade-offs of using one mode of transportation over others due to costs and affordability. They also discussed how costs impact how they plan their transportation each day. For example, on electric bikeshare, Yesenia said:

> *"I think that the cost is a bit high, in relation to the other services, like riding the bus, because it goes by the minute. So, if you do not keep a good pace, obviously not... you are going to spend like 3, 4 dollars, 5 dollars." (English translation)*
> *"Mi me parece que los costos son un poco altos, en relación con otros servicios como tomar un bus, porque es por minutos. Y si no tienes un buen ritmo, obviamente no... te vas a gastar como 3, 4 dólares, 5 dólares. (Spanish transcript)*

Others, like Karla, mentioned the costs of taking the train from the outer suburbs into D.C. She said:

> *"I also know it is a little bit hard to access transportation from Manassas Park... one has to take the train, but the cost of the train is higher. So we have the train station, but it gets a little bit harder, because of the costs."*
> *"Yo se que también se pone un poco difícil acceder al transporte, porque desde Manassas Park... pero el costo del tren es más alto. Pero tenemos como la estación del tren, pero se dificulta un poco, por cuestiones de costos."* (Spanish transcript)

Language Barriers: Difficulty getting information in Spanish

Participants expressed difficulty finding information about their routes. They also said they feel uncomfortable asking for information while speaking Spanish. Karla said:

"We know in the D.C. area there are many Spanish-speaking people. And one of the biggest challenges when I started taking the Metro was that sometimes it was hard to find out where the Metro stops were. Because, although they are announced, it is hard. First the sound system is very complicated. I do not know if it is because some Metro [cars] are newer and the sound machine is easier to understand. But also [there should be] information available for the people who are just getting started in this country or those whose language is not English. (English translation)
"Sabemos que en el área de DC hay muchas personas hispanohablantes. Y uno de los retos más grandes cuando yo empecé a usar el metro era que a veces se me dificultaba mucho ubicarme en las paradas del metro. Porque si bien las anuncian, es, es difícil primero el sonido es muy complicado. No se si es como en, en algunos metros que son más actuales como que el sonido es de una máquina y es más fácil de escucharlo, pero también que haya como información accesible para la gente que, que, está apenas iniciando en el país, o que no, no es nativa eh, con el idioma en el inglés." (Spanish transcript)

Many participants shared similar experiences while using public transportation (Metrorail and buses) and expressed a need for more information in Spanish or with Spanish-speaking workers on transit and at transit stations. A few participants said that the older population is more vulnerable due to less access or knowledge of smart phones and technology.

Safety

Signage is lacking: Confusion about what to do, how to behave

Overall, this focus group said that if people were more informed about how to behave on the roads, the roads would be safer. This led to a discussion about signage and educational tools. As an example, participants mentioned that parking in bike lanes creates stress for cyclists. One participant suggested providing more signage near bike lanes to communicate that parking is prohibited. Karla said:

"Even if we are not going on a bike or scooter, we need to respect pedestrians. And the same thing happens with the bike lanes on the roadway, I mean there are cars that do not respect that in some streets, they do not have good signs and cars park for a few minutes. Be it Uber, Uber Eats or Lyft. And they block the way. So, it goes both ways, there isn't enough education for pedestrians, drivers or the people riding bikes or scooters." (English translation)
Aunque uno vaya en bicicleta o en el scooter, uno también tiene que respetar al peatón. Y es lo mismo que a veces pasa con los carriles para bicicletas dentro de la carretera, que hay carros que no respetan eso...Entonces en algunas calles, que no está como muy bien señalizado, los eh, los carros parquean por momentos. Sea Uber, Uber Eats o Lyft. Y dejan el cami... o sea dejan el camino bloqueado. Entonces es como parte y parte de que nos está haciendo como una educación suficiente tanto para peatones, personas que manejan, o personas que van en bicicleta o en el scooter." (Spanish transcript)

Aggressive driving: Education and enforcement needed

Participants said that speeding is an ongoing safety concern for pedestrians. They said both more training signage and enforcement would make them more likely to walk, bike or use scooters more.

Participants suggested ways to improve safety on the roads for pedestrians. Speaking about times when pedestrians interact with cars, Raul suggested:

> *"There should be a place for training, so that we all learn, be it the driver, the pedestrian or anyone who drives a vehicle, any kind of vehicle. It is very important that there is technical support for each person. Both needed to take precautions, do you know what I mean?" (English translation)*
> *"Un lugar… de entrenamiento, para que todos aprendamos, ya sea el conductor, el peatón o cualquiera que maneje vehículo, cualquier clase de vehículo. Es muy importante de que el… de que hubiera un soporte técnico para cada persona. Que tengan precaución ambos."* (Spanish transcript)

Climate Change

Incentives: Suggestions for promoting environmentally friendly modes

When asked about climate change, participants shared ways in which they consider the environment in their personal lives and choices. They also talked through different strategies and incentives they would support to promote environmentally friendly modes of transportation, such as biking or closing streets for pedestrians and cyclists. Jorge said:

> *"…To extend the space for bikes would be better. And, to give a discount or an incentive, so when we can ride the bike, people tend to ride it. It would be good." (English translation)*
> *"Ampliar el espacio para las bicicletas, fuese mejor. Y dar como un descuento o un incentivo, para que en el tiempo que se pueda usar la bicicleta, se tienda más a usar. Estaría bueno."* (Spanish transcript)

Overall, the group shared a general interest in "doing their part" to support climate change initiatives and reduce carbon emissions.

Telework not a realistic option: "Not everyone has the luxury of working from home"

When asked about having the option to telework as a way to mitigate the impact on the environment, participants generally expressed disinterest because telework is not a feasible option for everyone. Karla said:

> *"Not all jobs can be performed from home. So, it would be a bit snobbish, because it depends on the job everyone has…. So, I do not think that it is a viable solution…equity-wise. Because not everybody can do this. And we saw it in the pandemic. A lot of people have the luxury to be able to stay home and take care of themselves and all of that, but there are others who cannot. Those who still have to continue to take public transportation and they have to keep going every day." (English translation)*

"Que no todos los trabajos se pueden hacer desde la casa. Entonces, eso sería un poco clasista, porque es depende del trabajo que tiene cada uno. Entonces, yo no pienso que esa sea una solución viable, una solución muy consciente ni una situación, eh... igualitaria. Porque no todos lo podrían hacer. Y se vio en la pandemia. Que muchas personas tienen, algunos se dan el lujo de quedarse en la casa y cuidarse y todo, ¡pero hay otros que no! Que igual tienen que seguir usando el transporte público y tienen que seguir yendo cada día." (Spanish transcript)

Generally, participants referred to telework as a luxury or privilege that not all individuals can benefit from, therefore they said they do not think it is a viable or long-term solution. Marianna said:

"Working from home is not for the working class, like us, who use public transportation." (English translation)
"Que el trabajar desde casa no es para la clase trabajadora como nosotros, que usamos el transporte público." (Spanish transcript)

KEY TAKEAW6AYS

TPB staff identified the following key takeaways from the focus group input. These suggestions represent potential practical actions for enhancing equity and safety, and mitigating climate change.

Equity

Transportation agencies can respond to some of the concerns of reported on equity by:
- Expanding service windows or provide alternate types of services to accommodate late-shift workers and others that don't work 9-5 hours.
- Improving reliability, frequency, and service areas for buses.
- Minimizing transportation costs to lower-income individuals, including tolls and transit costs, especially distance-based Metro fares.

Safety

Transportation agencies can respond to some of the concerns of reported on safety by:
- Recognizing that details matter, such as placement of transit stops and providing sufficient lighting around transit stops and stations
- Investing in transportation infrastructure that separates modal uses that travel at different speeds, such as protected bicycle lanes.
- Investing in infrastructure design, policy, and enforcement that limits aggressive behavior on roadways

Climate Change

Transportation agencies can respond to some of the concerns of reported on climate change by:
- Recognizing that strategies and solutions to mitigate climate change are in competition with the immediate challenges of everyday lives, therefore solutions must be realistic and made feasible to be implemented broadly.
- Improving the supply of low-carbon transportation options, including making transit more frequent, reliable, and convenient, making housing close to transit more affordable, and expanding electric vehicle infrastructure and access to electric vehicles.

NEXT STEPS

The findings from this report will be integrated into the Visualize 2045 plan update, which is scheduled for TPB approval in the spring of 2022. A variety of quotes from the report will be woven into the plan text. Coupled with forecasts and analysis, this inclusion of authentic human voices in the plan document will help to make the case that the plan's objectives are essential to the region's transportation future and in the lives of everyday people.

Beyond the approval of the plan in 2022, the input received from all the outreach conducted for the Visualize 2045 update will be valuable for the TPB's future work. The region certainly can expect that the challenges examined in these recent outreach activities— equity, safety, and climate change— will be with us for many years to come. The suggestions and opinions articulated in the recent outreach – through the survey, focus groups, and open QR code outreach – will help to establish a starting point for future long-range planning activities of the TPB.