

## Case Study: Greater Madison Metropolitan Planning Organization's Approach to Transportation Equity

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The [Greater Madison Metropolitan Planning Organization \(GMMPO\)](#) centers equity in its multidisciplinary planning efforts. The MPO strives to build lasting and meaningful relationships across communities to improve outcomes for all transportation system users in the Greater Madison area in Wisconsin. In 2020, GMMPO adopted the following mission and vision:

*“Mission: Lead the collaborative planning and funding of a sustainable and equitable transportation system for the greater Madison region.*

*Vision: A sustainable and equitable regional transportation system that connects people, places, and opportunities to achieve an exceptional quality of life for all”<sup>1</sup>.*

The MPO applies an equity lens to its planning processes, drawing on socioeconomic analysis and meaningful public engagement to prioritize “land use and transportation decisions that improve access to affordable housing, transportation options, jobs, and services for all”<sup>2</sup>. GMMPO defines equity in terms of fairness and justice in the face of present and upcoming planning projects and processes, while recognizing inequities in the system and undoing harms caused by past decisions. Instead of focusing only on equitable project and plan outcomes, GMMPO staff work to be proactive and intentional to ensure participation throughout the planning process includes perspectives and identities from all parts of the community.

### PROJECT SNAPSHOT

- The [2050 RTP](#) includes a goal dedicated to the pursuit of equity.
- The MPO weighs equity at 10-15% when determining discretionary funding allotments in its Transportation Improvement Program.
- The MPO uses socioeconomic spatial data to identify Environmental Justice areas of concern to inform its planning processes.

### IMPLEMENTATION HIGHLIGHTS

- The MPO uses real-time travel data to pinpoint service benefits and deficiencies.
- To inform its 2050 RTP, the MPO conducted focus groups in partnership with local community advocacy organizations.
- The MPO contracts with a local public engagement firm to identify innovative and intentional ways to connect with the community.

<sup>1</sup> [Connect Greater Madison 2050 Regional Transportation Plan: Executive Summary \(greatermadisonmpo.org\)](#)

<sup>2</sup>2022. Greater Madison MPO. “Our System Tomorrow: 2050, Chapter 4”.

<https://www.greatermadisonmpo.org/planning/documents/Ch-04-ConnectRTP-web.pdf>

The MPO's [Connect Greater Madison 2050 Regional Transportation Plan \(RTP\)](#) identifies equity as a primary goal. The RTP's Equity Goal describes equitable transportation planning as activities that create travel accessibility for people of all abilities, backgrounds, and travel needs with special attention to environmental justice populations.

## Background and Demographics

GMMPO is the MPO for the City of Madison as well as 34 other contiguous villages, cities, and towns in Greater Madison. The region is characterized by fast-growing employment and a growing and increasingly diverse population. While Wisconsin's state population grew 4% from 2010 to 2020, Dane County, containing Madison and other communities, grew by 15%. In the next thirty years, Dane County's population is expected to grow by 35% and add 140,000 jobs.<sup>3</sup>

There are several activities within the City of Madison supporting transportation equity:

- The City of Madison, the largest municipality within the planning area, has a Complete Green Streets policy focused on achieving equity, sustainability, and connectivity.
- The city is currently working on a comprehensive [transit network redesign](#) to increase trip frequencies and reduce travel disruptions.
- Madison has a bike share system: [Madison B-Cycle](#) that provides low-cost options to make B-Cycle more accessible.
  - In the last couple of years, the system has expanded into three new communities, allowing users to check out bikes using their Madison Public Library Card, with plans to build as many as 30 new stations in 2023-24. Twenty of these were selected for funding with federal Transportation Alternatives Program dollars by the MPO, as they will be located where they serve MPO-identified Environmental Justice areas. Bikeshare ridership continues to trend upwards in the area, especially with the bicycle fleet electrification in 2019.
  - Recently, Madison B-Cycle added [Art Bikes](#), raising awareness and funding for local social issues and employing local artists.

The MPO participates in other community mobility and accessibility initiatives such as the [Healthy Kids Collaborative](#) with the University of Wisconsin Health, the Dane County Traffic Safety Commission, and a partnership with the local public health department. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the MPO and [Public Health Madison & Dane County](#) worked together to identify transportation options to access testing and vaccine distribution sites. The pandemic underscored the essential role of transportation planning in improving communitywide health outcomes.

## Advancing Equitable Practices

GMMPO's [Environmental Justice Analysis](#) ensures the MPO's planning processes include consideration of the benefits and burdens allocated to historically disadvantaged communities. The MPO aims to improve the transit access, and broader transportation system, for historically disadvantaged

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<sup>3</sup> 2022. Greater Madison MPO. "Connect Greater Madison 2050: Regional Transportation Plan".  
<https://www.greatermadisonmpo.org/planning/documents/FullPlan-ConnectRTP-web.pdf>

communities. GMMPO planners leverage third-party data sets and qualitative research tools such as interactive maps and focus groups to distribute investments equitably across the community.

### 2050 Metropolitan Transportation Plan Focus Groups

In 2019, the MPO aimed to elevate community awareness of transportation services and programs available. To ensure an effective and intentional public involvement process for the RTP update, the MPO partnered with local organizations representing traditionally underrepresented communities to host focus groups. The MPO paid the organizations for their efforts to organize and host the focus groups and paid a stipend to all the individual participants. Host organizations provided access to computers and/or internet connection for any participants without.

The focus groups were an opportunity for community members to provide feedback on upcoming transportation plans and projects and participate more broadly in discussions on current issues. In one case, community members raised the issue of sufficient and reliable transportation to grocery stores. After the focus group concluded, the host organization identified a funding source for a vehicle to take residents to a low-cost grocery store with a wide selection of cultural foods, which has limited transit access from the neighborhood. Due to staffing and capacity constraints, the host organization has not yet pursued the vehicle purchase but expressed intention to do so once they have the staffing capacity to support the effort.

### Transportation Project and Transit Service Environmental Justice Analysis

The MPO annually reviews all projects in its Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) through an equity and environmental justice lens. The MPO's Environmental Justice Analysis is a qualitative process using spatial data to view the location of projects in previously identified areas of environmental justice populations and the benefits that might accrue to residents of those areas. The project prioritization process for the [Madison Metropolitan Area and Dane County 2023-2027 TIP](#) allocates 10-15% of a project's points toward equity. To identify its Environmental Justice areas, the MPO initially calculates two scores, Minority Score and Poverty Score, separately and then combines them to create an EJ index for each U.S. Census block group.

The MPO also conducts equity assessments across different transportation modes and services. In recent years, the MPO reviewed pedestrian and bicycle transportation-related requirements, policies, and standards in local ordinances for all the communities in its jurisdiction. They discovered that most neighborhoods without sidewalks, which pose both mobility and accessibility challenges, are also areas that historically experienced racial discrimination in real estate. Similarly, the MPO considered how optimal bicycle facilities and continuous sidewalks can be considered by communities as precursors of gentrification. The MPO drew on these findings to identify strategies to mitigate harms that result from current or predicted trends of displacement.

### Data-Driven Equitable Solutions

GMMPO identifies Environmental Justice areas using socioeconomic metrics. The metrics are spatially overlaid to determine where communities experiencing environmental, social, or economic disparities live and work. To further this effort, the MPO is partnering with the City of Madison to develop a region-specific social vulnerability index map for use across the city and the MPO's Planning Area. The MPO

also utilizes a transportation data analytics service that derives travel patterns from cell phone and connected vehicle location data. When participating in the City of Madison’s transit network redesign, the MPO leveraged this data to consider how proposed transit services align with where people go and when, and how to optimize services for underserved communities in the planning area.

To advance both safety and equity, the MPO – in partnership with the Dane County Traffic Safety Commissions’ Equity working group – evaluated disparities in traffic-related fatalities among minority groups. The MPO and its regional transportation partners plan to apply for the Federal [Safe Streets for All](#) grant to help address these and other transportation safety inequities.

## Public Participation and Stakeholder Collaboration

In addition to focus groups to help inform processes like the RTP update, GMMPO used an online interactive map as part of its public involvement efforts.

With GMMPO’s interactive map, users could place a pin indicating a question or concern related to a specific area in the region. Planners then considered the issues raised in Environmental Justice (EJ) areas and their proportionality to comments submitted in other parts of the planning area.

The MPO also recently hosted an open house to boost connection with community partners and familiarize the community with their new office location in the city. The Ho-Chunk Nation President, a leader of a Tribal nation headquartered approximately two hours outside of the city, attended the event. The touchpoint proved to be an opportunity for MPO planners and the President to establish a dialogue on how the MPO’s transportation plans, services, and programs could align with the needs of the Tribal community.

## Next Steps

Looking to the future, GMMPO plans to leverage the data resources and analysis tools at its disposal to expand the integration of equity into its planning processes. One short-term goal is to focus its travel demand model on employer and workforce resources, such as translating materials into multiple languages and increasing capacity and awareness for the Guaranteed Ride Home program. Using funding programs established through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, GMMPO plans to hire an outreach specialist to increase its capacity to engage meaningfully with all segments of the population in the region. The MPO will also continue to share resources and exchange lessons learned among its MPO peer network.

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## Resources

[Connect Greater Madison 2050 Regional Transportation Plan](#)

[2023-2027 Transportation Improvement Program \(TIP\)](#)

[Capital Area Regional Planning Commission](#)

[Regional Development Framework Report](#)

[Bicycle Transportation Plan](#)

[Greater Madison MPO Pedestrian Facility Requirements, Policies, and Street Standards](#)

[MPO Interactive Map of the Transportation Improvement Program](#)

[Snapshot – Greater Madison Telework Survey 2021](#)

[2021 Public Participation Plan](#)

[2017 Public Participation Evaluation](#)

[City Equity Improvement](#)

[City of Madison Transit Network Redesign](#)

[City of Madison Complete Green Streets](#)