

Statement of Robert D. Bullard

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on

“How are Communities of Color Impacted by the

\$300 Billion TEA-21 Reauthorization”

before

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Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and members of the Caucus, thank you for allowing me to testify on the topic of transportation equity and communities of color. Despite the heroic efforts and the monumental social and economic gains made over the decades, transportation remains a civil rights issue. Transportation touches aspect of where we live, work, play, go to school, as well as the physical and natural world. Transportation also plays a pivotal role in shaping human interaction, economic mobility, and sustainability.

Transportation provides access to opportunity and serves as a key component in addressing poverty, unemployment, and equal opportunity goals while ensuring access to education, health care, and other public services. Transportation equity is consistent with the goals and larger civil rights movement and the environmental justice movement. For millions, transportation is defined as a basic right.¹

It has been more than 108 years since the infamous *Plessy v. Ferguson* U.S. Supreme Court decision codified “separate but equal” as the law of the land. *Plessy* was about transportation equity and provided the legal basis for “Jim Crow” segregation not only in transportation but in other public services. We are now approaching the 50th anniversary of the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* decision that overturned *Plessy*. In 1955, Rosa Parks ignited the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the modern civil rights movement. Today, Rosa Parks would have a difficult time sitting on the front or back of a Montgomery bus, since the city dismantled its public bus system—that served mostly blacks and poor people.

While some progress has been made since we wrote *Just Transportation: Dismantling Race and Class Barriers to Mobility* in 1997, much remains the same. Discrimination

still places an extra “tax” on poor people and people of color who need safe, affordable, and accessible public transportation. Many of the barriers that were chronicled in *Just Transportation* have not disappeared overnight or evaporated with time.

In our new book, *Highway Robbery: Transportation Racism and New Routes to Equity*, we chronicle community leaders from New York City to Los Angeles who are demanding an end to transportation policies that aid and abet the flight of people, jobs, and development to the suburban fringe.²

Follow the transportation dollars and one can tell who is important and who is not. While many barriers to equitable transportation for low-income and people of color have been removed, much more needs to be done. Transportation spending programs do not benefit all populations equally. The lion’s share of transportation dollars is spent on roads, while urban transit systems are often left in disrepair. Most are strapped for funds. Nationally, 80 percent of all surface transportation funds is earmarked for highways and 20 percent is earmarked for public transportation.

Generally, states spend less than 20 percent of federal transportation funding on transit.³ Some states even restrict the use of the gas tax—the single largest source of transportation funding. For example, Georgia and 29 other states restrict use of the gasoline tax revenue to funding highway programs only.⁴ From 1998-2003, TEA-21 transportation spending amounted to \$217 billion. This was the “largest public works bill enacted in the nation’s history.”⁵

In the real world, all transit is not created equal. In general, most transit systems have tended to take their low-income and people of color “captive riders” for granted and concentrated their fare and service policies on attracting middle-class and affluent riders out of their cars.⁶ Moreover, transit subsidies have tended to favor investment in suburban transit and expensive new commuter bus and rail lines that disproportionately serve wealthier “discretionary riders.”

Lest anyone dismiss transportation as a tangential issue, consider that Americans spend more on transportation than any other household expense except housing. On average, Americans spend 19 cents out of every dollar earned on transportation expenses. Transportation costs ranged from 17.1 percent in the Northeast to 20.8 percent in the South—where some 54 percent of African Americans reside. Americans spend more on transportation than they do on food, education, and health care. The nation’s poorest families spend more than 40 percent of their take home pay on transportation. This is not a small point since African American households tend to earn less money than whites. Nationally, African Americans earn only \$649 per \$1,000 earned by whites.⁷ This means that the typical black household in the United States earned 35 percent less than the typical white household.

The private automobile is still the most dominant travel mode of every segment of the American population, including the poor and people of color. Clearly, private automobiles provide enormous employment access advantages to their owners. Car

ownership is almost universal in the United States with 91.7 percent of American households owning at least one motor vehicle. According to the 2001 National Household Travel Survey (NHTS), which was released in 2003, 87.6 percent of whites, 83.1 percent of Asians and Hispanics, and 78.9 percent of blacks rely on the private car to get around.⁸

Having a seven-lane freeway next door, for instance, is not much of a benefit to someone who does not even own a car. Lack of car ownership and inadequate public transit service in many central cities and metropolitan regions with high proportion of “captive” transit dependents exacerbate social, economic, and racial isolation—especially for low-income people of color residents who already have limited transportation options. Nationally, only 7 percent of white households own no car, compared with 24 percent of African American households, 17 percent of Latino households, and 13 percent of Asian-American households. African Americans are almost six times as likely as whites to use transit to get around. In urban areas, African Americans and Latinos comprise over 54 percent of transit users (62 percent of bus riders, 35 percent of subway riders, and 29 percent of commuter rail riders).

Over 88 percent of blacks live in metropolitan areas and 53.1 percent live inside central cities. About 60 percent of blacks live in the 10 metropolitan areas. The metropolitan areas with the largest black population include New York (2.3 million), Chicago (1.0 million), Detroit (0.7 million), Philadelphia (0.6 million), Houston (0.5 million), Baltimore (0.4 million), Los Angeles (0.4 million), Memphis (0.4million), Washington, DC (0.3 million), and New Orleans (0.3 million). Nearly 60 percent of transit riders are served by the ten largest urban transit systems and the remaining 40 percent by the other 5,000 transit systems.

In *Sprawl City: Race, Politics and Planning in Atlanta* (2000), my colleagues and I documented that government-subsidized sprawl has substantial equity and civil rights implications. Suburban sprawl is fueled by the “iron triangle” of finance, land use planning, and transportation service delivery. Sprawl-fueled growth is widening the gap between the ‘have’ and ‘have-nots.’ Suburban sprawl has clear social and environmental effects. The *social effects* of sprawl include concentration of urban core poverty, closed opportunity, limited mobility, economic disinvestment, social isolation, and urban/suburban disparities that closely mirror racial inequities. The *environmental effects* of suburban sprawl include urban infrastructure decline, increased energy consumption, automobile dependency, threats to public health and the environment, including air pollution, flooding, climate change, and threats to farm land and wildlife habitat.⁹

Many jobs have shifted to the suburbs and communities where public transportation is inadequate or nonexistent. The exodus of low-skilled jobs to the suburbs disproportionately affects central-city residents, particularly people of color, who often face more limited choice of housing location and transportation in growing areas. Between 1990 and 1997, jobs on the fringe of metropolitan areas grew by 19 percent versus 4 percent job growth in core areas. While many new jobs have are being created in the suburbs, the majority of job opportunities for low-income workers are still located in

central cities.¹⁰

Suburbs are increasing their share of office while central cities see their share declining.¹¹ The suburban share of the metropolitan office space is 69.5 percent in Detroit, 65.8 percent in Atlanta, 57.7 percent in Washington, DC, 57.4 percent in Miami, and 55.2 percent in Philadelphia. Getting to these suburban jobs without a car is next to impossible. It is no accident that Detroit leads in suburban “office sprawl.” Detroit is also the most segregated big city in the United States and the only major metropolitan area without a regional transit system. Detroit is the Motor City. Only about 2.4 percent of metropolitan Detroiters use transit to get to work.

Transportation-related sources account for over 30 percent of the primary smog-forming pollutants emitted nationwide and 28 percent of the fine particulates. Vehicle emissions are the main reasons 121 Air Quality Districts in the U.S. are in noncompliance with the 1970 Clean Air Act’s National Ambient Air Quality Standards. Over 140 million Americans, 25 percent of whom are children, live, work, and play in areas where air quality does not meet national standards.¹² Emissions from cars, trucks, and buses cause 25-51 percent of the air pollution in the nation’s nonattainment areas. Transportation related emissions also generate more than a quarter of the greenhouse gases.¹³

Improvements in transportation investments and air quality are of special significance to African Americans and other people of color who are more likely to live in areas with reduced air quality when compared with whites. National Argonne Laboratory researchers discovered that 57 percent of whites, 65 percent of African Americans, and 80 percent of Latinos lived in the 437 counties that failed to meet at least one of the EPA ambient air quality standards.¹⁴ A 2000 study from the American Lung Association shows that children of color are disproportionately represented in areas with high ozone levels.¹⁵ Additionally, 61.3 percent of Black children, 69.2 percent of Hispanic children and 67.7 percent of Asian-American children live in areas that exceed the 0.08 ppm ozone standard, while only 50.8 percent of white children live in such areas.

Air pollution from vehicle emissions causes significant amounts of illness, hospitalization, and premature death. A 2002 study in *Lancet* reports a strong causal link between ozone and asthma.¹⁶ Ground-level ozone may exacerbate health problems such as asthma, nasal congestions, throat irritation, respiratory tract inflammation, reduced resistance to infection, changes in cell function, loss of lung elasticity, chest pains, lung scarring, formation of lesions within the lungs, and premature aging of lung tissues.¹⁷

Air pollution claims 70,000 lives a year, nearly twice the number killed in traffic accidents.¹⁸ A 2001 CDC report, *Creating a Healthy Environment: The Impact of the Built Environment on Health*, points a finger at transportation and sprawl as major health threats.¹⁹ Although it is difficult to put a single price tag on the cost of air pollution, estimates range from \$10 billion to \$200 billion a year.²⁰ Asthma is the number one reason for childhood emergency room visits in most major cities in the country. The hospitalization rate for African Americans is 3 to 4 times the rate for whites. African Americans are three times more likely than whites to die from asthma.²¹

Getting sick is complicated for the nation's uninsured. Blacks and Hispanics are most at risk of being uninsured. Blacks and Hispanics now comprise 52.6 percent of the 43 million Americans without health insurance. Nearly one-half of working-age Hispanics (46%) lacked health insurance for all or part of the year prior to the survey, as did one-third of African Americans (30%). In comparison one-fifth of whites and Asian Americans (21% and 20%, respectively) ages 18-64 lacked coverage for all or part of the year.²²

Transportation and energy security are also linked. Transportation energy accounts for about half of world oil demand and road vehicles use over 70 percent of transportation energy consumption. In addition to health and environment reasons for the U.S. to move our transportation beyond oil to more secure and sustainable alternative fuels, there are compelling energy security and economic strength reasons to invest in clean fuels technology. The U.S. has over 217 million cars, buses, and trucks that consume 67 percent of the nation's oil. Transportation-related oil consumption in the U.S. has risen 43 percent since 1975. The United States accounts for almost one-third of the world's vehicles. With just five percent of the world's population, Americans consume more than 25 percent of the oil produced worldwide.²³ More important, almost 60 percent of our oil comes from foreign sources.

Conclusion

Transportation justice deals with benefits and costs. All communities have not received the same benefits from transportation advancements and investments. In addition, some of our transportation policies have distributed the costs and externalities at the lower end of the socioeconomic spectrum and exacerbated social inequities. Some transportation projects cut wide paths through low-income and people of color neighborhoods, physically isolated residents from their institutions and businesses, disrupted once-stable communities, displaced thriving businesses, contributed to urban sprawl, subsidized infrastructure decline, created traffic gridlock, and subjected residents to elevated risks from accidents, noise, spills, and explosions from vehicles carrying hazardous chemicals and other dangerous materials.

The environmental justice movement has set out clear goals of eliminating unequal enforcement of the nation's environmental, public health, housing, employment, land use, civil rights, and transportation laws. Transportation is a key ingredient in any organization's plan to build economically viable and sustainable communities. State DOTs and MPOs have a major responsibility to ensure that their programs, policies, and practices do not discriminate against or adversely and disproportionately impact people of color and the poor.

Policy Recommendations

Transportation Equity Act of the 21st Century (TEA-21). Build on, preserve, and strengthen the environmental, health, air quality, equity, and historic preservation

framework and provisions of TEA-21. TEA-21 renewal will need to address improved performance and accountability, mobility and choices, safety, economic prosperity, energy efficiency, and new transportation investments that meet the needs and challenges of creating healthy, livable and just communities.

Public Participation. Ensure greater stakeholder participation and public involvement to receive effective transportation decision making. The statewide transportation agencies and MPOs must design and implement MPO public involvement strategies with community-based organizations to identify minority and low-income populations, their concerns, and facilitate their involvement into transportation decision making.

Disproportionate and Adverse Impacts. Ensure the use performance measures to assess equity impacts (benefits and burdens) of state DOTs and MPOs transportation planning, investment decisions, and policies impact on Title VI protected classes, minority populations, and low-income populations.

Research and Evaluation. Improve research, data collection, and assessment techniques due to disparities that exist when it comes to transportation benefits. Incorporate an automated mapping system (Geographical Information System) that joins socioeconomic data with transportation plans.²⁴

Interagency Cooperation and Planning. Promote interagency cooperation in transportation planning, development, and program implementation to achieve livable, healthy, and sustainable communities. An interagency approach offers great promise in addressing social equity and environmental justice concerns. Solutions for many of these local, regional, and state transportation problems will require several agencies working together with the public.

Environmental Justice and Certification Review. Incorporate environmental justice as a benchmark for MPO recertification to ensure that compliance of federal funds for transportation projects include public input and public involvement in the transportation decision making process.²⁵

Environmental Justice Planning Team. Create more environmental justice planning teams similar to the one formed by the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) which consists of stakeholders representing business, environmental and community-based organizations as well as civic groups, universities, and governmental agencies²⁶ to provide guidance on the development of regional transportation plans.

New Guidelines for Financial Disclosure for Transportation Planning. Encourage MPOs to develop new guidelines in publicizing their transportation improvement program documents. MPOs, DOTs and the FHWA need to create a common system of project tracking and data-sharing²⁷ among themselves and with community stakeholders.

Employment Transportation Projects Partnerships. Implement employment transportation projects²⁸ that are community-based and consist of training and educating

community residents for transportation jobs and conduct transportation job fairs in low-income minority communities because they are transit dependent and rely on others for their mobility.

Baseline Assessment Tools. There is a need for increased knowledge in the development of improved baseline transportation equity assessments that estimate current levels of inaccessibility and adverse impacts; improved mobility assessment methods; air pollution and noise models that are more capable of micro-scale (neighborhood analysis); more effective methods of reaching affected populations and gauging neighborhood-level priorities regarding elements needing preservation or enhancement; better predictive approaches for estimating trip geography and travel desires of low-income populations and minority populations in specific situations; location analysis of public and private facilities that take into account protected populations' abilities to conduct their daily activities; and improved techniques for communicating probable impact, positive and negative, of contemplated transportation system changes.²⁹

Clean Fuel. There is an urgent need to move the nation's transportation systems away from its current over-dependence on oil.³⁰ Research needs to be conducted to determine what types of regulatory reform is needed to remove the obstacles to transitioning toward a non-oil based transportation systems. Federal and state governments need to serve as a catalyst for promoting alternative fuel such as natural gas, fuel cell systems, and renewable hydrogen. An interagency approach is needed since no one federal agency (i.e., EPA, DOT, DOE, HHS, etc.) can address the issue alone. New government incentives and funding are needed to accelerate the deployment of clean fuel vehicle and infrastructure enhancements for transit, government vehicle fleets, delivery trucks, including garbage trucks, taxis, airport vehicles, school buses, and others. Over seventy cities in the U.S. are using natural-gas buses in their fleet. Grant, assistance, and other incentives are also needed to promote public and private sector partnerships and alternative fuel and hydrogen vehicle training and certification. The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) has a major role in public education and outreach efforts need to be expanded.

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Endnotes

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