



THINK: VIRTUAL INFRASTRUCTURE FORUM Executive Summary | Nov. 18, 2020

Ensuring Equitable Transportation in the Twin Cities Region

On Nov. 18, 2020, nearly 100 transportation stakeholders representing state and local agencies, businesses, nonprofits and communities serving the Minneapolis/St. Paul region gathered via Zoom for an important conversation about achieving a more equitable transportation network for all the region's citizens. The event was hosted by **Tom Sorel**, Minnesota office leader and vice president for HNTB Corp. (Tom served previously as former commissioner, Minnesota Department of Transportation, and former director, South Dakota Department of Transportation.) The panel was moderated by **Keith Baker**, managing director for Reconnect Rondo, Inc. Panelists included:

- **Kenya McKnight-Ahad**, founder and president, Black Women's Wealth Alliance
- **Rep. Frank Hornstein**, Minnesota House of Representatives, chair, Transportation Finance and Policy Division
- **Veronica Burt**, community development consultant, 600 Strategies, Inc.
- **Marvin Anderson**, executive director, Rondo Center of Diverse Expression
- **Ronnie Hakim**, senior vice president, national transit market sector leader, HNTB Corp. (former managing director New York Metropolitan Transportation Authority)

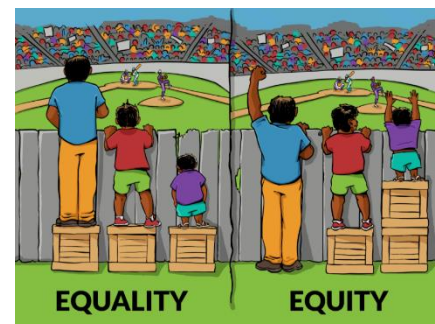
A recorded video of the 90-minute panel discussion is available online [here](#). A summary of the conversation's key points follows:

Reality check: inequities entrenched in Minnesota

Baker framed the discussion with the example of Rondo, the African American community in St. Paul demolished by Interstate 94 construction and the restorative movement underway there now. Reconnect Rondo aims to reverse racial disparities in Minnesota with a revitalized African American cultural enterprise district in St. Paul connected by a community land bridge. Baker also highlighted glaring inequities confronting transportation decision makers and stakeholders today. When it comes to affordability, the economy, quality of life and other metrics, for example, Minnesota is the second-best place to live in the country. But it ranks 50th when it comes to racial disparities in education, employment and healthcare. In the epicenter of nationwide social unrest after the murder of George Floyd, the region's transportation leaders face a renewed urgency - and opportunity - to better understand how the systems, tools, processes and resources of transportation policy making can be better leveraged to achieve a more equitable transportation network that advances prosperity for all.

Different definitions of equity, but a common goal

Panelists offered similar but nuanced interpretations of equity, defining it as unique to each community and the situations they face, as the division of resources based on fairness and justice and as equal access to mobility. It is about "mobility justice" and beginning from a place of fairness that ensures all users of roads, transit and any other mode obtain the same quality of life outcomes. Minnesota is there philosophically, but not in its implementation.



Time to visit the basement and repair the foundation

Transportation policy making institutions need to do more than trainings, revise procedures and host overdue conversations like this one to achieve mobility justice. Equity champions who have been down this road before feel a sense of process fatigue. To overcome generations of inertia and a legacy of inequitable decisions, institutions must take a hard look at how and why decisions are made in order to ensure transportation initiatives deliver more equitable outcomes. Panelist Marvin Anderson likened the situation to home repairs. Replacing the windows, painting the porch and tidying up the shrubs deliver better curb appeal, but fail to address problems with the home's foundation. Only by courageously illuminating and carefully examining the basement can threatening structural issues be identified and addressed. Transportation institutions, working with stakeholders across the communities they impact, must seize the moment to do so.

The paradigm is shifting

Inequities, in transportation and other public policies, continue to hold back minority communities, especially African Americans. The courage of advocates on the panel and their allies, however, along with approaches to new projects that demand community input, are beginning to turn the page. Social unrest in the Twin Cities and across the country has shined an intense spotlight on institutional racism and resulting inequities. It is pushing elected office holders, career policy makers and transportation planners to look in the mirror and reflect on their roles with transportation systems, processes, tools and resources and to explore new ways to bring the communities they serve to the decision-making table. By seizing the moment, the Twin Cities' community of transportation stakeholders can come together and make a long-term commitment to move forward, examine the basement and restore a foundation that supports an equitable future.

A cross section of the Twin Cities' transportation community

The THINK Forum's nearly 100 attendees represented the many different facets of the region's community of transportation stakeholders:

- Business - 9 attendees
- Community - 12 attendees
- Government - 42 attendees
- Nonprofit - 14 attendees
- Transportation - 15 attendees

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