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Inequities in Urban Mobility in Portland: Understanding Community Vulnerability and Prospects for Livable Neighborhoods

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Thanks to:

• Research Team: Emma Deppa, Raquel Nasser, Nate Rochester, Kyla Tompkins, Santiago Mendez

• Lora Lillard at the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability

• The Institute for Sustainable Solutions

• A note: research in progress; descriptive findings
Research Focus

Evolution of Project: From “spokes” to increase use in the Central City to an emphasis on better understanding how people use facilities in their own neighborhoods.

Research Questions:
• What might increase active transportation outside of downtown?
• What mobility barriers persist in N/NE/ SE Portland?
• How might the city amplify ongoing efforts in different neighborhoods?
The Green Loop

- The Green Loop is a 6-Mile walking and biking Path concept for Portland’s central city.

- City of Portland’s Bureau of Planning and Sustainability: Economic and Equity Analyses

Image from Bureau of Planning and Sustainability’s Concept Report: http://www.portlandoregon.gov/bps/article/478158
Climate Change and Neighborhood Livability

• Portland’s Climate Action Plan sets an objective for 2030 calling for vibrant neighborhoods in which 90% of Portland residents can easily walk or bicycle to meet all basic daily, non-work needs, as a means of reducing carbon emissions and increasing neighborhood livability.

• In pursuit of this goal, the city has made efforts to make the 20-minute neighborhood accessible for all.

• However as of 2015, 40 percent of Portlanders lived in neighborhoods that lacked access to the goods and services that would fulfill this objective.

8 Focus Groups
- Kenton
- Cully (2)
- Powellhurst-Gilbert
- Montavilla
- Hazelwood-Centennial (2)
- Lents
Research Approach

• Focus Groups and Community Mapping

• Research sites: Areas of N/NE and SE either experiencing gentrification or at increased risk.

• Recruitment: Partnerships with local non-profit organization AND recruitment of diverse participants via face-to-face and online outreach.
Community Engagement & Outreach

• Recruitment via face-to-face outreach online, but also:

• Partnerships with local organizations
  • Community facilitation training
  • Community bike ride

• Additional resources
Focus Group Participants

Race/Ethnicity (N=86)

- Black: 18
- Hispanic: 34
- Other: 10
- White: 24

Income (N=73)

- $10k or less: 25
- $10k to $19k: 14
- $20k to $39k: 18
- $40k+: 16
Focus Group Participants

**Age (N=80)**

- 18 to 34: 24
- 35 to 54: 38
- 55 and over: 18

**Educational Attainment (N=74)**

- No HS/GED: 15
- HS/GED: 17
- Some college: 20
- Assoc.: 12
- Bachelor: 4
- Graduate: 4
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<tr>
<th>Neighborhood</th>
<th>Non-White</th>
<th>4YR Degrees</th>
<th>HHI under 20k</th>
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<td>44%</td>
<td>16%</td>
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Mapping Activity

- Demographic Questionnaire coded to “sticky dots”
- Questions:
  - Where do you go in a typical week? Places you avoid?
  - What makes it harder for you to get where you need to go?
  - Barriers to Downtown
Focus Group Discussion

• Large focus groups:
  • Neighborhood emphasis
  • Barriers to getting where you need to go
  • What you like about where you live?
  • Perceptions of Central City investments

• *Data Analysis*: Inductive Coding for themes in Dedoose. Collaborative workshop format with research assistants.
Demographic Differences In Mobility

Violin graphs, with boxplots, for gender.

Density (share of sample) for gender breakdown and coverage areas.
Demographic Differences In Mobility
Where Do People Go?

• Of the 370 sticky dots placed on locations people reported traveling to (within our study area), 42 points (placed by 27 individuals) were on the West side of the Willamette River.

• This means that 88.6 percent of reported travel destinations in a typical week are on the east side of the Willamette River.

More than two-thirds of participants did not report travelling downtown in a typical week.
Barriers to Downtown Travel

• Traffic Congestion
• Affordability: Parking & public transit
• Biking Infrastructure
• Safety concerns

• “I hate paying for parking [group chuckling with her]...Like I would seriously rather park on the East side and walk across or something like that. I hate just paying for parking. It’s finding parking, also.”

• “[The city is not] consistent with the bike lanes. Downtown gets a lot of love for the bike lanes but hardly anywhere else...”

• “It’s kind of tricky to do a bike and bus, because the buses usually only have two bike racks. So if those are full, you’re stuck waiting for the next bus. Or you’re just stuck. So I mean that’s a barrier for me, because I would like to bus and bike. But I know there’s areas where I can’t do that.”
Barriers to Mobility

• Infrastructure:
  • Lack of sidewalks
  • Lack of lighting and shelter at transit stops
  • Inadequate bike facilities (poorly connected, poorly maintained)
  • Public transit that isn’t frequent or affordable

• Respondent 9: “There’s actually one spot that I walk everyday on Foster. And there’s no sidewalks. And it’s so sketchy. And it’s just a short amount of time. But I feel so scared when I’m like walking on that because I’m so close to traffic. And, you know, it’s before the sun comes up, you know. So it’s dark.”

• Respondent 3: “Sidewalks aren’t really an issue because there aren’t any [laughing]... My wife is blind with a cane. And it’s pretty hard to navigate around there when everything looks the same. So that’s a big issue for her.”
Barriers to Mobility

• Infrastructure:
  • Lack of sidewalks
  • Lack of lighting and shelter at transit stops
  • Inadequate bike facilities (poorly connected, poorly maintained)
  • Public transit that isn’t frequent or affordable

• “Nearby where I live, my daughter walks home from school, which is on 128th, in between Ramona and Foster. And there are no sidewalks for her to walk there. So it’s like really concerning for me. I have to come out and make sure she’s not going to get hit by a car because they kind of go fast, even though there are bumps.”
Barriers to Mobility

• Infrastructure:
  • Lack of sidewalks
  • Lack of lighting and shelter at transit stops
  • Inadequate bike facilities (poorly connected, poorly maintained)
  • Public transit that isn’t frequent or affordable

• “So I can get off bus 20 on 122nd and Stark. And I have to wait another thirty, thirty-five minutes for bus 71. And it’s not in the safest place. Like, they have no lights surrounding their bus stop leaving it very like...I don’t feel safe.”

• “I ride my bike quite a lot and have the same troubles as walkers. It’s kind of frightening on the main streets. Like one right out here, coming up from that way, I don’t know if there’s a dedicated bike lane on 122nd. But even if there is, it’s right next to somebody who’s doing forty or forty-five, it’s kind of nerve-wracking.”
Barriers to Mobility

• Cultural Differences:
  • Language barriers
  • Discrimination

• “I’ve noticed that on the MAX they speak both Spanish and English and I think that that similarly, bus stops should be said in both Spanish and English on the bus because there are people that are recent immigrants that don’t yet speak English.”

• “I was leaving the store right across the street and an American lady came walking by me and started to signal for the bus to stop. The bus stop was where I was standing. So the bus stopped for her. And then when I crossed the street to also get on the bus, since the bus driver saw a Mexican person running to get on the bus, she didn’t stop. It’s something like discrimination for us Hispanics. Not all, some bus drivers are really nice, but some are really mean. They prefer their own race.”
Barriers to Mobility

• Traffic Congestion
• Transit Centers and Stops
• Affordability

• “122nd and Burnside, that transit station like we were talking before. Like, I won’t even go to that platform, which is sad because that’s the one I used to go to when I was a kid. But now I don’t feel safe there.”

• “I look at [public transit] as another social deterrent...Like she said, you have a Fred Meyer. But Fred Meyers is a lot higher. So you have to go to Winco. And when you’re looking at those things [fares] and you’re on the bus and it’s cold and you have kids and you’re going to say, ‘hmm, I’m not going to go to the store.’ So you have this little convenience store...And you’re losing a lot more than you’re actually gaining. So I mean, I think that, me, I think that it’s intentionally designed like that.”
“Like I said... I feel like downtown Portland gets a lot of love already. And I know that there are needs, particularly Greeley [Avenue]. And I know the City is aware of that. And why that’s not prioritized is not clear to me.” [Group agreement]

Respondent 9: “They kind of need to stop paying attention to [downtown].” [Lots of agreement] [Group laughing]

Research Facilitator: “So investing in the Central City is not necessarily going to encourage you to go down there more?”

Respondent 3: “No.”

Respondent 5: “It’s just going to piss us off.”

Respondent 8: “It’s just magnifying inequity in the city. The city is so inequitable. It really is.”
Visions for the Future of Portland

• Public Engagement Processes:
  • “[I’d like] for it to not be so bureaucratic. I know that’s like, needed. But it kind of can make you feel like what you want is not being heard. And then you have to do petition and do all this stuff. Like, why can’t it be like we live here, hear us? Something needs to change. And then it just gets done. So, that’s a little bit intimidating. And I think it makes people not ask.”

• Economic Investments:
  • “With The Portland Development Commission or Business Association and...the urban core...It’s like, ‘You did, Guys, Congratulations- you revitalized downtown Portland.’ Now, you need to start giving loans...like, they need to be doing micro-loans on a 136th and building neighborhood commercial pockets out here.”
Visions for the Future of Portland

• Local, Neighborhood Investments:
  • Respondent 2: “I think it’s time to get away from just funneling people from outside into the Center and back again...”
  • Respondent 8: “Well, and that also sort of goes against what my understanding of planning and sustainability promotes, which is living in the neighborhood...or living fully in the neighborhood that you call home.”

Image: Emily Jan/ The Oregonian
Twenty Minute Neighborhoods for All

• Local, Neighborhood Investments:
  • “They’re trying to build up the neighborhood out here... maybe if that kind of stuff they’re doing in the bike lanes, on that side of town [downtown], if it was out here, then I think the environment would change... I don’t think there would be as much crime. I think people would be more aware...They can’t just...come driving down here real fast anymore...It needs to change. It’s changing...So, in order for it to change, the city is going to have to do something about the bike lanes, this street...”

• “Things can change. People are what changes things...You know what I’m saying? So it takes more than one person to say something. You guys we have to come together.”
Summary

• More than 2/3 of participants in this study—many of whom are low-income and racial/ethnic minorities—did not report traveling downtown in a typical week.

• There are demographic differences in patterns of mobility.

• Participants in this study reported multiple barriers to daily mobility, including a lack of safe infrastructure and issues of affordability.

• Participants highlighted ongoing concerns about the inequitable distribution of city resources.

• Residents in North and outer Southeast Portland want their neighborhoods to thrive; community members have clear ideas about how to enhance livability, while also maintaining economically and racially diverse communities.
Implications

• This study suggests that significant challenges remain in pursuit of the Portland Climate Action Plan’s vision: barriers to “complete neighborhoods” are particularly acute for low-income and minority residents living in North and outer Southeast Portland.

• Individuals represented in this study have limited accessibility to safe and walkable streets, lack access to robust public transit lines, and face a number of cumulative disadvantages (such as rising rents) that place them farther afield from the vision set forth in the Portland Plan.

• Planning for the future requires fuller attention to the demographic and spatial inequities in Portland.
What’s Next

• Development and Analysis:
  • Inequality in mobility
  • Mobility justice
  • Mixed methods approach

• Link to final report on Amy’s PSU Sociology department webpage
Questions?