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ProGov21 is a shared resource for progressive local policy makers and advocates alike. Operated and maintained by COWS, a national think-and-do tank based at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, ProGov21 offers a fully searchable digital library of progressive policies, practices, and other resources for 21st century local government.
What's the Problem & How are Progressives Addressing It

Local transit systems around the country face a series of challenges, many of which have been worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic. These include aging infrastructure, decreasing public transportation rideshare, increasing congestion, safety issues for pedestrians and bikers, and the need to address carbon emissions. Now more than ever, local governments need robust, progressive transportation policies.

With careful and intentional planning, local governments can create thriving transportation infrastructure that increases access to safe, high-quality mobility options, reduces air pollution, and advances equity. To realize these goals, local governments must address the following issues:

- **Access** – How is transportation providing access to jobs and services for everyone?
- **Safety** – How can we make transportation safer for bikers and pedestrians, and how can we address issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic?
- **Environment** – How can we reconfigure transportation systems to reduce environmental impacts?

Policy tools focusing on access, safety, and environmental impacts of the transportation sector are central in promoting an equitable and sustainable future for our communities.

Available Local Levers & Current Reforms

State and local governments can influence transportation policy by changing how they spend their money and redesigning transportation infrastructure to improve access to jobs and services, increase safety, and reduce negative environmental impacts from travel. Generally, state departments of transportation control most of the highways and major roads, while cities and towns are usually...
People spend much less time on public transportation than they do in the workplace or at home. Public transportation vehicles tend to be better ventilated than indoor spaces like offices and restaurants. People talk less on transit than they do in more social venues like restaurants or bars, releasing fewer respiratory particles into the air.

Modern mitigation practices, individuals will be able to make less/shorter travels, ultimately reducing their carbon footprint and improving their health.

Combating COVID has brought about new challenges for transportation systems. There is evidence that public transportation has not presented an unreasonable risk to public health, as long as proper precautions are taken. Neighborhood density and public transit usage are not strongly correlated with COVID transmission, in part because:

- People spend much less time on public transportation than they do in the workplace or at home.
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- People talk less on transit than they do in more social venues like restaurants or bars, releasing fewer respiratory particles into the air.

The American Public Transportation Association has put together a series of best practices for addressing COVID, including information on face coverings, protecting transit personnel, cleaning and sanitizing transportation facilities, limiting touchpoints and more.

More traditional transportation safety concerns also need to be addressed. Transportation design has routinely ignored the safety of bikers and pedestrians, younger and elderly people, and people with disabilities. The Center for Transportation Studies report “Personal Safety and Transit” outlines how transit environments can be...
designed to ensure the safety of users in the Twin Cities area. Distributing transportation investments fairly across communities and adopting comprehensive transportation policies at the local, regional, and state level (i.e., Complete Streets, Seattle Bicycle Master Plan) will result in streets that are engineered around populations with lower mobility and income, leading to safer and more equitable transportation for entire communities. Furthermore, communities can also commit to “Vision Zero”, a collaborative campaign between policymakers, public health professionals, and local traffic planners and engineers that seeks to eliminate traffic injuries and fatalities. Our featured ordinance, adopted by the Sacramento City Council, serves as a model example of a Vision Zero strategy in action.

Access to transportation services varies widely on race, class, and socioeconomic status. Local governments should prioritize equitable access to transportation. TransitCenter has published a report addressing how current transit practices discourage marginalized groups from riding. Both SSTI and the Center for Transportation Studies have produced recent reports examining how accessibility varies across cities. Other organizations have built on these reports on the data presented in these reports: the Center for Neighborhood Technology’s “Equity and Smart Mobility” explores smart mobility services and transportation access within various U.S. cities, and a similar report from the Greenlining Institute introduces a mobility equity framework aimed at supporting communities of color.

Progressive transportation policy must also address climate change. Mass transit reduces emissions to the extent it replaces single occupancy vehicle (SOV) miles, but the electrification of the transportation sector would reduce fossil fuel consumption even more, further limiting greenhouse gas emissions. Smart Growth America recently published two documents pertaining to such practices, entitled “Driving Down Emissions” and “A Green New Deal for City and Suburban Transportation.” Manhattan’s implementation of “congestion pricing,” where vehicles entering Manhattan on or below 60th Street will need to pay a charge, will ultimately reduce traffic volumes and limits the emissions cars will release in the area. Additionally, the transit demand mitigation strategies discussed above can reduce emissions by subsidizing bikeshare or carshare services and improving walking, biking, and transit infrastructure. Through the practice of modern mitigation, individuals will be able to make less/shorter travels, ultimately reducing their carbon footprint.

**Taking it to the Next Level**

**Coupling Transportation and Housing Policy:** Transportation policy can be co-created with housing policy to maximize the effectiveness of transportation infrastructure and ensure access to education, recreational opportunities, high-quality food, and sources of employment. Low-income households spend on average 30 percent of their
income on transportation, and these costs drive eviction; however, low-income communities with access to reliable lower-cost transportation options (such as public transportation) experience lower eviction rates.

**Cargo-Oriented Development:** Cargo Oriented Development (COD) refers to the development of communities that are nodes of both freight transportation and centers of employment in logistics and manufacturing businesses. When high quality transit services are nearby, employers have access to a broader workforce and the site has potential for supportive retail, office, and housing, allowing the collision of COD and transit-oriented development (TOD). The Center for Neighborhood Technology’s 2013 report documents case studies of civic and economic development organizations and local governments collaborating with private freight companies to realize the potential of COD for sustainable development. Case studies reveal that COD collaborations improve both the economies and quality of life at the community and regional level.

**Live-where-you-work policies:** Like cargo-oriented development, live-near-your-work policies encourage shorter commutes and lower housing and transportation costs, reaping benefits for employees, employers, communities, and stakeholders. A 2012 report by Policy Matters Ohio documents the adoption of live-near-your-work policies by cities, states, universities, and hospitals. These programs provide direct financial assistance to eligible employees, promoting shorter commute times and lower housing costs, and improved employee morale and productivity with lower levels of turnover. On the community-level, live-where-you-work policies can promote better air quality, decrease traffic congestion, and lead to less urban sprawl.
Allies, Comrades, & Helpers

The Center for Neighborhood Technology (CNT)
CNT has resources for progressive local government in the arenas of transportation, land use, equity, and economic development.

The Greenlining Institute
A California-based organization dedicated to building a just economy that is cooperative, inclusive, sustainable, participatory, fair, and health. As an advocate for progressive change, The Greenlining Institute addresses the root causes of racial, economic, and environmental inequities within communities of color in California and across the country.

TransitCenter
TransitCenter is a nonprofit that works to develop frequent, fast, reliable public transit in order to make cities more just and environmentally sustainable.

Center for Transportation Studies (CTS)
CTS is a catalyst for transportation research, education, and community engagement.

Smart Growth America
Smart Growth America, which includes SSTI and the National Complete Streets Coalition, has resources to help local governments develop Complete Streets policies.

The Mayor’s Innovation Project (MIP)
MIP has resources around how to reduce carbon emissions through transportation policies, parking, and bike infrastructure.

Strong Towns
Strong Towns is an international North American movement centered around improving communities using bottom-up methods. They empower community members to influence policy around transportation and commercial infrastructure.

We continue the conversation around this Transportation Roadmap on ProGov21’s Podcast. Our Transit episode features expert Eric Sundquist from the State Smart Transportation Initiative (SSTI).

Listen to our podcast on, our website, Spotify, Apple Music, or Amazon Music.