ARTS, CULTURE & MOBILITY: ADDRESSING PARTICIPATION BARRIERS THROUGH TRANSPORTATION EQUITY

Flannery Winchester

Major Paper submitted to the Faculty of Goucher College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Arts Administration

2019
ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: ARTS, CULTURE & MOBILITY: ADDRESSING PARTICIPATION BARRIERS THROUGH TRANSPORTATION EQUITY

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Degree and Year: Master of Arts in Arts Administration, 2019

Major Paper Directed by: Michael Crowley

Welch Center for Graduate and Professional Studies

Goucher College

Inequities in transportation policy and infrastructure pose barriers to arts and cultural participation for individuals in communities with poor transit options. Arts organizations can address transportation barriers through civically engaged programs and initiatives that facilitate community dialogue around transportation, facilitate community engagement with transportation planning processes, connect artists with transportation design, and identify opportunities within transportation projects as catalysts for enhancing existing cultural assets in their communities. This paper presents a brief history of transportation policy in the United States, discusses the barriers to arts participation that current transportation infrastructure and policy present to individuals, and provides
examples of how arts organizations and groups have taken on roles in addressing transportation challenges in their communities.
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This paper is dedicated to my parents, Jon and Melynda, who are a constant source of love, wisdom and encouragement.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My sincere thanks to the members of the Goucher College Masters of Arts in Arts Administration faculty, who have continually inspired and challenged my thinking for the last three years. In particular, Michael Crowley, who advised this paper and offered constant guidance and support throughout this process. Thank you, Greg Lucas, for pushing us all to be better writers and communicators. Kimberly Dimond, thank you for your insight and perspective, which were enormously helpful in shaping this paper. To Ramona Baker, we are incredibly lucky to have such an astoundingly kind, passionate, and generous leader. Thank you for making this program such an impactful experience.

Thank you to my cohort—Kate, Rebecca, Naomi, Tylor, and Kevin—for all of your brilliant ideas, insights, and conversations these past three years.

Thank you to my family, Melynda, Jon, Savannah and Madelyn, for your unending love and encouragement, and for inspiring me by example. I am so lucky to have you. Matt Sullivan, thank you cheering me on and for making every challenge feel significantly more fun.
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Introduction

Over the last several decades, numerous reports have been published regarding arts participation patterns and tendencies in the United States. One of the most recent of these studies, *When Going Gets Tough: Motivations and Barriers Affecting Arts Attendance*, was released by the National Endowment for the Arts in 2015 and uses data collected through a 2012 General Social Survey to report on findings regarding both motivations for attendance in a variety of benchmark arts events as well as barriers for interested non-attendees at arts events. The report maps the ways in which education, income, race and ethnicity, age, and life stages correlate with motivations and barriers affecting arts participation for individuals, finding that the most commonly cited barriers to arts participation for individuals who were interested in a specific arts event but did not attend were lack of time, cost of participation, and difficulty in getting to the venue (Bloume-Kohout and Leonard 14-15).

While the NEA’s 2015 report evaluates mobility as a barrier independent from other factors in the context of this survey, all three of these most frequently cited reasons for non-attendance are impacted by access to transportation both as it relates directly to the specific event in question and as it relates to the amount of time and money that an individual regularly spends on transportation. The amount of time needed to attend an arts event does not only include the length of a performance or duration of the event itself. It also includes the
commute to the event, which varies greatly depending on the transportation options available to the individual. Similarly, the perceived cost of attending an arts event does not only depend on the ticket price. It also includes such factors as the cost of gas and parking or tickets for public transit, the cost of childcare which increases with the amount of time needed to get to the venue and back, and other factors depending on the individual’s available modes of transportation.

The transportation options available to an individual can be a determining factor in the job opportunities, health care, education, and other basic amenities that they have access to. Low-income individuals tend to have the least public transit or pedestrian friendly infrastructure available but are the most likely users of public transit (Jiao and Bischak). These factors are important considerations, as an individual’s everyday relationship to transportation, including their commute times to school and work, can significantly impact their propensity to attend an arts event, especially as the distance to the event venue increases (Voss et al.).

The impacts of transportation barriers are not experienced equally across communities. Due in large part to transportation policies and infrastructure developed in the mid twentieth century, access to transportation options is inequitably distributed amongst cities today. Communities of color and low-income communities were often the targets for discriminatory transportation planning and displacement for projects in the twentieth century. Those communities continue to deal with the negative effects of these transportation policies which divided neighborhoods, displaced vital businesses and gathering
spaces, and planted infrastructure that was not designed to benefit the neighborhoods that the construction most negatively impacted.

Arts and cultural participation is influenced by an individual’s access to transportation options, and this goes beyond an individual’s efforts to simply arrive at a venue for a specific event. It is important for arts organizations to recognize the transportation barriers that exist in their surrounding communities as well as the ways in which certain neighborhoods and community members are more negatively impacted by their current transportation infrastructure than others, and to take steps towards addressing these barriers as they cause inequities in participation.

There are a number of ways in which arts organizations can address transportation inequities in their communities. Some organizations have begun to do so through programming that is designed to reach community members who do not have access to quality transportation options, such satellite arts programs, shuttle buses for schools and senior centers, and pop-up-art exhibitions and activities. Additionally, arts organizations have worked to address perceptual barriers around transportation through marketing strategies that acknowledge the distances traveled to get to the venue and provide clear directions, suggestions for parking or public transit routes to take, or encourage pre- and post-arts event activities such as dinner at a nearby restaurant to create a sense of destination around the venue and make the commute worthwhile. These are all effective ways to acknowledge transportation barriers and work to provide some ease of access for potential audiences. However, while there are benefits to these
programmatic and marketing strategies, they do not address the larger issue of transportation in organizations' communities and do not affect long term, impactful change.

Arts organizations can address inequities in participation caused by transportation barriers by collaborating with public and private partners to influence transportation practices. There are four primary entry points for doing so: facilitating dialogue among community members, facilitating engagement of community members with local government, bringing artists into the design process of transportation infrastructure, and identifying capital transportation projects as a catalyst for enriching local arts and culture.

Chapter I of this paper will provide a brief history of transportation policy in the United States, demonstrating how today's transportation landscape was shaped over the last century. Chapter II will give an overview of the state of transportation today, the barriers it poses to communities in mid-sized American cities, and the implications that this has for access to arts and cultural participation. Chapter III will discuss the ways in which arts organizations can respond to the transportation barriers in their communities and discuss examples of arts organizations that are already doing this work through a variety of roles and approaches.
Chapter I
A BRIEF HISTORY OF FEDERAL TRANSPORTATION POLICY

To understand the ways in which contemporary transportation infrastructure shapes American cities and creates barriers to participation today, it is necessary to reflect on the history of this country’s transportation policy. This chapter will provide an overview of transportation history in the United States as a means for understanding the contemporary transportation landscape.

Until the mid-twentieth century, the United States federal government took little responsibility for local transportation and focused instead on interstate commerce and national economic growth. In the nineteenth century, the booming railroading industry increased access to long distance transportation and significantly improved the trade of goods from coast to coast, developing a truly national economy. One of the major projects that the government supported at that time, in partnership with private funders, was the Transcontinental Railroad. While the federal government prioritized national transportation initiatives, care for local infrastructure such as paved streets, trolleys, streetcars, and unpaved roads fell to city government and private companies through the early 1900s (Shoup and Lang 16).

In the 1890s, due to the increasing popularity of bicycles, states began taking greater interest in their often unpaved or poorly maintained roads. Some states began to adopt “State-aid” plans, which distributed funding to the local
level for the improvement and upkeep of county roads. In 1893, the Federal government took an unprecedented role in local transportation by forming the Office of Road Inquiry to advise states on these improvements (Weingroff). In the early 1900s, with the boom of the auto industry and the increasing popularity of owning a personal automobile, the federal government became even more strongly invested in the construction of paved roadways. The 1921 Federal Aid Highway Act was the first significant step that the federal government would take in both regulating and supporting automobile usage and road improvements. In the years following, the federal government took steps towards standardizing road construction, engineering practices, vehicle performance, paving, and driving rules (Shoup and Lang 17).

In the early 1940s, President Roosevelt appointed the National Interregional Highway Committee, which issued a report recommending a national system of interstate and defense highways combining arterial and circumferential routes to mitigate urban traffic. The circumferential routes would guide drivers around cities, while the arterial routes would allow drivers to exit onto roads towards central destinations within the cities, creating a layout akin to the spokes of a wheel. This report resulted in the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1944, which authorized the construction of the National System of Interstate Highways, a 40,000 mile system through the nation’s cities, but did not offer funding to support its construction ("Interstate Highway System").

In the years following the authorization of an interstate highway, the federal government began to offer the financial backing to support the boom in
roadway construction. The Federal Highway Act of 1956 authorized the allocation of $26 billion for this purpose, funding 90% of states’ construction costs. This support came from the Highway Trust Fund, which was supported by an increased gasoline tax, from two to three percent. This legislation spurred the states into action. Departments of Transportation were established in many states and new freeway construction projects were envisioned to take advantage of the new opportunities for federal support (“Interstate Highway System”). Of course, in order to build new freeways, states would need to make room for the broad roads and disruptive construction.

The new interstate highways were controlled-access expressways with no at-grade crossings—that is, they had overpasses and underpasses instead of intersections. They were at least four lanes wide and were designed for high-speed driving. They were intended to serve several purposes: eliminate traffic congestion; replace what one highway advocate called “undesirable slum areas” with pristine ribbons of concrete; make coast-to-coast transportation more efficient; and make it easy to get out of big cities in case of an atomic attack. (“Interstate Highway System”)

During the postwar years, communities of color and low-income communities, especially those deemed as “slum areas”, were the primary sites for displacement and demolition in preparation for the construction of major highway building projects (Sanchez et al. 3-4). These projects often displaced and divided communities to create transportation infrastructure that would not be accessible or beneficial to the individuals living within them. This displacement should not be
mistaken as unintended collateral of the freeway construction projects that city planners championed during this time. Rather, the construction of freeways was considered a means by which cities could demolish and clear out what they determined to be slum areas with monetary support from the federal government. By the time the boom in building an interstate highway came about, many cities had already begun the process of redlining neighborhoods, a practice in which people of color were denied access to home loans from the federal government in many neighborhoods within cities and their surrounding areas. This practice segregated cities and gave people of color limited areas of available housing, which often led to densely populated neighborhoods. For city planners, the next step in this process of segregating cities would be “slum clearance.” And what better way to “clear out” an already underserved neighborhood than to use federal funding to build a freeway through it (Semuels)? Robert Moses, a prominent city planner at the time who created highway and road transportation plans for major cities throughout the United States, made this clear in his 1944 *Baltimore Arterial Report*: “Some of the slum areas through which the Franklin Expressway passes are a disgrace to the community and the more of them that are wiped out, the healthier Baltimore will be in the long run” (qtd. in Gioielli 152).

This displacement of communities of color occurred in cities throughout the country, creating such disruption and poorly designed infrastructure that many of the displaced neighborhoods are dealing with repercussions of major transportation projects to this day. In many cases, however, these highways were not built without resistance and backlash from the communities they were sited
for (Sanchez et al. 4). In Baltimore, Maryland, long-time residents can still recall one such project that received immense resistance from the community and resulted in the construction of the never to be completed Franklin-Mulberry Expressway, appropriately dubbed the Highway to Nowhere.

Denise Johnson, a community organizer and native of West Baltimore, says the name was an obvious choice. “We lost families, we lost homeowners, we lost businesses, and we lost churches. And we lost people. People who were stable. People who didn’t plan to leave the community” (qtd. in Miller).

The story of the Highway to Nowhere begins in earnest in 1957, the year following Eisenhower’s 1956 Federal Highway Act, though it can truly be traced back to the 1930s, when an already redlined Baltimore began planning for a network of urban highways with two goals in mind: improve transportation routes for suburban whites to reach their jobs in the downtown area, and begin the process of “slum clearance” that would target people of color in the city (Misra).

In 1944, Robert Moses was brought in to devise a highway plan for the city, which resulted in the Baltimore Arterial Report and quote above. However, it was not until 1957 that city planners were spurred into action, thanks to the 90% federal funding match that had recently been instated (Shoup and Lang).

The plan that emerged proposed North-South and East-West expressways that would run through many of Baltimore’s densely populated residential areas and was resisted by both black and white Baltimoreans for this reason. The plan used the model of the circumferential and arterial routes that were popular at the time, with interloop roads connecting the two major
expressways to form one large circular route through the city. It took over twenty years for a plan to be finalized, in large part due to constant revisions brought on by debates between the city planners and community members. In 1969, the finalized plan had been in some ways successfully scaled down to halt the construction of freeways through many of the neighborhoods that the original plans would have displaced. However, before the project met its end, the city had already demolished most of the community of Harlem Park, which lay to the west of Baltimore’s downtown, for the construction of a small stretch of highway that to this day does not make any of the planned connections to other major roads (Misra). The less than two-mile stretch of expressway remains a strip of road that has no entrances or exits into the once whole community that it tore through, and instead forms a barrier in the form of a deep concrete ditch between those living to its north and to its south. Since 1979, the Highway to Nowhere has served as a reminder of the city’s disregard and destruction of communities of color for transportation projects. Says Baltimore City Councilman John Bullock:

This is not a neighborhood that was struggling. We’re talking about middle-class neighborhoods, which were seen through the eyes of others as slums or ghettos because of the color of the people who lived there. We’re talking about generations of black people who have faced these challenges. Not only from the highway, but also from disinvestment, the redlining, the lack of employment. Because if we say housing was lost, churches were lost, we have to remember also businesses were lost. And
oftentimes people have to go outside their communities to spend that money, which never gets recirculated in that community. (qtd. in Miller)

This story is not unfamiliar to many cities in the United States in the second half of the twentieth century when excitement over federal support for these types of transportation projects led to hasty freeway plans and the displacement of countless communities. While white flight had already begun in many places in years prior to the federal government’s support for interstate highway building, it certainly worsened as these expressways made it all the more convenient to flee the city and travel longer distances for work and other daily needs.

While the displacement of low-income individuals and communities of color for freeway projects continued long past the early years of the interstate highway boom, federal transportation policy in the later years of the twentieth century did take small steps towards supporting other modes of transportation. This started with the 1970 Urban Mass Transportation Assistance Act, which provided twelve years of dedicated funding for public transportation, and was further improved upon by the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1973, which allowed for federal funds to be used towards the construction and operation of public transit. However, support for public transportation remained miniscule compared to that for highways. The federal government gave state transportation departments complete control over which projects to fund and heavily incentivized highway projects by making them eligible for the highest level of federal matching funds (Sanchez et al. 4-5).
One of the primary issues with transportation policy during much of the twentieth century was the nearly autonomous power given to state governments to make decisions about transportation spending. In 1991, the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTA) addressed this by giving federal funding and responsibility for planning and allocating transportation funds directly to Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs). These MPOs were regional planning authorities that were designed to carry out more robust planning processes in cooperation with state and local governments (“About MPOs”). Perhaps most importantly, ISTA required that MPOs produce a three-year Transportation Improvement Program outlining the transportation projects that would be initiated, which were to be prepared with community involvement (Sanchez et al. 5-6). Decentralizing federal funding for transportation projects in this way was a major step towards addressing concerns over transportation equity.

Since ISTA, community engagement with transportation planning has been increasingly emphasized in federal policy. In 1998, the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA21) increased opportunities for public involvement and required greater responsiveness to the concerns of low-income individuals and communities of color, in part, by shifting focus to coordination of diverse modes of transportation in cities beyond personal automobiles. TEA21 also introduced Job Access and Reverse Commute grant programs intended to improve transportation options for welfare recipients and low-income individuals commuting to work or employment-related services, as well as the Transportation
and Community and System Preservation Pilot Program, which encourages the integration of land use with transportation planning on a local level (Sanchez et al. 5-7).

In 2012, the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21) continued the progression towards localizing transportation planning and funding allocations by giving MPOs and states more flexibility with how they use funding. The federal government eliminated competitive grants, which were replaced with funding on a rolling basis where credit-worthy projects would receive funding if available (“MAP-21”). However, while MAP-21 did further the push towards increased local control of funding, it continued to use federal funding matches to incentivize highway projects over public transit and repairs to existing infrastructure (“MAP-21”). MAP-21 also took what many have described as a step backward by creating the Transportation Alternatives Program. The program gave states the authority to choose whether or not to allocate funding for alternative transportation projects, such as complete street projects and projects prioritizing pedestrian safety for community members reliant on walking and bicycling as primary modes of transportation. By designating less funding for these alternative transportation programs, and incentivizing highway construction, MAP-21 continued to support automobile-centric infrastructure.

The current federal transportation law, the Fixing America’s Surface Transportation (FAST) Act, is a long-term surface transportation program that was adopted as the policy and funding for 2016-2021. The funding authorized for transportation in the FAST Act supports capital grant programs prioritizing the
needs of transit-dependent and low-income communities, as well as Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) multimodal improvements. While the FAST Act met a need for a relatively long-term program for the country, it has been criticized for its lack of forward-thinking or progression from a policy perspective (Roman).
Chapter II
TRANSPORTATION AS A BARRIER TO PARTICIPATION

Transportation projects that divided and demolished communities in the second half of the twentieth century did not impact only the lives of those individuals who were displaced in the past. The ramifications of these projects have created infrastructure that makes daily life difficult for many neighborhoods and communities. Simple tasks such as grocery shopping, getting to work, attending school, and accessing healthcare are made time consuming and costly when transportation options are limited. The barriers created by poor transportation infrastructure impact the lives of community members at a foundational level.

As mentioned previously, the NEA’s 2015 report on barriers and motivations for arts attendance found that the three most commonly cited barriers for interested non-attendees at arts and cultural events were lack of time for the individual, cost of attendance being too high, and difficulty in getting to the venue (Bloume-Kohout and Leonard 14-15). While these three barriers may manifest differently from individual to individual and be influenced by other factors such as occupation, family or marital status, age, income, and education, they are each impacted by an individual’s access to transportation options.
It is important to consider the ways in which these barriers correspond with each other and the overlapping influences that may determine how strongly they impact an individual. While the third barrier cited in this list, difficulty in getting to the venue, is the only barrier specifically referencing mobility, the perceptual and practical barriers of time and cost of attending arts and cultural events can be heavily influenced by an individual’s transportation options. For those without access to reliable and efficient transportation options, getting to a venue may take significantly more time than for those who do have ease of access. Most American cities are automobile-centric with swaths of transit deserts in which there is a need for but no adequate public transit available (Jiao and Bischak). For community members who own cars and have income available to spend on gas and tolls, getting to a venue in this type of city may not be an issue. However, for the many individuals who do not own cars in these automobile-centric cities, getting to a venue requires time to plan the best route, which may include a combination of walking, buses and trains. In many cities, community members must rely on bus services to reach subway lines that tend to be the most direct and rapid means of public transit. However, buses themselves tend to be unreliable, with a tendency to not show up on time or not show up at all in certain neighborhoods, especially at night. Bus shelters and mechanisms for estimating bus arrival times are also often in disrepair or dysfunctional, leaving riders exposed to the elements as they often wait a minimum of fifteen to twenty minutes for service (White). A twenty-minute car ride
to a venue for one person may translate to an hour-long public transit commute for another person depending on the public transit options available.

This barrier may also be compounded by an individual’s regular commute time. A study by SMU DataArts found that the likelihood of an individual attending an arts event drops by 80% when the distance between the individual and the venue reaches over one mile. For people who have regularly long commute times, the drop in their propensity to attend an arts event at a venue over one mile away drops at an even steeper rate (Voss et al.).

The cost of attending an arts event is also impacted by the access an individual has to adequate transportation options. While studies, including *When Going Gets Tough*, have found that the cost of admission will not necessarily have a large bearing on the decision of whether or not to attend an event, it is important to consider the other costs associated with attendance. Even for free arts and cultural events, there are other costs to be considered for individuals driving to an event, such as gas, parking, and tolls, or paying to utilize public transit.

A study on transit deserts by the Urban Information Lab found that a “kind of negative economic feedback loop” is created in transportation planning in which neighborhoods with higher income individuals tend to have better access to transportation options, as well as higher rates of owning personal automobiles that eliminate dependency on public transit. Individuals with low income tend to spend a much higher percentage of their total income on transportation and are more likely to depend on public transit options, but are also more likely to have
lower-than-average access to transit in their communities. Because so many aspects of individuals’ lives are impacted by access to transportation and so many of these are determining factors for upward mobility, inadequate and inequitable transportation policy and infrastructure creates a cyclic pattern in which low-income communities are kept at a disadvantage (Jiao and Bischak).

Says Rosabeth Moss Kanter, author of Move: Putting America’s Infrastructure Back in the Lead, “Public transportation is desired by many but is even more important for lower-income people who can’t afford cars. Without really good public transportation, it’s very difficult to deal with inequality” (qtd. in White).

The impacts that this may have on arts and cultural participation are reflected in the findings of When Going Gets Tough. Individuals with a high school degree or less, aging individuals, and individuals in the lowest income quartile tended to cite difficulty getting to the venue as a primary reason for not attending an event they were interested in. For many individuals, especially individuals of color, difficulty getting to the venue is a stronger barrier to attendance than the price of admission itself (Bloume-Kohout and Leonard 4). When addressing inequities in participation, arts organizations must consider the practical and perceptual barriers caused by their local transportation infrastructure as they impact both their potential audiences and their communities at large.

In his 2016 article on transportation’s relationship to racial and economic inequality in Baltimore, Alec MacGillis spoke with community member and
attorney Sherrilyn Ifill about the impact she’s seen poor public transit have on residents. In their interview, Ifill captured the deep roots that transportation has in shaping the lives and futures of community members:

She’d seen the women standing at the bus stops on Edmondson Avenue before daybreak, waiting to ride to work downtown or at the big east side hospitals. She had thought often about the consequences of their long commutes, the kids left to get themselves off for the day on their own, the twelve-year-old getting breakfast for younger siblings, getting them dressed, getting them to school. “And once they get to school and maybe don’t have their homework and maybe haven’t had their breakfast, what’s the teacher’s reaction to that student?” Ifill said in an interview. “What’s our reaction as a society to the children? We talk about that mother, about people not doing their job. But we aren’t willing to follow the thread to that bus stop on Edmondson Avenue -- to understand the larger problems in the context of transportation decisions over decades, in the context of why Baltimore doesn’t have a city-wide system.” (MacGillis)
There are several roles that arts administrators can play in responding to the transportation inequities causing barriers to arts and cultural participation in their communities. Some arts organizations have begun to think about the ways in which their audiences actually get to their events and the obstacles or inconveniences that may be dissuading their attendance. Efforts to address transportation as a barrier often take the form of making programming more convenient, such as strategically scheduling events to occur outside of high traffic hours, making events family friendly to eliminate the need for childcare, and offering parking or dinner packages. Arts organizations often use marketing strategies that help to mitigate perceptual barriers around transportation and make getting to the venue as clear as possible to potential attendees. These are all important considerations for arts organizations concerned with the physical and perceptual barriers that audience members may face. However, without taking a deeper and more community-oriented approach to addressing transportation barriers, these internal tactics will fall short of increasing access
and striving towards cultural equity in their own organization and community at large.

With the increasing emphasis that is placed on localizing control of federal funding for transportation projects and engaging local communities with transportation planning processes, nonprofit arts organizations have an opportunity to address inequitable transportation barriers at the policy level.

Arts, culture, and transportation are not usually talked about in the same breath, but together they offer tremendous opportunity. Using an arts and culture lens to shape transportation investments can bring communities together around an asset frame—proud, empowering traditions—and result in transportation systems that work better for the people who need them most. Furthermore, the transportation sector brings significant resources that can yield lasting arts and cultural assets for communities.

Transportation equity champions have discovered that engaging artists and cultural organizations strengthens organizing and advocacy efforts and results in better transportation and community design. (Rose et al. 17)

Facilitating Dialogue

Arts and culture have a unique ability to create spaces and forums in which communities can gather to reflect, comment on, and engage with challenging social and civic issues. “Art forms express and embody culture, and in whatever form—visual, performing, landscape—mirror, reflect, inform, explain, and provide meaning and substance to cultural practices and social movements”
(Rose et al. 5). Arts and culture can create a space for critical dialogue and make room for community growth and healing.

An important role that arts organizations can play in engaging with and challenging the inequitable infrastructure or policies that impact their communities is as facilitators and organizers for community dialogue around these issues. It is not up to any single organization to decide what the community’s challenges are or how they should be addressed. Rather, by leveraging their expertise and practices within arts and culture, arts organizations can catalyze dialogue, reflect on community, and open spaces for gathering and exchange. This can take a variety of forms, from workshop-based projects that engage community members with specific questions and topics related to where they live, art exhibitions that raise awareness about community issues, film screenings related to local challenges, performances inspired by or created in collaboration with community members, talk backs, panel discussions, and more.

One organization that uses its expertise in the arts to facilitate community dialogue around a broad range of social issues is Forward Union, a volunteer-run organization founded by five women art workers in New York City. The organization’s marquee event, Forward Union Fair, launched in 2017 as a social justice fair to bring together advocates, organizations, topical art installations, and public programs (“About”). The 2018 weekend-long event featured such programs as a free sewing workshop for the creation of handmade art protest banners, a “cathartic rap-dance party” led by Iranian-American artist and 2022 Brooklyn City Council candidate Amy Khoshbin, a project entitled Another Protest
Song by artists Angel Nevarez and Valerie Tevere in which fair-goers can sing protest songs karaoke-style, and This Is Not A Gun, a workshop led by Cara Levine where attendees use clay to make objects that have been mistaken for guns by police officers in civilian shootings.

In addition to the arts and creative making programs, Forward Union Fair features a series of panel discussions around relevant social issues as well as information booths to learn more about specific community organizations and initiatives. The goal of this event is to utilize the model of the art fair to engage in community dialogues about current issues that impact local and national communities. Holly Shen, the director and curator of visual arts at the Brooklyn Academy of Music and co-founder of Forward Union Fair, says that “We’re all art workers, and we really believe strongly in the power of art to not only change people’s lives but to communicate issues and problem solve” (qtd. in Kis).

Forward Union’s work is made possible by its partnerships with community-based groups and organizations that allow for many areas of expertise and approaches to community issues to unite in this space for dialogue and sharing.

While the art fair model that Forward Union utilizes to reach community members and spark conversations through a variety of lenses is an effective way to create a hub for this kind of dialogue, artists can go beyond the walls of a gallery or venue space and into the public realm to facilitate discussion. Site-specific projects meet community members where they are and create space for dialogue and interaction directly within the venues that are at the core of the conversation.
In 2016, Indygo, Indianapolis’s bus service, partnered with the Arts Council of Indianapolis and Marian University’s writing center to produce *Moving Stories*, an art project within the city’s annual Spirit & Place Festival. Over the course of three days, community members were invited to board one of Indygo’s rapid transit bus lines to engage in conversations with fellow riders about the city’s public transit system. Forty volunteers were tasked with engaging the participants in conversations around their experiences with public transportation and living in Indianapolis. “They were encouraged to ask questions such as ‘How long have you been living in Indianapolis?’ and ‘Where are you headed today?’ From here, they would hopefully then be able to dive into deeper questions like ‘Why do you consider Indy to be your home?’ and ‘How does mass transit play a role in that?’” (Johnson)?

The buses transported participants to the university writing center for storytelling workshops, during which community members learned to craft their own stories with the assistance of the writing center team (Latta). They were invited to share their experiences with public transit and their definitions of what home in Indianapolis meant to them. At the end of the workshop, the participants could hop back on the buses to return to their starting points. In the months following these events, the community members’ stories were exhibited within the buses on routes throughout the city, in Indygo’s Transit Center, and shared through social media channels. Indygo’s partnership with the Arts Council and university allowed all three organizations to contribute to the project in ways that aligned with their own missions and goals to create a project that highlights a
range of perspectives and stories about this important aspect of the city. “A ‘home’ is greater than a place where you sleep. Home is a neighborhood, a community group, and a place for leisure. These are places we feel comfortable, safe, happy, and define and shape who we are. Mass transit plays a vital role as a connector to these places” (“Awesomeness Nominee”).

Through collaboration, Indygo, the Arts Council of Indianapolis, and Marian University’s writing center catalyzed each entity’s expertise and positioning in the community to bring awareness not only to the transportation systems at play in Indianapolis, but also to the role of transportation in making one’s city a home and establishing a sense of ownership for community members over these systems. This example demonstrates a model for arts organizations to engage with other organizations and assets in their communities to spark a conversation with community members about their local transportation infrastructure.

In addition to making space for dialogue and community expression, arts and culture can ignite excitement around projects and imagine transportation solutions that may not seem feasible in the traditional planning settings. Large transportation projects take significant amounts of time to move from idea to reality, and it can be easy for a city to grow fatigued and dispirited over time when addressing larger transportation challenges. Arts and culture can use creativity and imagination to envision transportation in their cities in a new light, and communicate these ideas to their communities.
In El Paso, Texas, one artist used visual art, marketing and performance to reignite excitement around a once highly utilized international streetcar system that connected the city of El Paso with Juarez, Mexico, which is just across the United States-Mexico border. Between the two cities are five border crossings that are used by thousands of individuals on a daily basis, and they have become one of the world’s largest binational metroplexes (Doyle). While earning his Masters of Fine Arts degree at the School of Visual Arts in New York, El Paso native Peter Svarzbein began an arts project in the form of a guerilla marketing campaign advertising the reopening of what he named the El Paso Transnational Trolley. Though there were no formal plans to revive the trolley at the time, Svarzbein recognized an opportunity to both educate community members on the history of the trolley and to spark excitement and dialogue over the possibility of its opening through this fake advertising campaign. The artist used wheat paste posters and a mascot, Alex the Trolley Conductor, to advertise the return of the streetcar system throughout the city. It worked--many community members believed the project to be a real campaign and the advertised return of the trolley was received with excitement (Stone et al. 16-17).

After graduating, Svarzbein returned to El Paso and used the momentum of his project to begin seriously advocating to his local government for the return of the trolley. When the City of El Paso announced plans to sell the streetcars, Svarzbein lobbied the City to cancel the sale and instead bring the trolley back into use. With public support behind him, Svarzbein succeeded in convincing the City to halt plans to sell the trolley and then collaborated with the City and the
Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) Commissioner to gain over $95 million in funding from TxDOT to bring streetcar service back. The El Paso Streetcar had ceased operations in 1974 (Stone et al. 16-17). In November of 2018, the streetcar once again returned to the streets of El Paso, offering free rides to community members for the first several months of its operations, with plans to extend service to revive the transnational connection to Juarez and make connections to the Medical Center of the Americas (Bock). Svarzbein is now a member of the El Paso City Council.

The evolution of Svarzbein’s project from sparking excitement and dialogue around a specific transportation project to leveraging the necessary funding and support to bring infrastructure to life is one that many arts organizations can use as a model for change in their own communities. Arts organizations have an opportunity to identify areas of potential in their local transportation systems, and can utilize creative projects to energize their communities around new ideas and possibilities. This energy and enthusiasm can, in turn, be utilized to leverage funding and support to create change.

In Takoma Park, Maryland, Dance Exchange took a different and more targeted approach to addressing transportation related issues in the community. In the last decade, a large number of new community members from India, El Salvador, China, Ethiopia and other countries have moved into the neighborhood and established businesses along New Hampshire Avenue, a six-lane freeway developed during the 40s and 50s that runs through Takoma Park. These community members created a corridor of local businesses with unique offerings
and farmers markets that bring fresh produce to the community. However, because the corridor is built around a freeway, it is not a safe place for community members to walk or ride their bikes or access public transit. Not only is this a general hazard for Takoma Park residents who would like to frequent the businesses and farmers market, it poses a very real danger for those community members who rely more heavily on alternative modes of transportation than personal vehicles (Stone et al. 20-22).

In response to the challenges and opportunities of New Hampshire Ave, the Housing and Community Development of the City of Takoma Park partnered with the community-engaged nonprofit dance company Dance Exchange to develop an artistic project that would reflect on these issues and Takoma Park’s sense of place. New Hampshire Ave: This is a Place To... became a multi-year project that invited community members to connect to the avenue through storytelling, dancemaking, music, visual art, and performance.

The project explored six core questions of individuals and communities along New Hampshire Avenue: What brings us to this place? What traditions do we carry here? Which do we leave behind? How do our diverse experiences and journeys to the New Ave corridor shape the place today? What keeps us here? What do we hope for the future of the Avenue? (Stone et al. 20-22)

Dance Exchange worked with local artists to commission visual and performing artworks through community exchange, which culminated in a final installation and performance along New Hampshire Avenue. The project kicked
off with a one-day festival at which attendees created artworks about their experiences along the Avenue and sampled food from many of the restaurants along the corridor. In the months following the festival, Dance Exchange hosted community dialogue and artmaking gatherings to further explore these experiences and ideas around New Hampshire Avenue, including a dance and storytelling workshop for community elders at the Takoma Park Recreation Center as well as “culture of feedback” workshops aimed at understanding “how and why residents already gather.” The culminating project was a site-specific performance and installation along New Hampshire Ave that was shaped by the contributions of the local community through interaction at the festival and workshops (“New Hampshire Ave”).

In addition to the community-facing aspects of the project, Dance Exchange also worked internally with professionals across the City of Takoma Park Housing and Community Development Department through a series of workshops that focused on strengthening the ways the City and their constituents engage in feedback through a planning process. Dance Exchange’s founder, Liz Lerman, is also the creator of the Critical Response Process (CRP), a practice she developed that is utilized by artists in a variety of mediums to give and receive feedback about works in progress (“Critical Response Process”). Lerman’s CRP was used as the foundation for these interactions with the City.

The workshops consisted of: dialogue regarding the current and historic cultures of feedback in City offices and in the Takoma Park Community; identification of particular opportunities and challenges surrounding
feedback in urban planning/city management context; explorations of practical applications of Dance Exchange tools and creative practices within city administration and urban planning. Through these engagements with the City, Dance Exchange is creating and refining a workshop model focused on enhancing the culture and foundations of feedback within city administration and urban planning. (“New Hampshire Ave”)

Facilitating Engagement

As mentioned in Chapter I, federal transportation policy has increasingly emphasized the need for community engagement with transportation planning. City planners and transportation experts realize that projects that do not have public support or the awareness of community members can receive pushback after plans have been laid or even after expensive construction has already begun, causing costly cut-backs or delays (“Community Engagement”). In this way, city planners understand the importance of informing the public of large infrastructure projects before moving forward with construction. What may be lacking in these practices, however, is a real understanding of what community input and authentic engagement with the planning process can do to bring heightened effectiveness and longevity to these projects.

Often, city planners or leaders of transportation-related projects will attend community board meetings in neighborhoods that will be impacted by a specific project late in the project’s planning process with the goal of informing the
community and vetting questions and concerns rather than seeking real
gengagement with the plan. However, truly engaging community members with a
planning process is a serious project within itself, made especially challenging for
communities in which this type of engagement is new. Even for city planners who
do wish to engage community members more deeply with planning processes,
there may not be the type of channels or structures in place for reaching
community members effectively, and planners often lack the expertise or training
to facilitate this type of engagement. While community board meetings are one
way to reach segments of communities, not all community members are able to
make it to every, or any, board meetings due to scheduling conflicts and time
constraints (Stone et al. 28). Finding a way to reach the community is a
challenge that arts organizations are all too familiar with. However, deep and
meaningful engagement from the earliest stages of city planning can result in
projects that are truly desired, shaped and embraced by the communities that
they will impact, and those projects will often more effectively meet the needs of
these communities in the long term. Arts organizations can collaborate with local
government to bridge this gap and facilitate stronger engagement with city
planning processes at earlier stages.

In St. Paul, Minnesota, Public Art Saint Paul is a private, nonprofit
organization that works in partnership with the City of Saint Paul “to imagine and
create a more just, sustainable and beautiful city” (“City Artist”). The organization
brings artists into leadership roles in the city to improve city systems and deepen
civic engagement. Through their City Artist program, the organization partners
with the City of Saint Paul to redefine the role of the artist working within local government. Through this public-private partnership, artists advise on major city initiatives and lead their own artistic projects with dedicated workspace within the Department of Public Works.

Saint Paul is unique in that City Artists work within the walls of City Hall and ensure that art is considered as an integral part of nearly every civic discipline: parks, planning, public works and libraries; from early conceptualization of the City’s urban future through planning studies, capital project design, on-going street and sidewalk maintenance, and the programming of public places. ("City Artist")

Through her work with Public Art Saint Paul, current City Artist Amanda Lovelee “acts as translator between the city’s ideas and its residents with the goal of building the city everyone wants to live in” ("About the Artist"). In 2015, Lovelee launched the Pop Up Meeting, a retrofitted city vehicle designed by the artist that travels the city asking for input from community members in the form of survey responses, love letters, and conversation in exchange for a locally made ice pop. It is a playful and informal way to meet community members where they are, and show gratitude for their input by creating an exchange between feedback and tasty treats. Colleen Sheehy, Director of Public Art Saint Paul, says that Pop Up Meeting sprung from the need to take the public meeting to the people. Lovelee works with multiple city departments to identify areas that need the community’s input. According to Sheehy, 70% of the community members
who completed surveys with the Pop Up Meeting truck had never been to a city meeting before (Sheehy).

Public Art Saint Paul has made this type of work possible by partnering with the City to build the foundation for meaningful relationships between local departments and local artists. Public Art Saint Paul’s role as a facilitator in this relationship is very important, as artists and city planners tend to have very different processes, timelines, and even vocabularies that they work within. By working collaboratively with the City, Public Art Saint Paul is able to help foster an environment in which these departments are ready and open to communicating directly with artists about the kinds of challenges and opportunities that their work entails. On the other hand, Public Art Saint Paul is able to support the artist in navigating this relationship and has laid the groundwork for such an exchange to be truly effective. Their role here is in nurturing this relationship of exchange, and allowing the skills and ideas of the artist and professional planners to flourish within the space created. This model, while used in Saint Paul to impact planning processes on a broader scale, can be adopted and tailored by arts organizations to specifically target transportation planning processes in their own communities.

While Public Art Saint Paul’s role in facilitating engagement with public planning processes focuses on doing so by creating the framework for artists to develop relationships with city planners and empowering them to envision and implement arts projects to connect with their communities, arts organizations can also take on a role of leading these arts projects and programs themselves.
Warm Cookies of the Revolution is a Civic Health Club and nonprofit organization based in Denver, Colorado that regularly brings community members together for fun and creative programs that tackle civic issues in a warm and welcoming environment. The goal of these gatherings is to create a space in which community members can learn from each other about civic issues and engage in dialogues around them through social and cultural activities. These programs are educational, celebratory, and personal, often involving games or other playful techniques that invite community members to share their viewpoints and learn from others. The program also opens up public forums for communities to voice their concerns, opinions, and express their own community visions. Activities include Bring Your Government, a program in which club members come together to play with Legos building their own miniature cities while listening to guest speakers presenting visions of their ideal form of government. Another program, The Reconstructionist, celebrates the “badass women” in the community by asking participants to think about the women in their lives and in their communities who they admire, then create physical and digital scrapbooks about them. Civic Stitch & Bitch is an updated take on a long tradition in which community members gather to work on sewing, crochet, drawing, or other arts projects while discussing larger civic issues such as gentrification, immigration, or the legalization of marijuana (“What’s a Civic Health Club?”).

In 2017, Warm Cookies received a grant of over $300,000 from ArtPlace America for their participatory budgeting project, Does This Machine Have A
Soul. The art project was created to engage community members in an even more direct way with local civic issues by using an artist-made Rube Goldberg-style machine to collect input and teach community members about participatory budgeting processes. This participatory budgeting machine was featured as a part of a larger art installation in a detached garage with walls that were painted in vibrant colors and contained a “museum of repeated history” including artworks and videos of residents sharing how they use creativity to address challenges in their neighborhood (Wolf). One of the major goals of the project was to build awareness within their neighborhoods about this type of community-generated budgeting process, and potentially to use the project to campaign for the utilization of participatory budgeting within their district (Kenney).

Many cities have begun exploring ways to incorporate participatory budgeting into their practices, which typically allows community members to directly vote on how they would like to see public funds allocated on a local level. In New York City, over $1 million of the city’s public budget is allocated through participatory budgeting process in participating city council districts (“Participatory Budgeting”). Organizations including Art + Democracy, the Participatory Budgeting Project, and ArtPlace America have noted the benefits of utilizing arts and culture in these participatory budgeting projects to build community engagement and offer creative ways to make the budgeting and voting processes accessible and exciting (Appleton). Says Aaron Jones, Mass Engagement Director for the organization Community Voices Heard:
Participatory Budgeting, at its core, answers the question, ‘How can we improve our home?’ In order to do this you must simply engage a lot of people. Art has a language that can be universally understood. Through incredibly inclusive collaborations, artistic expression bridges the gap between people to identify what the community needs in different ways. (qtd. in “Arts + Participatory Budgeting”)

Warm Cookies for the Revolution’s project, which calls attention to the concept of participatory budgeting and demonstrates to community members how the process works in the context of a fun and creative setting, is an example of how arts organizations can generate excitement over this more direct form of community engagement with planning processes. The model of participatory budgeting can be adapted and utilized for the specific needs of diverse communities, and has the potential to give community members authority over the types of transportation projects they would like to see and how they would like their tax dollars to be used towards transportation infrastructure in their communities. Arts organizations can both introduce the concept of participatory budgeting, or other alternative planning processes, to community members and collaborate with their local governments to make this type of community input more effective and engaging for the community.

Artist in Design

Beyond facilitating conversation around the types of transportation policy and infrastructure that a community would like to see, the design of
transportation infrastructure is another important aspect of transportation planning in which the arts can play a valuable role. Design decisions are often made in consideration of functionality rather than in consideration of the historical or cultural context in which the projects will exist. A brand new, state of the art subway station may be a real asset and meet a community’s needs in a very realistic manner. However, if this type of structure is designed without consideration of its context within the community, it will be a missed opportunity for a public space that truly belongs within the neighborhood where it is sited.

Community-engaged design depends on many of the same elements as community-engaged planning. While engaging community members with city plans tends to take a more conceptual form of understanding the challenges and inequities that they face and the types of infrastructure and spending that would best address these challenges, community-engaged design becomes more focused on the physical characteristics of the infrastructure that is planned for a site.

Many cities have access to Percent for Public Art programs, which typically mandate that a percentage of the total funds that will be used towards the construction of capital projects must be allocated for public art either within the new capital project or to be put into a public art fund for later projects, depending on the city’s needs (“State Percent”). Unfortunately, public art projects that are created in conjunction with these types of capital projects, such as bus shelters, new libraries, or road construction, tend to be treated as add-ons rather than as opportunities for integrated artistic elements or enhancements to design.
The artist is often brought into the picture after plans and designs have already been fully developed, and is built into the overall construction timeline in a manner that is focused what makes sense for the building plans. Frequently, the artist is chosen based on an artwork proposal submitted to a committee that will be brought into the space, rather than as a guiding force on the design team of the infrastructure (Hopper).

While plans for new transportation infrastructure may be well intended, and considerations may be made to fund and accommodate public art projects that bring warmth to the space, this process is disjointed and often does not result in public art that gives community members a sense of ownership over the infrastructure. Without inclusion and engagement with transportation design, these types of infrastructure are less likely to be embraced and used to their full potential (Stone et al. 33).

In an interview with the National Endowment for the Arts as a part of their Designing Equity Interviews, Bryan Lee, Place and Civic Design Director at the Arts Council of New Orleans, says that community engaged design is integral to navigating day-to-day life in an organic way. “I always say that architecture is the hardware to the software of life. So it’s this thing that is inextricably linked from how we operate in our day to day lives. And then art on top of that is kind of the user interface. So these three things help us to understand the world that we live in” (“Designing Equity Interviews”).

Community engaged design provides the tools and resources to enable community members to be the leaders in envisioning what they want to see in
their neighborhoods and how infrastructure can be designed to bring those visions and goals to life. Arts organizations are in a unique position to facilitate this type of engagement with the design process. Many arts organizations already have structures and programs in place that allow for creative expression and problem-solving. Artists are experienced in envisioning projects that meet specific purposes and then strategically finding ways to bring those visions to life to share with their audiences.

In Danville, a small rural town in Vermont, community members grew concerned when the state’s department of transportation, VTrans, determined that the federal highway Route 2 would need to be upgraded. A stretch of the highway ran through Danville and had been long established as the town’s Main Street. The proposed upgrades were met with concerns from community members about the impact that an expanded federal highway would have on the safety and livability of the town’s Main Street. For years the project was at a standstill as the state was unable to gain public approval from residents. In response to this challenge, the Vermont Arts Council partnered with VTrans to navigate the concerns of the community while meeting the needs of the state. Together, they brought forth a proposal to the Dansville Town Select Board that involved utilizing Context Sensitive Design to upgrade the highway while preserving the character and walkability of the Main Street. The design process began with the formation of a committee of community stakeholders to guide the project goals and provide input at each phase of the project. Artists were selected by the review committee and brought on early in the planning process to
shape the design and provide expertise. As a result of this approach, the collaborators were able to upgrade the federal highway while simultaneously enhancing the Main Street’s sense of place. They did this through simple yet strategic visual enhancements that highlight the entrances to Danville’s Main Street and calm the highway’s traffic as it passes through the town, prioritizing pedestrian safety and livability along the road. Additionally, the designs included an upgraded bandstand on the town’s green, landscaping elements, and decorative light posts that utilized materials reflecting the town’s surrounding nature and farmland (“Danville Public Art”).

While these types of enhancements may not be the traditional artistic contributions that public art projects bring to mind, when done well and in consideration of the surrounding community these elements are often what can ground infrastructure in a local context. The sensitivity that artists bring to the design process makes infrastructure navigable and welcoming, and can result in spaces that enable or encourage community gathering and engagement with cultural life. Through partnership with the department of transportation and local community stakeholders, the Vermont Arts Council was able to successfully meet the needs of the Danville community while updating the state’s transportation infrastructure.

In Baltimore, Maryland, the role of artists in the transportation infrastructure design process was highlighted in a very intentional manner as a part of Transit, creative placemaking project produced by the Baltimore Office of Promotion of the Arts (BOPA) in partnership the city’s department of
transportation, and the mayor’s office. BOPA, a nonprofit arts organization that serves as the city’s official arts council, film office and special events agency, received a $200,000 grant from ArtPlace America for the project, which would pair European artists with each of the city’s three arts and entertainment districts. *Transit* began with a visit to Europe by representatives from each district and the stakeholder organizations, followed by a public forum to share learnings from the trip and reveal the project frameworks that each district would undertake.

Detailed project planning commenced with the selection of three European artist groups that each completed a residency in one of the three districts, tasked with carrying out a community engaged planning process and creating artistic projects that would be installed and activated in the neighborhoods for eighteen months (“Transit”). "The whole idea was to get the three arts districts doing something together," Bill Gilmore, former BOPA Executive Director, said in an interview with the Baltimore Sun. "One of the things that we all came to a consensus on was that the European Union knows how to do transit better than we do" (Scharper).

In Highlandtown Arts & Entertainment District, the Spanish artist collective mmmm…. were selected to complete a six-week residency in the neighborhood. The neighborhood’s art center, Creative Alliance, and the Southeast Community Development Corporation partnered with the artists to engage community members through streetscape design workshops, during which residents requested that the project take the form of a bus shelter. The resulting project, which was fabricated by local artists and installed in partnership with the local arts organizations, is a bus shelter that takes the form of the word “BUS”, each
letter fourteen feet tall and seven feet wide and constructed from simple wooden slats. Each letter can comfortably seat several people in a variety of positions. One can sit in the lower loop of the “B”, protected from the elements by the slats above, relax comfortably in the curve of the “U,” or lay back against the slats of the “S” (Metcalfe). The word “BUS” was chosen not only for its element of humor, but also to celebrate the diversity and bilingualism of the neighborhood, which is home to many Latinx immigrants--“bus” has the same meaning in Spanish and English (Scharper). Since it’s installation, the arts district has programmed a series of events activating the bus shelter through aerial performances and even responding to humorous incidents that have occurred at the installation--at one point, stacks of pizza were being left at the bus shelter overnight. The Creative Alliance made a playful nod to the incident by serving pizza at the next performance event (“Unexpected Places”).

By being very intentional about the artist group’s leadership role in this infrastructure project and supporting the artists at all stages of the process, from collaborating with the department of transportation to gathering community input and finally to installing and activating the project through programming, Transit resulted in a bus shelter that goes beyond basic functionality. Now, while Highlandtown community members wait for their buses at this busy intersection they see a project that they or fellow community members requested and gave input into. They might find joy in the humorous design, talk to a stranger about their preferred letter to perch in, enjoy the expanded seating options the new bus
shelter design offers, or even simply appreciate how easy it was to find their bus stop that day.

Incorporating artists into the design of transportation infrastructure can also become a process by which arts organizations can more deeply engage community members with these projects and mitigate concerns related to their construction and fit in their communities. One example of this took place in Boston, Massachusetts, where, in the 1980s, community members pushed back against highway construction that was planned to displace and negatively impact many of the city’s neighborhoods. The community successfully halted the highway’s construction, and in its place, the City planned for an expanded public transit system that would include the relocation of a major subway line as well as new commuter rails, Amtrak lines, and green spaces. Although this was a positive result of the community’s pushback against highway construction, many community members remained skeptical of the City’s Department of Transportation and remained concerned with how the expanded public transit project would impact many ethnically diverse neighborhoods. Late in the construction process, Urban Arts, a nonprofit arts organization, began a program entitled Arts in Transit in Boston’s Southwest Corridor to engage community members with the new development through a series of public art projects (Breitbart and Worden).

The key to Urban Arts’ public art program was the formation of community advisory committees to lead engagement in the neighborhoods and steer artistic and design decisions throughout the process. There were several components to
Arts in Transit, including permanent installations at each of the transit stations, temporary and off-site public art projects, a literary art series, and an oral history project led by students and residents in collaboration with a local community college. While federal guidelines called for the formation of a panel of professional artists to guide the artist selection process for each project, Urban Arts expanded this to include a committee of community members who would guide the outreach for the projects in each neighborhood and be treated as the client for each station’s public art project. The resulting projects were reflective of the stories and character of the stations’ neighborhoods. The temporary projects involved works by community participants, many of which spoke to the political and social issues that arose with the transportation project.

In addition to these visual arts projects, Urban Arts also initiated a statewide poetry competition that resulted in poems carved into granite and placed in the Southwest Corridor transit stations. The organization worked with a community advisory team on a comprehensive outreach plan that involved connecting with established and informal literary groups throughout the region. The authors selected for the project reflected the diversity of the Southwest Corridor neighborhoods in both ethnicity and artistic experience (Breitbart and Worden).

Over the course of the project, Arts in Transit was shaped by over eight hundred community participants. In a study of the impact of this project, interviews with community members and larger discussions with participants revealed that while the resulting artworks and oral history projects enhanced the
stations and created better public spaces, it was the process behind *Arts in Transit* that had catalyzed community dialogue and a heightened sense of ownership over neighborhood infrastructure.

What lessons can be drawn from *Arts in Transit*? One lesson may be that public artists and arts administrators cannot assume the pre-existence of a public; instead, citizen participation must be invited and sustained. The project also suggests new indices for evaluating the success of cultural activity in public space. Instead of only asking “Do I like it?” we may begin to ask more of our public art projects. How much discussion does it generate in the community? Is it ongoing? Can it sustain local involvement even after the project is completed? How many additional arts activities does it spawn? Is the art, and the process of its selection, responsive to change? Does it ensure community ownership, not only of the art, but of the community itself? Can that sense of ownership be sustained to prevent gentrification and displacement in neighborhoods upgraded through arts activity? Along Boston’s Southwest Corridor, many of these questions remained unanswered. It will take years to assess the true impact of *Arts in Transit*. That the questions were raised at all, especially by residents deeply affected by their engagement in the project, speaks to the reality that public art has gone beyond the elusive task of creating a sense of place. Public art in Boston has also helped engender a sense of purpose. (Breitbart and Worden)
**Identifying Opportunities**

Arts organizations that maintain awareness of transportation projects in their regions are in a stronger position to identify potential opportunities and threats that may be posed to their communities. Additionally, arts organizations that have established meaningful community partnerships and communication channels with community members will be better prepared to facilitate broader engagement with these opportunities and bring the impact of larger transportation projects under the control of the community they serve.

The development of the American Indian Cultural Corridor along Franklin Avenue in Minneapolis, Minnesota is one example of how organizations can identify opportunities brought on by larger transportation projects to cultivate the cultural amenities within their neighborhoods. For much of the twentieth century, Franklin Avenue was a thriving commercial corridor and an important hub for Native American communities, who moved into the area in the mid twentieth century during a relocation period in which the federal government encouraged Native Americans to move into urban areas (Rose et al. 19). In the late 1960s, Franklin Avenue became the heart of the American Indian Movement, which addressed the discriminatory policies and practices of the federal government against indigenous communities and advocated for their civil rights (“American Indian Movement”). Today, the area around Franklin Avenue continues to have the highest urban concentration of Native American individuals in the country (“History” [American Indian Cultural Corridor]).
In 2010, with the oncoming development of a light rail system in the region, the Native American Community Development Initiative (NACDI) recognized an opportunity to create a formal American Indian Cultural Corridor along Franklin Avenue that would cultivate the local cultural economy and serve as a community hub. NACDI collaborated with local Native American arts organizations to transform the distance between the Franklin Avenue light rail stop and the corridor into a pedestrian-friendly path, activated by arts programming and signage that would boost foot traffic to the local shops, galleries, and gathering spaces along the corridor (Rose et al. 19). In the heart of the district, NACDI reopened All My Relations gallery, which had exhibited contemporary Native American artworks for close to a decade, as a cultural hub and anchor along the corridor (“History” [All My Relations Arts]).

While the idea of a cultural corridor had been generated prior to the new development of the regional light rail system, NACDI recognized the impact that the transit project could have on increasing foot traffic to the corridor and creating a thriving cultural destination (Rose et al. 19). By identifying the opportunities of the transit project early on, NACDI was able to engage the community and collaborate with local organizations to ensure that the light rail would benefit the neighborhood’s existing arts and cultural assets.

In addition to using transportation infrastructure as an opportunity for enhancing local arts and cultural assets and amenities in communities that will be impacted, arts organizations can also play a strong role in shifting the narrative around transit projects that may be beneficial but have potential to cause
disruption during their construction, which can often take multiple years to complete. In connection with this, they can also ease concerns around the impact of construction and new transit development by offering entry points for community members to have a sense of control during the process.

Irrigate, created in collaboration between St. Paul, Minnesota-based organization Springboard for the Arts, the Twin Cities Local Initiatives Support Coalition, and the City of St. Paul, is one example of how collaboration between public and private partners can accomplish this. The Irrigate strategy was developed in response to a new light rail planned to travel between St. Paul and Minneapolis, which would impact many communities along its route that had experienced a history of negative effects of highway transportation projects in the area (Nezam). The Green Line would provide a meaningful connection between St. Paul and Minneapolis that the region formerly lacked. However, civic leaders worried that concern over the disruption that could be caused by a long construction timeline on local business corridors as well as immigrant communities and communities of color threatened to bring negative reception to the project before the new transit line would begin operation (Stone et al.).

Irrigate, a three-year initiative, involved the training of 600 local artists to collaborate with local businesses on creative solutions to the challenges that would arise during the construction period. The artists, in partnership with community members and business owners, created 150 creative placemaking projects that ranged from musical performances to art installations and performance workshops in areas impacted by the construction. These projects
brought positive attention to the region and shifted the narrative around the new light rail, while also helping businesses and organizations to prosper in spite of the challenges brought on by its construction.

By responding to this new transportation project with creative and innovative solutions, the partners behind Irrigate were able to use the construction of the Green Line as a catalyst for creative placemaking that would strengthen the identity of organizations and businesses that existed in the local community. Following this series of projects, Springboard for the Arts has released a series of creative placemaking toolkits that offer guidance to other organizations seeking to respond to potentially disruptive construction projects in their communities (Nezam).
Conclusion

As tax-exempt, charitable entities, nonprofit arts organizations face a legal obligation to serve the public and have long faced challenges in advancing cultural equity. Many arts organizations have adopted statements or policies on equity, diversity and inclusion and undergone workshops and trainings to improve internal practices. There is a growing understanding of the need for arts organizations to look internally at their boards of directors, staff, and programs to reflect the diversity of their communities, and take tangible steps to reach these goals. Addressing, in this manner, barriers to participation that arts organizations themselves present to their communities is vital. Even if there are no outside obstacles to participation, community members who do not feel invited or represented in the boards, staff and programming presented by an organization may face perceptual barriers to attendance.

Advancing cultural equity requires arts organizations to evaluate not only how they are serving diverse audiences within their own institution, but also the access and opportunities that their community members have to engage with arts and culture from a holistic perspective. No single arts organization will be able to offer an arts or cultural experience that is desired or engaging for all individuals. Cultural equity calls for creating an ecosystem in which individuals have the ability to engage with arts and culture in the ways that are most meaningful and
suitable for themselves, and this manifests differently for each person. While it is vital to work internally to be representative of the diversity of one’s community, and to work towards inclusion in all aspects of the organization’s operations and activities, it is equally important for nonprofit arts organizations to look externally at the forces that create inequities to participation for their community members.

Transportation inequities create barriers to participation in arts and culture by generating policy and infrastructure that impose means of mobility onto their communities rather than responding to their communities’ existing needs. Transportation planning that does not engage communities in meaningful ways early on has continually resulted in infrastructure that is underutilized or that leaves gaps in serving its surrounding neighborhoods. This has a direct impact on the ability of many individuals to get to a venue for an arts or cultural event, and barriers to arts participation are worsened for individuals who face transportation related barriers in other aspects of their day-to-day lives.

The transportation infrastructure that shapes many American cities today finds its roots in a history of inequitable transportation policy that has often displaced and destroyed communities of color and low-income communities. While contemporary transportation policy has progressed towards planning processes that increasingly aim to inform and seek input from community members, the state of transportation in the United States continues to see many communities placed at a disadvantage with few options for basic mobility. Looking towards the future, arts organizations have an opportunity to support their communities in shaping local transportation infrastructure for the better.
While new technologies emerge, such as the self-driving car, which make automobile-based transportation more desirable and threaten to increase the sprawl of cities, a change in attitude toward transit may offer opportunities to bring about more equitable transportation infrastructure. Urban Information Lab’s study on transit deserts, led by Junfeng Jiao and Chris Bischak, uncovered this shift:

Our finding that denser areas tend to be underserved suggests that cities will be increasingly challenged to provide transit access in the coming decades. The United Nations estimates that two-thirds of the world’s population will live in cities by 2050, which will mean growing demand for transit. Moreover, fewer Americans, particularly millennials, are choosing to own vehicles or even get driver’s licenses. This dual challenge underlines the urgency of investing in transportation infrastructure. The problem of transportation access is only likely to grow more acute in the coming years, and new infrastructure projects take many years to plan, finance and complete. (Jiao and Bischak)

Arts organizations have an opportunity to affect lasting and community-driven change by facilitating and supporting the voices of their communities in planning processes, advocating for the inclusion of artists in transportation design processes, and identifying opportunities in oncoming transportation projects to enrich and preserve the existing arts and cultural assets in their communities. Arts and culture have the power to engage communities in a pluralistic manner, making room for a multitude of voices and perspectives. By
collaborating with public and private partners, arts organizations can facilitate
connection between community members, local leaders, artists and city planners
to respond to transportation challenges in ways that will meet the community
members where they are and allow for increased mobility and diversity in modes
of transportation.
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