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Author

Ekman, Annaleigh Yahata

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Meeting Travel Needs: Becoming Reacquainted with a Community's Unmet Travel Needs

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Annaleigh Yahata Ekman, MURP

Issue

Transportation in Los Angeles is deeply unequal. There are populations that face additional burdens that are not currently addressed by our transportation network. For agencies, like the Gateway Cities Council of Governments, a regional planning organization encompassing a population of about 2 million in southeast Los Angeles County, to address these inequities and create a better transportation system, these needs must first be identified and acknowledged.

There is a vast amount of data collected that help to identify the current travel patterns of a community. What these national and regional data sets do not include, however, is an evaluation of unmet travel needs of their residents. Unmet travel needs are defined as "trips and activities that people need or would like to do more, but for a variety of reasons they are prevented from doing so" (Luiu et al., 2017). In this research, this definition has been expanded to include the discomforts and dangers faced by vulnerable populations during their travel.

This research is focused not on transportation solutions, but on the methods of gathering information on the basic issues that individuals face when it comes to their unmet travel needs. The goal of this research is to identify the best practices to collect data on the unmet travel

needs of a neighborhood, particularly for disadvantaged populations, so that decision-makers are intimately familiar with the problem before they try to solve it.

Research Findings

- The ideal approach for collecting information on the travel needs of a neighborhood combines the benefits of active and passive data collection using smartphone-based surveys and thorough outreach to ensure that the survey instrument effectively reaches underrepresented populations.

- Existing efforts to study the travel needs of disadvantaged populations in studies occur at a smaller scale, but with greater effort placed on relationship building and community context.

- There are quality resources, examples, and guides for community needs assessments that can serve as a template for agencies seeking to explore the needs of their communities, such as the Mobility Equity Framework (Creger et al., 2018) and the University of Kansas Community Tool Box.

- The focus groups, although not fully representative of all living or working in downtown Huntington Park, produced valuable insights into the willingness of

Figure 1. Concept map of travel needs by focus group participants.

in California. Lastly, the focus groups gathered community opinions from downtown Huntington Park located in the Gateway Cities on survey preference and opinions on alternative data-collection strategies. The focus groups involved participants taking an initial survey and trialing a "concept mapping" exercise.

Recommendations

In the short-term, the Gateway Cities Council of Governments should continue outreach in the downtown Huntington Park area and maintain the relationships established through this project in order to lay groundwork for engaging people in future data collection.

In the medium-term, the GCCOG should conduct a one-week smartphone travel survey for one to three cities of the Gateway Cities region with mail recruitment while working with community-based organizations in every city to ensure participation on part of underrepresented communities in multiple neighborhoods.

In the long-term, the GCCOG should follow through with the next steps of the Mobility Equity Framework, which includes identifying specific modes and projects that will maximize benefits and minimize burdens on the community, then empowering community members to prioritize the projects that they would like to see happen. the amount of buses using the corridor. More sophisticated traffic engineering models can improve on these assumptions and strengthen these findings even further.

people to participate in a smartphone survey, the car-dependent nature of the neighborhood, and practical lessons-learned about the logistics of hosting focus groups.

Study Approach

This research is based on the following question: What are the best practices for characterizing unmet travel needs of neighborhoods in the Gateway Cities subregion? To answer this question, this project utilized a literature review, open-ended interviews, and focus groups. The literature review dived into the existing knowledge of the needs of disadvantaged populations, current travel behavior analysis data-collection strategies, and community needs assessments popularized in the field of public health. Open-ended interviews provided insight into the methodologies of current survey efforts occurring

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Yahata Ekman, A. (2020). Meeting travel needs: Becoming reacquainted with a community's unmet travel needs (Master's capstone, UCLA). https://escholarship.org/uc/item/446367xt

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