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The Movement Toward Mobility Justice in Los Angeles: Building a Framework Grounded in Popular Education & Community Knowledge



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Issue

In 2015, Los Angeles launched the citywide Vision Zero initiative to achieve a 20% reduction in traffic fatalities within two years. Vision Zero is centered around a three-word motto, referred to as the three E's: Engineering, Education, and Enforcement. However, even with the lack of implementation, the "Enforcement" arm of Vision Zero has brought up concerns about racial profiling and police violence (Abonour, 2018).

As an alternative, People for Mobility Justice (PMJ), an organization focused on addressing the transportation needs of communities of color, created the five D's: Decolonize, Decongest, Decriminalize, Dignify and Dream. These terms differ from Vision Zero's three E's in that they represent an invitation to collectively define safe streets. According to PMJ, mobility justice highlights how individuals face different challenges in transportation because each person is socially controlled in public spaces in distinct ways.

This project supported PMJ in refining its concept of mobility justice for its Mobility Justice Certification Program. The researcher examined the 5 D's as identified by PMJ and operationalized these constructs by looking at key studies, conceptual frames, and community-based work on mobility justice. Ultimately, the study sought to address the following question: How are mobility justice concerns encompassed within the 5 D's?

Research Findings

Residents in the communities studied have long been impacted by mobility injustices. As explored in this research, mobility represents the freedom and ability to move through space in a just and safe way. It is also a manifestation of structural inequities embedded within historically oppressed communities and, thus, one's ability to access resources to live a quality life.

Of all the 5 D's, Decriminalize was the most-discussed topic among PMJ meeting participants. When discussing Decriminalize, interviewees specifically tied it to the policing of Black people and their movement in public space. Participants connected these discussions to historical legacies of slavery, state violence, redlining, police brutality, and enforcement, as well as highlighting platforms of resistance such as Black Lives Matter, and abolitionist movements. It is important to recognize that race is also embedded in discrepancies in access to space, movement, and geography. Therefore the battle for true mobility justice and safety in public spaces is also about recognizing and organizing against white supremacy.

When discussing the other 5D's, participants were particularly worried about the effects of traffic congestion (Decongest) on their children's health. While participants did not specifically bring up the word "Decolonize," they did discuss displacement. In further discussions, a focus on "Decolonize" could help draw a connection between displacement and the repatriation of Indigenous land.

Study Approach

This project used a mixed-methods approach. First, the researcher conducted a literature review of key text, ideas, frameworks of mobility justice, and research about the 5 D's, followed by a review of case studies, such as the Bus Riders Union, The Untokening, the Movement for Black Lives, and Vision Zero policies across the United States, to supplement the ways other cities have implemented the frameworks around mobility justice. In addition,



Figure 1. Sample from People for Mobility Justice's "Decriminalize" module
(Source: Grace Lynne/PMJ)



Juárez Muñoz, Z. A. (2020). *The Movement towards mobility justice in Los Angeles: Building a framework grounded in popular education & community knowledge*. (Master's capstone, UCLA). Retrieved from: <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/12k791n6>

Abonour, R. (2018). *Vision Zero's enforcement problem: Using community engagement to craft equitable traffic safety strategies* (Master's capstone, UCLA) Retrieved from: <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7122h9g3>

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the researcher observed PMJ community meetings, workshops, and trainings, through the development of their Mobility Justice Certification Program. Surveys, along with semi-formal interviews, were conducted with participants and facilitators. The outcomes from this project will support PMJ's work in producing and refining their concept of mobility justice.

Conclusions

- Due to COVID-19 and its outsized impacts on BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color), mobility justice groups will have to focus even more on the criminalization of BIPOC mobility — whether on transit or when driving — by police forces. Principles for divesting from police should be established.
- PMJ has the potential to strengthen abolitionist movements such as the Movement for Black Lives. For example, PMJ can allocate resources to organizing efforts that center conversations around alternatives to policing. This can be an expansion of phase two of the Decriminalize module.
- There is room to build stronger relationships between mobility justice and environmental justice movements. PMJ has the potential to include mobility justice in the movement for zero-emission transportation systems adding to the Decongest framework.
- A vision towards mobility justice includes the dual themes of the freedom of movement and the freedom to remain in place such as dwelling and anti-displacement. It is recommended that PMJ engage in conversation about the freedom to remain in place as a way to address power and policing as it relates to Decriminalize and Decolonize.