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Centering Community in Transportation Policy: Lessons from Biking While Black Policy Report

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Centering Community in Transportation Policy: Lessons from Biking While Black Policy Brief



The Problem

Black and Brown bicyclists face disproportionate harms. Although Black residents only make up 8% of Los Angeles's population, they are represented in 17% of traffic collision victims and 21% of traffic fatalities, highlighting ongoing inequities in safety and infrastructure, despite investments in new facilities.¹ Enforcement disproportionately affects Black and Brown riders without demonstrating real safety benefits.² Traditional policy approaches perpetuate these problems and fail to recognize place-based solutions that already exist in grassroots practices. Despite these clear inequities, Black and Brown bicyclist repeatedly find their voices and initiatives ignored. Their potential to transform mobility systems is lost.

The Solution

Biking While Black (BWB) mobilizes community voice to make this problem visible and envision safe and dignified active transportation for all. Consisting of two short films, a companion guide, curriculum and community discussions, BWB uses lived experiences as necessary data to inform reformative change. The mobility justice framework used by BWB prioritizes dignity, belonging, and community power. Based on four years of film screenings, community discussions, and workshops, BWB offers the following insights for policy makers:

1. *Treat community narratives as vital data to inform policy.*

Transportation policy prioritizes technical data such as crash frequency and ridership counts, while sidelining community stories that highlight real lived harm. Racialized stops, unsafe infrastructure, and fear of harassment are all daily realities that Black and Brown bicyclists face. Agencies must formally incorporate community narratives into the planning, evaluation and policy design process. Include community testimony in project scoring and funding allocations. Partner with grassroots media and cultural groups to document lived experiences, Integrate qualitative findings into official performance metrics.

2. *Support community power to create durable, place-based, and experience-driven solutions.*

Black and Brown communities run group rides, mentorship programs, bike repair hubs, and safe passage networks. These initiatives allow communities to become safer and build leadership capacity. These initiatives are vital parts of the transportation system and must be given support. Provide long-term partnership and financial support to grassroots groups. Give community representatives real decision-making power in advisory groups.

3. *Make knowledge accessible and actionable to communities.*

Transportation plans are often lengthy reports with technical phrasing, which impedes accessibility. Budget and decision-making processes are opaque. Collaborate with communities to create materials in plain language, with infographics and bilingual resources. Train staff on community communication practices.

¹ Brozen, M., & Butler, T. L. (2024, April 9). *Prioritizing Black Lives in L.A.'s Traffic Safety Efforts, Revisited*. UCLA Lewis Center for Regional Policy Studies.

² Racial and Identity Profiling Advisory (RIPA) Board. (2025, January). *RIPA Board annual report 2025*. California Department of Justice.

Replicate collaborations like the Los Angeles County’s Anti-Racism, Diversity, and Inclusion (ARDI) work with BWB. By hosting film screenings, mobility justice panels, and facilitating community feedback, ARDI has acknowledged the power of community storytelling and lived experience as necessary knowledge to shape policy. Make financial processes and decisions transparent. Translate technical materials and financial decisions into real-world impacts on Black and Brown communities.

4. *Show accountability through measurable improvements in equity.*

Equity must be put into practice through structural change. Adopt regular equity audits to evaluate whether investments reduce disparities or meet the Title VI civil rights requirements. Overhaul enforcement as a safety strategy and implement community-led initiatives such as ambassador programs or other non-police safety strategies. Share data on crashes, citations, and budget by race and neighborhood. Align equity goals with budget allocations and leadership evaluations. Meaningful change requires restructuring institutional practices and the reallocating resources.

5. *Provide stable, long-term investments in equity.*

Equity-focused initiatives need more than short-term grants that come and go with shifting budgets. Create stable funding pathways for community-led projects. Stable funding pathways could look like permanent budget lines in transportation departments, changes to grant rules that favor equity-focused partnerships, or even combining resources with health, housing, and educational programs. As BWB has shown, mini-grants can accomplish a lot, however long-term change will struggle to take hold within the limitations of current financial models.

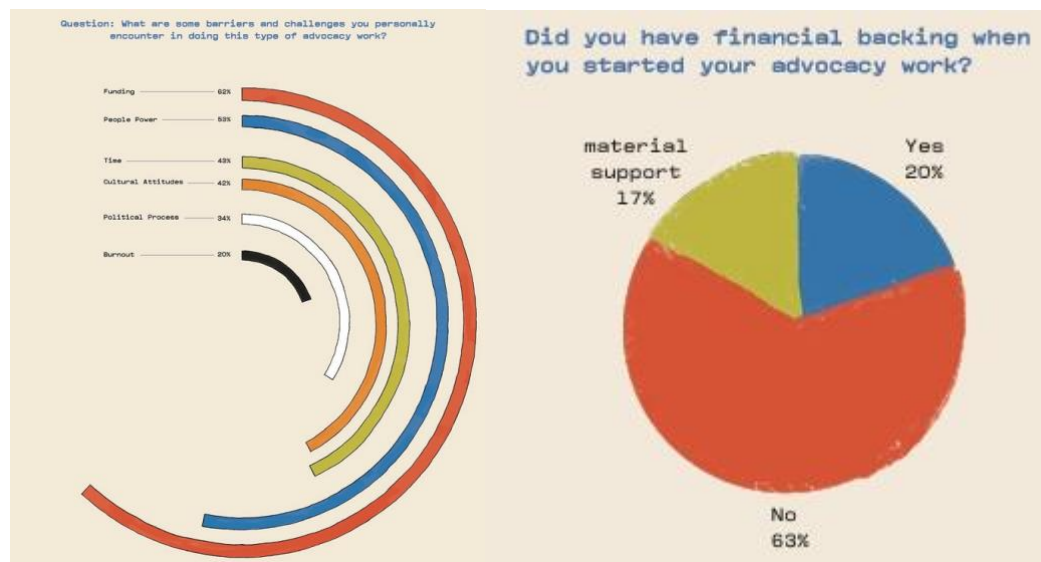


Figure 4. 62 percent of advocates cite funding as a barrier to advocacy work, and 63 percent stated they had no financial backing at the start of their advocacy work.⁴

These policy recommendations offer a clear roadmap for advancing mobility justice and equity in transportation policy. The result will be safer and fairer streets. When policy is co-created with communities, not only is it more inclusive, but it also works better and matches the real needs of the community.

To access the full report or for more information, contact Yolanda Davis-Overstreet at Biking While Black (bikingwhileblackfilm@gmail.com) or the Feminist Research Institute at UC Davis (fri@ucdavis.edu).