

Tear Down Those Highways!

By Gil Rodan

The following piece is part of Progressive City's [Planning for Just Transport](#) series. Transport is fundamental to our existence – including access to key sources of livelihood, ranging from work to healthcare to educational institutions to childcare to stores. Yet, the right to accessible, safe and affordable transport – as a public good – is continuously denied on the basis of ability, race, gender, sexuality and class. With this in mind, authors have highlighted initiatives, strategies or actions that aim to secure more just forms of transit.



Oakland's Grove Shafter Freeway, 1968, by Russ Reid (Courtesy of Oakland Museum of California)

The web of highways that crisscross the American cityscape was created out of an express desire to provide wealthier white suburbanites with comfortable access to the resources and jobs in central cities, while destroying low-income and racially diverse urban neighborhoods—often intentionally. These deliberate policies were designed in a way that exacerbated racial and economic stratification and they continue to wreak havoc on the built environment to this day. No program for just transportation can exclude the reality of the violence promoted by highway-building. Instead, we must confront and dismantle the disastrous relics of our past in order to build the sustainable and equitable transportation infrastructure that the climate crisis of this century

demands.

No program for just transportation today should ignore the deleterious impacts of highways on cities. Residents of poor and BIPOC neighborhoods that bore the brunt of highway construction suffer from poorer air quality and higher rates of respiratory illness than residents of wealthier and whiter neighborhoods. Furthermore, highways act as physical barriers enforcing racial and class-based segregation.

As Omer Freilla notes in his chapter from *Highway Robbery* (Edited by Robert D. Bullard, Glenn S. Johnson and Angel O. Torres, South End Press, 2004) highway construction, in concert with discriminatory financial and housing policies, was developed as a “massive welfare program for the white working class” that was predicated on the immiseration of urban minorities.

What cities need is not deceitful highway departments that rebrand their projects to widen the concrete snakes that have strangled cities so they can satisfy the needs of suburban real estate developers. What they need is a program of highway removal that centers community control and the right of return for the 475,000 displaced families in decommodified and community-controlled housing.

Highway teardowns present an opportunity to limit the outflow of urban wealth into the suburbs, while also providing urban communities a way to harness that wealth in order to secure better transit and safer mobility options for residents.

The money is certainly there. The California Department of Transportation's 2021 budget alone included \$10 billion for highway expansion and "improvement" projects, enough to fund several highway teardowns and develop community-controlled housing. Yet local, state, and federal transportation planners continue to invest in transportation programs that further inflame racial and economic disparities, treating the city as a resource to be exploited by those from the outside rather than as a place for people to thrive.

Highway removals present their own challenges, however. Following the teardown of San Francisco's Central Freeway, the Black population of the freeway impacted zone declined by nearly 36% and nearby real estate values soared; showcasing the ability of freeway removals to be wielded as tools of real estate speculation. Without proper considerations, highway removals can have the effect of replicating the same processes of segregation caused by highway construction.

Highway removals must not be conducted with the ethos of urban renewal and master-planning whole cities and metropolitan regions, but with an emphasis on the needs of residents so they can enjoy the benefits of urban living while remaining shielded from the speculative tides of real estate capital.

Gil Rodan is a San Jose (California) based columnist.

Towards Transport Justice in the Global South

Towards transport justice in the Global South: Using PAR to define, evaluate and monitor progress in Chile

By Ignacio Tiznado-Aitken and Lake Sagaris

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What do we mean by transport justice? In the Global North, the concept is usually linked to benefits and costs of transport systems and how their distribution across population groups affects equity and social inclusion. In Chile, one of the world's most unequal societies, we started from current academic conceptualizations to test and adapt key concepts to our context. We used a participatory action research (PAR) framework, which is based on horizontal, democratic principles of power sharing, *learning through action* and research *with* rather than *on* people. We applied two surveys, qualitative workshops with community leaders and academics, and feedback workshops. This allowed us to generate a "transport justice balance sheet", *Balance de Transporte Justo (BTJ)* (2018-2020), using an open-ended definition of transport justice.

Led by the university-community collaboration, the *Laboratorio de Cambio Social* (Laboratory for Social Change), we explored the dimensions that transport justice should consider and how the mobility system could contribute to more just cities in Chile's highly segregated urban areas. We found that planning for transport justice should consider elements of universal access, walkability, cycle inclusion, and public transport, as might be expected. However, partners also underlined gender violence, democratization of governance, provisions for seniors and children, neighborhood heritage, and ecological services as central dimensions.

In 2020-2021 we again used PAR to produce a tool to rank transport justice in diverse cities. The main tool was a survey of experts, developed with intensive participation from leading citizen groups and academics. The survey focused on five areas key to transport justice: universal access, gender, walkability, cycle inclusion, and public transport. Over 100 experts from citizen, technical and academic backgrounds responded, evaluating different facets of each topic, prioritizing possible solutions, and identifying challenges and opportunities for each location. This allowed us to generate a ranking for 12 cities in six of Chile's 13 regions, leaving us with a well-tested instrument to evaluate and, in 2021-2022, monitor progress towards transport justice.

Cities in the initial ranking posted results ranging from 33% to 58% of transport justice achieved. Rancagua, the best city in the ranking, has advanced significantly in walkability and cycle inclusion, but has been weak on citizen participation (Figure 1). To further complement and contextualize these results, we created a companion City Profile with qualitative and quantitative indicators, including city size, density, spatial aspects, planning with or without citizen participation, and road fatalities broken down by gender, rural/urban, and transport modes. This last indicator was based on a national database that holds significant data but has failed to make it available in an easily understood, policy-relevant format.

The ranking avoids any pretense at universality and, by presenting itself as a baseline rather than an absolute evaluation, avoids stigmatization when generating an overview for each city highlighting strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for improvement. The ranking also generated flexible quantitative and qualitative tools to monitor progress at a time when major pro-democracy changes have swept municipal elections countrywide and regional governors have been elected for the first time in Chile's history. This socio-political context, the result of massive protest movements throughout 2019 and well into the pandemic, offers significant opportunities for the BTJ and our ranking to serve as a roadmap for more inclusive transport, making it particularly useful to advocacy groups and visionary politicians.

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Lake Sagaris is an internationally recognized expert on cycle-inclusive urban planning, civil society development, and participatory planning theory and practice as they relate to urban-regional governance. She has increasingly used a gender perspective to highly aspects of transport and mobility justice and intersectionality in both her research and her teaching, pioneering studies on women, safety and public transport (Santiago case study, *Ella se mueve segura*, CAF/FIA Foundation) and action-research partnerships to create gender, civil and social justice programs as part of Cool routes to schools programs in vulnerable neighborhoods in cities large and small. In 2019, the Transformative Urban Mobility Initiative, of the German Development Agency, ITDP and others, included her in their list of Remarkable Women in Transport.

Transportation Justice is Needed Throughout the Supply Chain

By Lisa Berglund and Emily Erickson

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photo credit: Doing Development Differently in Metro Detroit

There has been a concerted effort at many agencies to diversify the workforce of professional transportation planners, however little attention is paid to workers who actually deliver on these plans by building and maintaining transportation infrastructure. Transportation planners have been paying significant attention and proposing policies to increase accessibility and mobility for racialized communities by restructuring.

fares, increasing access to transit, and making reparations for damages caused by the construction of transportation infrastructure through racialized communities. But missing from this discussion is the role of workers of color throughout the supply chain who build and operate the buses, trains, and infrastructure that our transit systems rely on. In the case of transit operators, the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the taken for granted essential services of a largely racialized workforce. These workers have historically faced both exclusion from these workforces on one hand, and exploitative labor practices on the other.

Key links in the transportation supply chain have received little attention in the scholarly and practice oriented discussions on just transportation, from a race or class perspective. Low-road employment practices where cost cutting leads to racial wage gaps and dangerous conditions for workers of color in transit vehicle manufacturing. Next in the supply chain, we should consider organizing efforts of Black and Indigenous workers and their historic struggle to be included in the building trades that construct rail and road networks. Across the U.S. and Canada, workers of color have not gained access to construction trades and high skilled (and therefore higher paying) sectors due to a legacy of exclusion and discrimination in training and hiring. As a final link in the supply chain, transit operators, a group in which workers of color are frequently overrepresented, is also overlooked in discussions about transportation equity. While many of these operators have successfully fought for benefits and protections, they are routinely exposed to occupational hazards, most recently in their roles as essential workers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Planners should use their positions of institutional power to support anti-racist labor practices *throughout* the supply chain by creating inclusive procurement policies, supporting campaigns to improve job quality and normalizing the promotion of anti-racist practices at every link in the chain. While we focus here on transportation planning, labor issues are embedded in the production and maintenance of planning outcomes and are key for planners working towards racial justice in all areas of the profession.

Lisa Berglund is a professor at the School of Planning at Dalhousie University. Her work focuses on social justice and community organization in the context of gentrification and other types of neighborhood change. She has researched the role of community benefits agreements in the US and Canada, exploring how benefits like jobs and housing can be distributed justly in quickly redeveloping areas.

Emily Erickson is a professor in the Department of Urban and Regional Planning at Alabama A&M. Her work focuses on economic justice, immigrant rights, and civic engagement. She has researched how heavy manufacturing is reshaping communities in the American South.

Reclaiming streets from cars: towards a fairer road space distribution in Latin America

By Giovanni Vecchio, Ignacio Tiznado-Aitken, and Rodrigo Mora

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Figure 1. Examples of emergency interventions: upper left, redistribution of the road space for a new temporary cycleway in Mexico City; upper right, partial street closure with traffic calming and a new space for pedestrians in Rancagua; middle left, new permanent cycleway in Salta; middle right, transformation of one road lane into a cycleway in Bogotá. Redistribution of road space in Porto Alegre, reducing parking spaces to realise a cycleway (sources: Gobierno de la Ciudad de México; Ilustre Municipalidad de Rancagua; Jimena Pérez Marchetta; Instituto Distrital de Recreación y Deporte; Prefeitura de Porto Alegre)

Troubling times, when well managed, can underscore long-standing socially unequitable and environmentally unsustainable problems and prompt the development of new kinds of solutions. The COVID-19 pandemic has created the opportunity for a fairer allocation of road space – one that considers all modes of transport – showing that a more sustainable approach to mobility is possible. The need for physical distancing in public spaces helped to shift the focus of planning from traffic to people, changing the allocation of resources and road use. Many cities around the world, for example, started promoting temporary transformations of streets, redistributing road space to create emergency cycleways and expanding sidewalks to allow the movement of people and grant physical distance between people. These initiatives were not restricted to the exclusively rich and “well governed” European or North American cities but also instituted in less affluent Latin American cities with less formalized planning practices, lacking technical experience, resources, and sometimes public acceptance. What are the lessons to be learnt for cities of the painful experience of the COVID pandemic? Can Latin American cities employ this traumatic experience to mitigate their deep-rooted inequality and car-centric urban planning?

The major disruption posed by COVID-19 has reconfigured sustainable and fairer mobility initiatives in Latin American cities. Cities such as Bogotá (Colombia), Mexico City (Mexico), Porto Alegre (Brazil), Rancagua (Chile), and Salta (Argentina) have been active in implementing such measures and had well-known leaders in charge of these initiatives. Interviews conducted by the authors in June 2020 to key decision-makers in each city revealed that the pandemic fostered faster adoption of sustainable mobility measures such as emergency cycleways, street pedestrianization, bus lanes, and other traffic calming initiatives (Figure 1).

These transformations show two important changes in comparison to pre-pandemic interventions. The first refers to an advance in terms of equity. The COVID-related interventions explicitly promote a redistribution of road space, usually dominated by car-based mobility, benefitting users typically overlooked when planning mobility, such as pedestrians, cyclists, and public transport users, who are often socially disadvantaged compared to car users. In doing so, these actions provided more affordable mobility alternatives for essential workers, low-income people and car-less households usually neglected by traditional planning

approaches. In two webinars, organized by Chile's CEDEUS - Center for Sustainable Urban Development, the five cities presented their initiatives during the pandemic (in [July 2020](#)) and one year after (in [June 2021](#)). For example, authorities of Mexico city implemented an emergency bike lane in one of the city's most important and longest road, Insurgentes st., while in Bogota a series of less extended but more dense bike lanes were constructed in 2020 in order to facilitate the movement of people.

The second change involves decision-making processes among planners. Cities facing the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic reported different degrees of public involvement in defining actions to be taken. When public involvement was promoted, as in Bogotá, Mexico City and Salta, it consisted primarily of regular meetings of advocacy groups with city authorities during the lockdown period in order to decide the type of action to be implemented and determining which streets and public spaces to target. In other cases like Rancagua, however, civic involvement was non-existent (mainly for sanitary reasons related to the pandemic), as it was considered that the community had already expressed support for the transformation of streets and public spaces in the city that started in previous years. This raises important challenges on participatory planning and procedural justice (i.e., how decision-making is done in practice) and how to ensure that people's desires and needs are considered in the mobility interventions taken.

The COVID pandemic showed that also Global South cities such as the mentioned Latin American examples can engage in rapid, transformative interventions for fairer mobility. However, the discussed emergency interventions have a limited reach for addressing structural inequalities. Latin American cities require deep transformations to overcome long-ingrained urban segregation and underfunding, fostering more balanced urban structures that facilitate the availability of opportunities and the interaction between social groups. However, in the short term, redistributive policies are required to achieve just transport, facilitating the sustainable movement of disadvantaged people and enhancing accessibility to relevant urban opportunities.

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Just Transportation through Transformative Planning: Another World is Possible

By Diana Benitez

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International Blvd and 53rd Street Under Construction, 2019 UC Berkeley Transportation Studio

Built environments like public transportation have been physically shaped and enforced by intentional human-enacted policies and practices that have harmed low-income communities and communities of color. This harm has denied equitable access to not only public transportation to meet daily mobility needs, but safety, amenities and culture. Growing up in Los Angeles and living in the Bay Area, I have seen similar policies and practices that have been codified into zoning codes, policies and investments. As planners, it is

our duty to acknowledge this harm, remove harmful policies and practices, and prevent any further harm from occurring in these communities. At [Just Cities](#) we're working alongside community members and partners to do transformative planning to make this a reality in East Oakland and other Bay area cities. We are a policy and planning research organization that designs cities that recognize the human rights of all by advancing racial and policy justice with communities.

My colleagues and I conducted a [racial equity and restorative justice analysis](#) of East Oakland Displacement Status and Impacts from the East Bay Bus Rapid Transit (EBBRT) project for the [East Oakland Mobility Action Plan \(EOMAP\)](#). East Oakland is a sub-region in Oakland, California. We highlighted that Black/African American, Latinx, and Asian American people have been harmed by gentrification and racialized displacement, and experience safety and business displacement impacts from the EBBRT. During our analysis I saw hundreds of business licenses along the corridor that disappeared from 2014 to 2019. My colleagues and a Resident Advisory Council ground truthed this data through their lived experiences and identified what businesses in the displacement analysis were still on the corridor, how many legacy businesses remained and developed profiles on some of the displaced East Oakland staples like Perry's Fine French Furniture Store and Thalia's Jewelry shop.

Alameda County Transit Authority (AC Transit) spent 12 years pre-developing and constructing the 9.5-mile BRT from San Leandro to Oakland, including International Blvd in East Oakland. AC Transit promised improved bus service with decreased wait and ride times and a dedicated bus lane. However, the agency largely trivialized or ignored community concerns of impacts to business, traffic, and safety. This transportation improvement launched in August 2020 and led to East Oakland residents losing access to transportation, businesses, safety, and culture in the following three ways:

- 1) Prioritizing connectivity for people getting from downtown Oakland to downtown San Leandro, while removing 30 bus stops for East Oakland residents. Some of these residents must now walk longer distances to their home.
- 2) Decreasing safety and accessibility for pedestrians (+26% collisions within the first year of construction) with single car lanes and median bus stops along all of International Blvd, a high injury network street. This made it difficult for drivers to navigate and increased collisions both during and after construction, and
- 3) Decreasing the number of businesses by 37% (502) along International Blvd. from 2014-2019. Many were local mom and pop shops that could not survive the prolonged construction and reduced parking.

How do we prevent and not just mitigate harm in these projects? It requires a shift in planning frameworks, methodology, policies and practices, and the people who lead planning efforts. From 2019-2021, the Oakland Department of Transportation (OakDOT) co-developed the EOMAP with community partners, East Oakland Collective, TransForm, and Just Cities. It centers the mobility needs of lower-income Black East Oakland residents and outlines a 5-year action plan, projects and funding opportunities. These actions include centering racial justice in planning processes, hiring Black planners, and developing community partnership agreements with local community-based organizations. This plan that will be released in the Fall documents OAKDOT's intention to prevent harm and show us that another world is possible. In addition, Just Cities

recommends that agencies like OakDOT must: center community safety, the needs and voices of most impacted populations, and integrate existing community-driven strategies.

Diana Benitez serves as the Urban Planning Justice Manager at Just Cities. Her research contributions have included health equity and racial disparities analysis, student equity need indices, early care and education gap analysis, climate hazards analysis, and greenhouse gas reductions. She previously worked as an Intermediate Planner/ Designer at Raimi + Associates, a planning consulting firm and as a Research Data Analyst at Advancement Project California, a next generation civil rights organization. Diana is the Chair of the American Planning Association (APA) California Planners4Health Initiative. Diana received her MURP from UCLA.

Boda Bodas for the US?

By Steven Polunsky

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[Three persons on boda-boda](#). Uganda, somewhere on A109 Road, between Jinja and Malaba. Licensed under [CC BY-SA 3.0](#)

Motorcycle taxis have been more of a joke than a reality in the US – played for laughs in the HBO show *Succession* and destined for a short life like the [MotoLimos](#) company, which in 2011 offered rides on top-of-the-line Honda Goldwings with Bluetooth helmets, airbag equipped vests, and even [riding clothes](#) for up to

\$90 an hour plus membership fees in San Diego, San Francisco, Las Vegas, and New York. Legend has it that the company was banking on lane filtering (moving between lanes of vehicles, closely related to and usually used interchangeably with lane splitting) but doing that created customer anxiety, so they added 3-wheeled Can Am Spyders, which became stuck in traffic like everyone else.

2011 is also the year World Moto announced the Taxi-Meter, heralded as "the world's first motorcycle taxi meter...", "one of the most significant innovations of this decade..." and "The First Real Taxi Meter Innovation in 100 Years...a \$3 billion dollar idea." Like MotoLimos, World Moto is no longer in business.

Yet, other parts of the world are seeing successful uses of motorcycles in passenger and freight movement through urban and even rural areas. A good example is the boda bodas of Africa. The name possibly signifies the ability to serve border-to-border, or more likely is the sound made by the gasoline powered engines most use. The same concept is known by different names around the world, but boda boda is the term of choice in several African countries including Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Rwanda, Tanzania, Togo, and Uganda. Auto passengers in congested urban centers like Mombasa and Nairobi have been said to leave their vehicles and catch a boda boda for time-sensitive trips. Uganda's capital Kampala alone may have as many as 200,000 boda bodas. Some can carry two or even three passengers.

Barriers to entry are few, as evidenced by the self-described "housewife with two children" Indonesian motorcycle taxi driver and data from Vietnam that shows motorcycle taxi driving is a full-time job for unskilled and low-income populations, although heavily skewing to males from 40-60 years old. Equipment is more readily available in Africa since limits on importing motorcycles were eased. Capital costs are low, enabling a wide range of business models, from individuals operating as ride-hail taxis to Mobility-as-a-Service implementations (typically, technology-enabled subscription services that integrate disparate travel modes) including fleets that are leased for a daily fee and app-based dispatch (some are available through Uber and other apps).

In comparison to micromobility such as bicycles and scooters, boda bodas use only the street so they do not take up space on sidewalks and, at the owner's discretion, can be cash-based, app-based, or use some combination of these methods. In some areas, collectives have sprung up to support training and safety standards and provide financing and loans through savings and credit cooperatives (SACCOs). Income can be augmented through sales of small, portable items like condoms.

Furthermore, there is now a movement to electrify these vehicles. A company named Ampersand is operating a small fleet in Rwanda. Other companies entering the field are ARC Ride, Bodawerk, Ecobodaa, Safi, and Zembo. Much as with autos, adoption of electric motorcycles depends on factors such as price, range, and charge time.

Could this new movement find its way to the United States? While Thailand became the world's first country to regulate motorcycle taxis in 2005, the United States has no similarly specific requirements, so the answer depends on how well existing systems, laws, and regulations can adapt to the paradigm, rather than the other way around. Issues include a patchwork of local business regulations – licenses, permits, fees, and fare regulations as well as insurance requirements – that affect the business entity, the equipment, and the drivers. How will local regulators see these businesses – as taxis, transportation network corporations, or like restaurant delivery services that use scooters? Will the drivers be seen as owners, employees, or contractors? Would some level of training be required to carry passengers for hire? Would speed or engine size be regulated? Such a regulated system may be attractive to transportation officials who could require sensors

that communicate with infrastructure to transmit real-time traffic related data; on the other hand, at least one country's tracker implementation is being interpreted as unwanted surveillance.

The concept presents an opportunity for addressing safety concerns by using data-driven research to evaluate safety needs. Boda bodas in the US would have a significant advantage if more states legalize lane filtering, as California and Utah have done and Montana recently authorized under certain circumstances. Speed limitations, safety gear requirements, and operational considerations could be tailored to localized injury data in geographically defined, speed limited, and congested areas.

Such services are more likely to become attractive in urban areas where parking spaces for new structures are limited or subject to fees. Moreso as the vehicles become electrified and linkages are made to transit agencies, local nonprofits, and businesses (one popular African restaurant chain has its own branded boda boda service for its customers). One unknown is how existing ride-hailing companies would react. Would they enter the field and impose an American-style gig economy, and under those circumstances could African-style models meet or out-compete?

There are downsides to this line of work. Motorcycle drivers would be subjected to urban street noise levels and exhaust, both while driving and waiting/acquiring new customers. Motorcycles are dangerous -- pre-Covid data tells us that motorcyclists are about 29 times more likely than passenger vehicle occupants to die in a motor vehicle crash and 4 times more likely to be injured. Driving a motorcycle with a passenger or passengers is difficult and may be made more so if the passenger is unfamiliar with motorcycle physics.

About one in four adults in the US report having a disability, and the most prevalent type of impairment is mobility. Motorcycles can be designed or modified for drivers with disabilities using devices like dual kickstands, foot controls, and stabilizer bars. Motorcyclists with disabilities are generally entitled to special license plates or placards in the same way as car users, enabling the use of marked parking spots and sometimes free metered spaces. The technology that enables passengers with disabilities to access taxi or ride-hailing should be serviceable for motorcycles as well. There does not seem to be much in the way of research regarding motorcycle use by passengers with disabilities, although there is literature that suggests guidance on creating infrastructure that accommodates people with disabilities is scarce.

While not a solution to every transportation problem, motorcycle taxis could be an affordable and efficient augmentation to America's mobility network. Some laws and regulatory structures may need adjustment to maximize the benefit. Low cost of entry would be attractive for potential drivers but safety and health concerns become prominent.

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