



# 2045 Long Range Transportation Plan

October 2021

Appendix H – Equity in Transportation Planning



# Appendix H

## Equity in Transportation Planning

This appendix discusses equity in transportation planning and summarizes the SLATS 2045 LRTP environmental justice analysis. SLATS and its members are committed to implementing a regional transportation system that serves all area residents, employees, visitors and businesses without discriminating based on race, income, or ability, and to institutionalizing transportation planning and development processes that elevate the voices, concerns, and preferences of those individuals and communities traditionally underrepresented in transportation decision making.

### Environmental Justice Framework

Federal, state, and local law provides a framework for undertaking transportation planning that attempts to bring the benefits afforded by a comprehensive transportation system to all. Key non-discrimination legislation includes Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, Executive Order 12898 (Environmental Justice) and the Americans with Disabilities Act. These laws prohibit discrimination in Federally funded transportation project development and selection based on race and ethnicity, low-income status, and ability. They furthermore require an analysis of projects to avoid, minimize or mitigate disproportionately high and adverse impacts on people of color and low income populations, prohibit the denial of and significant delay in the receipt of transportation benefits for those individuals, and ensure full and fair participation of all populations affected by transportation projects.

In practice, for the SLATS 2045 LRTP, this commitment to transportation equity was expressed through three channels. First, the planning process included targeted efforts to secure participation by traditionally underrepresented communities. These efforts are documented in the SLATS LRTP **Chapter 2** and in **Appendix A**. Second, equity measures were added to the LRTP goals and objectives and project ranking criteria to help SLATS and constituent municipalities and agencies focus future project development on improvements that will directly benefit – and will not disproportionately harm – individuals of color, low-income residents, and people with disabilities (see **Appendix B**). Finally, the projects recommended in this plan were subjected to an Environmental Justice review to evaluate their impacts on protected populations and their potential to benefit minority and low-income individuals.

### Equity Goals and Objectives and Project Criteria

In transportation planning, the considerations articulated in Title VI, Executive Order 12898 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) are sometimes generally called “environmental justice,” or EJ. In recent years, the United States Department of Transportation (USDOT) and FHWA have placed an increased emphasis on equity. This interest is mirrored by SLATS leadership and in public sentiment. The metropolitan transportation planning process, and LRTP development process, has long required an EJ analysis be conducted to document the potential impacts the fiscally constrained LRTP projects might have on the most vulnerable members of the community, specifically low-income residents and

minorities. The ADA requires accommodation of people with disabilities in the public right of way, and it is also consistent with industry practice to consider the impacts and mobility needs of children and older adults.

In developing the SLATS 2045 LRTP, one of the directives was to review the EJ inclusion and evaluation processes and identify opportunities to better address equity, including considerations for on-going transportation planning activities. The LRTP can be a powerful instrument to identify strategies that transportation agencies and planning partners can take to increase access to alternative transportation modes, improve safety, improve air quality, and improve connectivity – all of which can support and enhance equity if improvements are targeted in low-income and minority communities. In the second community survey, 70% of respondents either strongly or somewhat agreed with the statement: Target transportation investments to historically underserved populations first to provide better options to minority, low income, elderly, and people with a disability to improve access to jobs and services

Recognizing the critical importance of addressing equity in transportation planning, the SLATS TAC and Policy Board added the following equity goal and supporting objectives to the LRTP:

**Environmental Justice and Equity in Transportation System Development** - Prioritize transportation investments that support and improve mobility and access for traditionally underserved residents, workers, business owners, and visitors.

- Actively engage people of color, low income and transient populations, and people with limited English proficiency in transportation system planning and development.
- Prioritize multimodal transportation investments that enhance access to jobs, healthcare, education, and other essential destinations for traditionally underserved residents.

The transportation equity goal takes its place alongside transportation safety, land use integration, access and mobility and others as the foundation of the project development and selection process. The equity objectives were utilized in two ways: first, as described in the following section, they were applied qualitatively to the projects recommended in this plan. Second, the LRTP planning team developed a project evaluation tool to guide future project development. The tool operationalizes all the goals and objectives affirmed for this plan and will allow SLATS jurisdictions to refine projects early in the planning phase to improve conformity with those goals. This includes developing projects that explicitly address the particular needs of EJ populations, wherever they may reside in the region, and to have consideration of those needs integrated with other project development criteria. Chapter 10 provides additional details regarding the project evaluation matrix.

## EJ Evaluation of Fiscally Constrained Projects

The principles of environmental justice include:

- To ensure that no person be excluded from participation, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin.
- To ensure the full and fair participation by all potentially affected communities in the transportation decision-making process.

- To avoid, minimize, or mitigate disproportionately high and adverse human health and environmental effects, including social and economic effects, on minority populations and low-income populations.
- To prevent the denial of, reduction in, or significant delay in the receipt of benefits by minority and low-income populations.
- To guarantee that people with disabilities have the same opportunities as everyone else to participate in the mainstream of American life – to enjoy employment opportunities, to purchase goods and services, and to participate in State and local government programs and services.

The fiscally constrained roadway/freight projects (see **Appendix F** for a detailed description of the projects) were evaluated against these principles to determine if the criteria are met.

Environmental Justice populations are found in every neighborhood of the SLATS MPA, and they are employed and attend educational institutions throughout the region. Businesses, recreation facilities and community facilities serving the residents are found in all areas covered by this plan. However, in some cases, minority, low income and disabled residents face particular challenges when it comes to transportation, tending to rely more on transit, carpooling, cycling and walking compared to a non-EJ person. EJ populations form a greater proportion of the region in the central districts of Beloit and South Beloit and at the northern end of the planning area, near Janesville. These also tend to be the most densely populated areas of the region, the areas with the highest rates of unemployment, and with some of the oldest infrastructure. See LRTP Chapter 4, and/or **Appendix C: Demographic Trends**, for additional details.

During the stakeholder outreach process, interviews were conducted with a variety of stakeholders from EJ populations or those that work closely with minority, low income and persons with disabilities to identify key transportation issues and values. These include:

- Lack of information about transit and biking in Spanish in a visual (non-text) format
- Lack of safe routes for children and teens to access community facilities and recreation program providers
- Heavy traffic, high traffic speeds and perceptions of unsafe walking conditions around schools
- Limited transit service hours and service levels

**Figure 1** and **Figure 2** display the fiscally constrained projects as overlaid with the minority population and low income areas to determine their benefits for, and potential impacts on EJ populations. The projects were evaluated qualitatively to estimate the:

- Spatial relationship to people of color and areas with low household incomes, including potential to disrupt EJ populations, lead to displacements either directly or indirectly due to pressures on land values, or to separate EJ individuals from community facilities
- Ability to improve access to employment for minority, low income and persons with disabilities
- Ability to improve quality of life in areas with concentrations of EJ populations
- Ability to improve transportation safety – including multimodal safety and access – for EJ populations
- Ability to address issues raised by EJ populations in outreach activities
- Likelihood to delay the receipt of transportation benefits for EJ populations



FIGURE 1. EJ ANALYSIS (MINORITY POPULATION) – FISCALLY CONSTRAINED PROJECTS

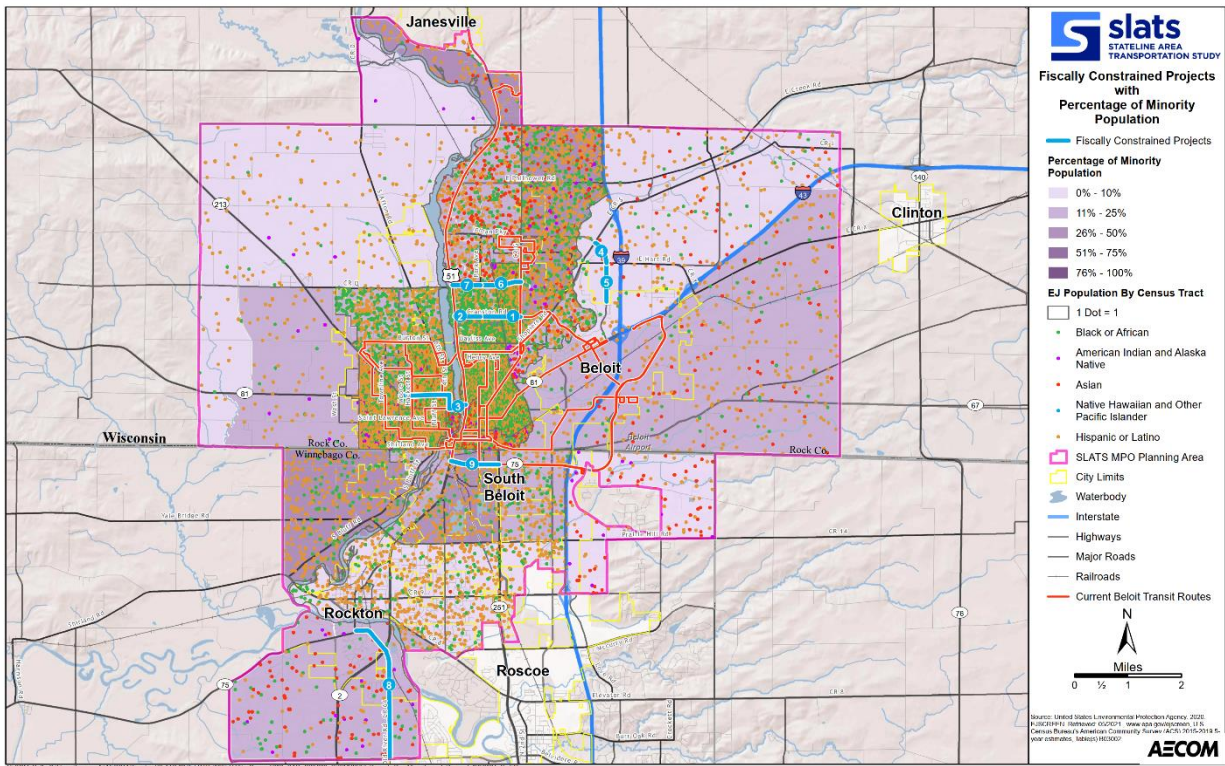
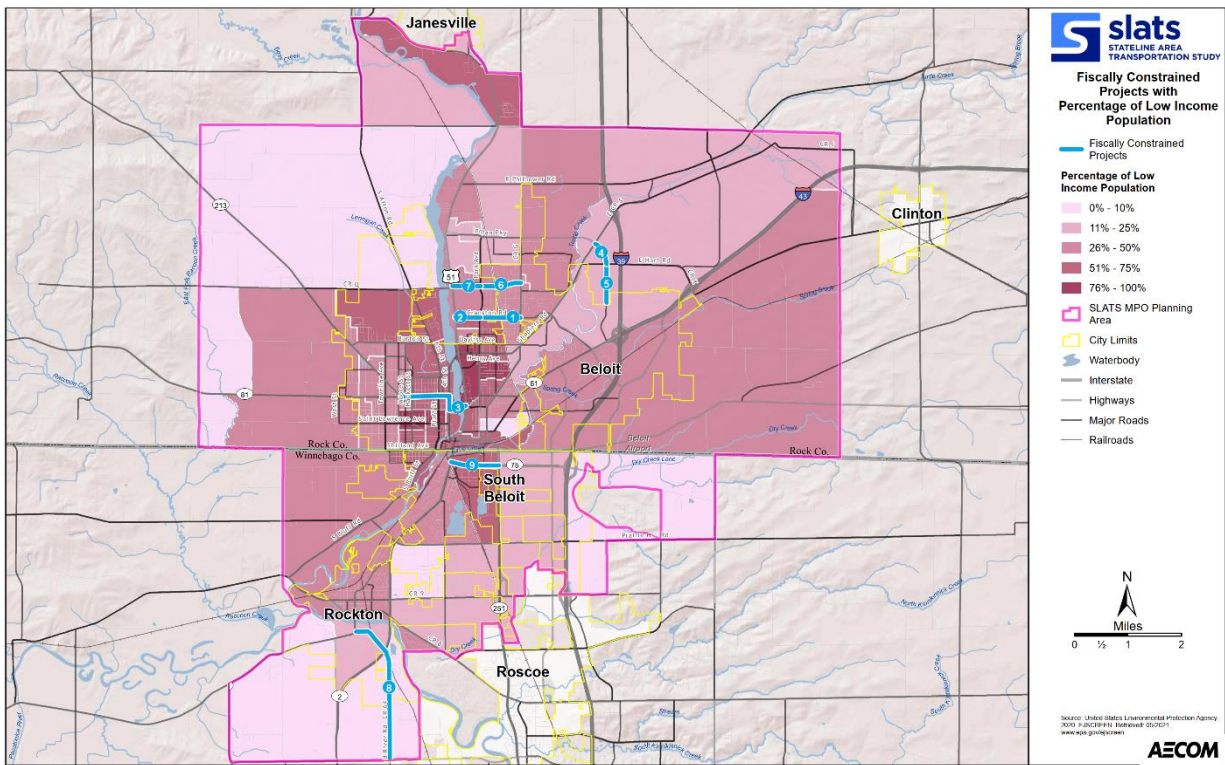


FIGURE 2. EJ ANALYSIS (LOW INCOME POPULATION) – FISCALLY CONSTRAINED PROJECTS



*EJ Analysis of the Fiscally Constrained Projects*

The EJ analysis for the projects recommended in the fiscally constrained plan are briefly described below. The results of the EJ evaluation are summarized in **Table 1**.

- **Cranston Road Reconditioning** (Phase 1 & 2). The road will be reconditioned between Prairie Avenue and Riverside Avenue and may include a lane reconfiguration and dedicated facilities for bicycles and pedestrians. Safety improvements will be evaluated at the road's intersection with Prairie Avenue, an area with high crash rates. The project is located in a census tract with a concentration of minority and low income residents. The project is likely to improve east-west connectivity north of downtown Beloit for all modes and connects to fixed-route transit service at the eastern terminus. Access to two schools will be enhanced by this project.
- **County BT Extension** (Phases 1 & 2). A new roadway will be constructed between Winchester Road and County S, extending County BT in an undeveloped area west of I-90. The project will connect a tract on the north side of the planning area with high minority population and poverty rates above the regional average to employment opportunities near the freeway.
- **Elmwood Avenue Reconstruction** (Phases 1 & 2). The road will be reconstructed between Prairie Ave. and Riverside Ave., This is currently part of a one-way pair west of Park Avenue to be converted to 2-way (Briar remains one-way) and needs to be widened east of Park to provide bike facilities. The project has the potential to improve east-west connectivity while diverting some motor vehicle traffic from a census tract with a high concentration of minority residents while significantly enhancing multimodal connectivity to employment and services. The corridor also connects to fixed-route transit service.
- **Liberty Avenue-4<sup>th</sup> Street-Portland Avenue Safety Improvements**. WIS 81 is a key east-west route through downtown Beloit and the adjacent residential neighborhoods west of the river. This project would systematically address existing safety concerns in the corridor, which includes six of the top twenty crash locations in the SLATS MPA. The improvements will also be coordinated with the High School Master Plan (underway) and would improve pedestrian and bicycle access within the corridor, as well as slow traffic (high traffic speeds through the district were identified as a key stakeholder concern) and improve overall neighborhood quality of life. The project corridor is home to one of the highest densities of people of color in the region, as well as high rates of poverty. This project has the potential to improve access for all modes, strengthen transportation connections to employment centers, improve safety for all travelers, and reduce the impacts of high-speed truck traffic in a residential area.
- **Old River Road Widening and Resurfacing**. The project consists of the widening and resurfacing of Old River Road from IL 75 to Roscoe Road providing improved shoulders and multi-use path. An urban section will be constructed east of IL 75 to improve drainage. Minor intersections will also be improved to meet applicable criteria and current ADA standards. The project will improve access to a middle school and regional recreation complex. The project area is relatively less densely populated than the regional average and is largely rural in character. The area relatively low densities of minority and low income persons.
- **Gardner Street Reconditioning**. Located in South Beloit along a corridor that the City has planned for redevelopment, this project would enhance traffic operations on key route linking I-39/90 with South Beloit and downtown Beloit. Depending on the results of a more detailed study that will be required, the project could potentially include the addition of a center median to enhance safety for the traveling public. The corridor has high truck traffic and the improvements will better define appropriate space for all users. This project will also include sidewalk improvements, and bicycle improvements could potentially be identified, including a possible continuation of bicycle facilities that continue east of I-39/90 and connect to Gateway Boulevard. The project is located in an area with a moderate density of minority residents, and has the potential to provide an improved east-west link for residents of high-minority west side neighborhoods to access employment opportunities near the freeway, including the planned new casino development, while reducing the negative impacts of truck traffic on the corridor itself. Fixed-route transit service travels on Gardner Street, and roadway improvements could benefit transit riders by reducing conflicts and providing opportunities for stop improvements.

TABLE 1. ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE EVALUATION OF FISCALLY CONSTRAINED PROJECTS

FC Project	Negative Direct Impacts	Better Employment Access	Better Quality of Life	Better Safety	Addresses Outreach Issues	Delay Benefits
<b>1. Cranston Road – Phase 1 (Park Avenue to Prairie Avenue) – FY 2025</b>	Not likely; no ROW acquisitions, removes barriers to local travel	Likely; improves options for travel to employment centers	Likely; lower traffic speeds, multimodal system enhancements; improves pavement and supports redevelopment of the corridor.	Likely; will address high crash location. Reduces travel lanes which will slow traffic	Likely; improves non-motorized access to schools; addresses request for improved bicycle facilities at this location	No delay
<b>2. Cranston Road – Phase 2 (Riverside Drive to Park Avenue) – FY 2027 / 2029</b>	Same as #1.	Same as #1.	Same as #1.	Reduces travel lanes which will slow traffic	Same as #1.	No delay
<b>3. Liberty Avenue / 4th Street / Portland Avenue – FY 2027</b>	Not likely; no ROW acquisitions, removes barriers to local travel	Some improvement; especially for those individuals that walk and bike in this area; should enhance access across the river and generally improve east-west connections through downtown to employment centers	Likely; lower traffic speeds, multimodal system enhancements; coordinated improvements with High School Master Plan will better accommodate traffic	Likely; will address potentially 6 of the top 20 crash locations within the MPA. Should improve pedestrian environment, and crossings.	Very high; addresses specific safety concerns identified in the downtown area. Supports enhanced east-west connection across Portland Avenue bridge.	No delay

<p><b>4. BT Phase 1 (S to approx. 200 feet south of Hart) – FY 2029</b></p>	<p>Not likely; it will be constructed in undeveloped parcels generally</p>	<p>Provides important network connection that will enhance east-west travel from residential areas to the west and employment opportunities in the east.</p>	<p>Not likely; area is undeveloped.</p>	<p>Minimal or no impact on safety anticipated, although some potential to divert traffic from moderately congested intersections to south.</p>	<p>May enhance access to employment opportunities</p>	<p>No delay; projects with direct positive impacts scheduled for earlier timeframes</p>
<p><b>5. BT Phase 2 (200 feet south of Hart to Winchester) – FY 2031</b></p>	<p>Same as #4</p>	<p>Same as #4; completes important north-south travel corridor in the MPA</p>	<p>Same as #4</p>	<p>Could potentially relieve some traffic from the intersection of WIS 81 and Cranston Rd, a top crash location in the MPA.</p>	<p>Same as #4</p>	<p>Same as #4</p>
<p><b>6. Elmwood Avenue – Phase 1 (Riverside Drive to Park) – FY 2033</b></p>	<p>Potential for significant ROW impacts to accommodate roadway realignment with Newark Road (and intersection improvements). There is minority presence in the area.</p>	<p>Likely; improves options for travel to major employment centers</p>	<p>Likely; improvement will include bicycle and pedestrian accommodations.</p>	<p>Likely; addresses of the top crash intersections; previously identified as part of an ICE study. Improves rural corridor to an urban cross section</p>	<p>Better accommodates east-west traffic. Provides improved access to employment opportunities. Addresses public requests for improved bike facilities in this location.</p>	<p>No delay</p>



<b>7. Elmwood Phase 2 (Park to Prairie) – 2035</b>	Maybe some ROW impacts; widening to urban cross section could impact residents front yard.	Same as #6	Same as #6	Likely, improves rural corridor to an urban cross section	Same as #6	No delay; projects with direct positive impacts scheduled for earlier timeframes
<b>8. Old River Road (IL-75 to Roscoe Road) – FY 2024 (currently in the 2021 TIP)</b>	Not likely; no ROW acquisitions, removes barriers to local travel	Unlikely to improve employment access	Improved bicycle accommodations and access to recreation.	Improved cross section will better accommodate all users, including accommodating truck traffic.	None identified at this location	No delay; projects with direct positive impacts scheduled for earlier timeframes
<b>9. Gardner Street (Phase 1) – FY 2028</b>	Not likely; no ROW acquisitions, removes barriers to local travel	Supports redevelopment planned within the corridor. Major east-west corridor; will likely become a major east-west corridor to access the new casino.	Supports redevelopment planned within the corridor; will fill-in sidewalk gaps; could help attract businesses to the area	Some; improved cross section will better accommodate traffic, and truck traffic. The corridor to the east of the project is identified as a truck bottleneck	Better accommodate truck traffic. Improve east-west connectivity.	No delay; projects with direct positive impacts scheduled for earlier timeframes

## Transportation Equity Conclusion

Following a review of the 2045 LRTP projects, SLATS believes there are no EJ concerns associated with the proposed roadway projects. In fact, the fiscally constrained projects strongly benefit the EJ communities, respond directly to items of concern raised by minority and low income populations, and support the 2045 LRTP transportation equity goals. Furthermore, policy changes envisioned in this plan have the unique potential to establish a project development framework that institutionalizes equity considerations in transportation planning, through the operationalization of equity in the project evaluation scheme. Furthermore, outreach conducted during the 2045 LRTP showed strong public support for these efforts.

The 2045 LRTP identifies the potential EJ impacts of projects at a very high level as the LRTP often contains relatively conceptual projects. As projects advance through the planning and design phases and they become more specific, the TIP documents the region's prioritization of limited transportation resources available among the various needs of the region. TIP projects are also reviewed for potential EJ and equity impacts. Together, it is through the LRTP and its implementing program (the TIP) that investments to the transportation system can be examined for any disparate impacts to EJ communities. As such, this process does not end with the LRTP, instead it is an on-going effort that SLATS is committed to as part of all future planning efforts.