

Equity for All Arizonans

TRANSPORTATION EQUITY IN RURAL ARIZONA COMMUNITY TOWN HALL

August 16, 2023 – Pinetop, AZ

DEFINING EQUITY AND ITS IMPACT

People in Pinetop-Lakeside and across Navajo County choose to live here and love to live here, and there are many strengths and advantages of being in a rural community. In some ways, residents understand and live with some of the challenges, but they also need the equitable resources necessary to meet unique local and county needs.

Transportation equity impacts many aspects of the community since transportation connects people to get to the places they need to be. Transportation includes not only road conditions but also buses, sidewalks, biking, crosswalks for students, and flights and the airport. Reliable transportation helps people get the services they need like healthcare, education and college, groceries and food, public safety, social services, and court services and criminal justice. However, those who need to get to services can't because of the lack of more options for transportation. Transportation inequity creates barriers for people in the criminal justice system to meet their court obligations.

One of the inequities is that transportation resources stem from the amount of funding counties and cities get based on taxes. This includes the Highway User Revenue Fund (HURF) which is distributed across the state based on population and a city-implemented Transaction Privilege Tax (TPT) in Pinetop-Lakeside of which a half cent goes towards transportation. To add to the challenges, around 55% of the residents are not counted towards these funding formulas since they do not live in the city year-round, and the homes are second homes rather than primary residences. The state funds are not equitable because they do not address the unique community needs in Navajo County around transportation options, accessibility, and mobility. The per person distribution does not reflect the road usage and the miles people travel in the community, and it doesn't consider the weather conditions or the part-time residents.

The state legislature and lawmakers need to step up and invest equitably in transportation in rural communities like Pinetop-Lakeside and across Navajo County in order to help Arizona residents thrive.

OPTIMIZING EVERYONE'S POTENTIAL THROUGH EQUITABLE APPROACHES

Transportation is interconnected to many other parts of living and working in Navajo County and in rural communities. Equitable transportation is the bridge to building strong communities and contributes to the workforce and jobs, services, and connecting with others. For example, transportation gets people to a health or mental health provider which supports the individual resources they need to succeed. Additionally, transportation can help us break the barriers with tribal communities and leverage tribal strengths in contribution to overall community success.

Snow, weather issues, and accidents can shut down the roads, and potholes may mean people avoid going out to avoid damaging their vehicles. These issues can stop people from getting to work or stop people from getting where they need to go. When the roads were fixed, visitors and residents seemed happier and more willing to go out and do more in town. One other barrier that needs to be addressed is "decision fatigue" which happens when someone needs to make multiple decisions and take multiple steps in order to get somewhere likely increasing their decision not to access needed services.

Equitable transportation would also bring economic development to communities and individuals—improving access to education and to the healthcare system. By improving transportation,

commerce also improves. Adjustments in the transportation system improve public safety and emergency management. Residents live in a fire zone, and access to roads and bridges for evacuation routes is critical for public safety. A focus on equity makes sure we optimize everyone, not just counties like Maricopa, which have more resources and funding. Improvements to transportation can bring more population, build the community, build businesses, and lead to success for all.

The current formulas are not equitable because they do not account for the uniqueness of tourism and business and the actual, real needs of our community. The funding formula needs to ensure the necessary dollars and resources for rural communities. Stronger, better supported, and more investments in transportation options can improve the well-being of our residents and community.

IMPROVING COMMUNITIES THROUGH EQUITY

The greatest priorities to use equity as an approach for improving the transportation needs of rural Arizona are funding, education, and collaboration. We need to increase the types of transportation available to our citizens including biking, buses, and other ways of transportation that improve access, mobility, and opportunity. These projects also need to link local employment and the workforce and incentivize employing local citizens to help contribute to these transportation solutions. To maximize our efforts, we should consider a region-wide approach where cities, towns, and counties work together to get the funding needed.

We want to leverage our partners across different departments, organizations, and throughout the community. We need to create a grassroots effort to demand creative solutions from our lawmakers, policymakers, and community members. We need to collaborate with citizens to help them become informed advocates on behalf of this issue with legislators and town representatives.

For example, faced with the challenges of road conditions, the town of Pinetop-Lakeside posted the Arizona Department of Transportation survey link on their website and encouraged community members to give feedback. This made a difference in helping the state understand the issues that needed to be addressed and consider the resources and support necessary to make a positive impact.

NEXT STEPS AND ACTIONS

Here are some actions that should be taken to address these opportunities:

- The regional transportation committee members will help make sure people show up to where funding decisions are being made and mobilize our group of core people to make their voices heard about transportation equity.
- The legislature needs to modernize the revenue stream and the allocation formula for these funding sources. Lawmakers can update the selection process for the distribution of funds and allow more flexibility in determining how to use those funds based on local and regional needs.
- All of us can show up and bring our human stories of the real impact of these funding sources on real Arizonans. For example, years of collaboration and advocacy led to investments that helped construct a crosswalk for local elementary school students to ensure they can safely cross the street each day to get home from school.
- Those of us in the community closest to the issues need to engage with mayors, boards, councils, and local representatives, and ask for them to fight for us so they can understand what rural Arizona faces and what rural Arizona needs.

When we unite our efforts and work as a team, we can succeed.

INDIVIDUAL COMMITMENTS TO ACTION

Recognizing that the power to change the future begins with each individual, participants committed to take personal actions based on their experience and discussions during the Transportation Equity in Rural Arizona Community Town Hall. Below are individual actions that were shared.

I WILL...

- Participate in community programs.
- Promote and encourage others.
- Share with my organization.
- Reach out to elected representatives at all levels.
- Get involved with my local regional transportation board.
- Comment publicly on projects related to transportation.
- Advocate to state legislators to modernize revenue streams.
- Work with ADOT board to keep our needs on their agenda.
- Utilize my position in Pinetop-Lakeside community services to engage and educate and channel their comments to the proper entities for the most impact.
- Make sure the public understands the issue and why it needs to be addressed.
- Dedicate time and effort to promoting an improved transportation system in Navajo County and collaborating with key partners.
- Strive to educate my community on the value of improving transportation as social determinants of health and improving our community members' quality of life.
- Work to educate the community on the importance of pedestrian ways.
- Open up to the White Mountain Regional Transportation Committee to a broader spectrum of people.
- Work with others on a regional comprehensive system for transportation.
- Dedicate my time to increase public education regarding transportation equity and involvement needs in the community.
- Reach out to become active in transportation solutions for our rural county.
- Join a talk force or a committee on transportation solutions for our rural county.
- Continue to educate and collaborate.
- Not assume that co-workers, neighbors, and other community members understand the inner work required.
- Make sure I am having conversations with other people I encounter and educate them on real transportation issues to help them understand the real challenges.
- Continue to encourage our local government officials to fight for our communities.
- Spread the information I have learned on transportation equity with the White Mountain Apache Tribal council.
- Collaborate on ways to educate our communities about connecting with surrounding towns.
- Engage my local leaders and share what my organization does to help my community.
- Advocate for change of revenue streams and allocation via equity.
- Talk to legislators about rural transportation needs and how to increase funding to rural communities.