



NATIONAL SAFETY COUNCIL

Position/Policy Statement

Equity in Roadway Safety

The policy position will supersede #165. The National Safety Council initially passed Equity in Transportation policy position in 2021. Since that time, more research and resources have been developed on this topic.

As a leader in safety, the National Safety Council (NSC) is compelled to address systemic disparities and inequities that exist within road safety with the goal of creating a safer, more equitable U.S. transportation system. This framework is a reflection of our current knowledge and intention. Due to the complexity of this issue and our own continued education, this framework may be revised as needed.

For the purposes of this document and the position discussed, equity is defined as the fairness with which benefits and burdens are distributed and how disparities, including those based on race, income, and gender, are identified and addressed within specific populations. This fairness should take into account addressing disparities, lack of agency in decision-making, and other legacies of under-investment or discrimination that may have resulted in unequal outcomes for specific groups or individuals.

Policy/Position

NSC appreciates that the interventions and programs that address transportation safety and access to mobility options often have a grassroots or local component. NSC leadership, voice, and programming can be leveraged to address disparities in roadway safety, including traffic fatalities,¹ access,² and equity, as well as to expand the diversity of stakeholders and partners.

To achieve the NSC mission to save lives, from the workplace to anyplace, the Council must work in a multi-faceted effort to address safety disparities, including achieving transportation equity: the idea that, regardless of one's age, race, gender, ability, income, background, or other personal characteristics, a person will be able to enjoy mobility options that are safe and accessible.³

¹ <https://smartgrowthamerica.org/dangerous-by-design/>; <https://www.governing.com/gov-data/pedestrian-deaths-poor-neighborhoods-report.html>

² https://nationalequityatlas.org/indicators/Car_access#/

³ Safe and accessible mobility includes consideration of investments in transportation options and support for those transportation systems, and NSC will support transportation investments to provide safe and accessible transportation for all.

When achieved, transportation equity can have a profound impact on communities, enabling safe access to school, work, healthy food, parks, and more, as well as empowering community members to become stakeholders in roadway safety; mobility independence for all road users becomes a reality.

In recent years, transportation stakeholders, including NSC, have established a goal of reaching zero deaths on our roads as both an objective for the organization and as a framework for programming. As such, NSC commits to understanding the historic and current barriers to transportation safety as it relates to its roadway practice and incorporating equity into its work, which is critical to creating safe environments where people can move freely and safely, such that, achieving zero deaths within our transportation system is possible. [A Safe System approach](#), as emphasized in the Road to Zero strategy, adopted in an NSC policy position,⁴ and serving as the foundation of the National Roadway Safety Strategy, is also necessary, as it promotes approaching roadway safety in a data-driven, holistic, and equitable manner. The Safe System approach emphasizes a shared responsibility for roadway safety for all road users, and more information is available at the NSC policy position on the topic.⁵

Additionally, NSC will use its platform to promote safety for all, regardless of demographics, a priority on both a national level and within its own organizational culture.⁶ For example, NSC supported the Road to Zero Coalition in adopting an equity priority statement and incorporating an equity lens into programming.⁷

Justification

There has been a deep history of inequities in the U.S. that continue to impact transportation systems and safety outcomes.⁸ From decades of policies and programs prioritizing infrastructure for vehicle transportation over active transportation, such as walking and biking, and public transit, to inequities in transportation funding in historically disadvantaged communities, not all communities and individuals are able to enjoy or access the full benefits of our transportation system.

Despite the advances that have been made in transportation safety, research consistently shows that any gains made are not shared equally.⁹ Perhaps even more troubling, improvements and changes made in the name of transportation safety sometimes have unintended consequences that do additional harm to those they mean to serve.¹⁰

For example, research and reporting show that:

- Drivers are less likely to yield to Black people walking and biking than white people. Black pedestrians were passed by twice as many cars and experienced 32% longer wait times

⁴ <https://www.nsc.org/getattachment/aea3e3ed-a01f-43e8-9564-81422d8593b1/t-safe%20system%20approach>

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ At the time of writing this policy position, the Biden administration has instituted Executive Orders calling on the whole federal government to evaluate ways they can incorporate DE&I into the work they are doing.

⁷ <https://www.nsc.org/road/resources/road-to-zero/safe-mobility-equitable-mobility>

⁸ Policies such as “redlining” that denied services to people based on race and/or ethnicity and the U.S. Highway Safety Act of 1956 that disproportionately destroyed Black and poor neighborhoods are some examples.

⁹ http://www.bridgingthegapresearch.org/_asset/02fpi3/btg_street_walkability_FINAL_03-09-12.pdf

¹⁰ <https://www.racialequitytools.org/resourcefiles/sanchez-moving-to-equity-transportation-policies.pdf>

for cars to yield to them than white pedestrians.¹¹

- The pedestrian fatality rate for Native Americans is nearly five times higher than that of whites; for Black people, it is nearly twice as high as that of white people.¹²
- Black people are killed at a rate four times higher than white people while cycling even though they are substantially lower users of this modality.¹³
- Motor vehicle traffic death rates among American Indian and Alaska Native children and youth are up to eight times higher than those of other racial and ethnic groups.^{14,15}
- The pedestrian death rate is more than twice as high in neighborhoods that were historically “redlined.”^{16,17}
- Lower-income neighborhoods experience more than twice as many pedestrian fatalities as those with the highest incomes.¹⁸
- Low-income communities are more likely to contain more dangerous roads with higher crash risks like high speed arterials.^{19, 20}
- Older adults experience higher rates of pedestrian fatalities. For those 50 and older, the rate of pedestrian fatalities is more than a third higher than the general population. This jumps to almost twice as high for people 75 and older.²¹
- Fatality rates within car crashes vary by age. Older adults and drivers under the age of 25 have a higher fatality rate than other age groups.²²
- Policies such as jaywalking disproportionately burden communities of color. Over one five-year period studied, Black people received 55% of pedestrian tickets in Jacksonville, Fla., despite representing 29% of the population.²³
- Biking policies are inconsistently applied, resulting in the disproportionate enforcement of Black cyclists. In one study, Black cyclists accounted for almost half of incident or arrest reports for bicycle citations despite making up just 18% of the population in Minneapolis.²⁴
- Black and Hispanic people received 86.4% of biking-on-sidewalk tickets in New York City in 2018-19.²⁵
- Public transportation inequities disproportionately impact Black people. Bus drivers are twice as willing to let white people ride for free than Black people.²⁶ Ninety-one percent of WMATA/Metro Police citations/summons were issued to Black people in Washington, D.C., while only 8% were issued to white people.²⁷ (The Washington, DC population is 45% Black

¹¹ https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1009&context=psy_fac

¹² <https://smartgrowthamerica.org/dangerous-by-design/>

¹³ [https://www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797\(22\)00155-6/fulltext](https://www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797(22)00155-6/fulltext)

¹⁴ <https://www.cdc.gov/injury/features/tribal-road-safety/index.html>

¹⁵ <https://americawalks.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Inclusive-Planning-in-Tribal-Communities-2.pdf>

¹⁶ <https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/redlining>

¹⁷ <https://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/10.2105/AJPH.2022.307192>

¹⁸ <https://smartgrowthamerica.org/dangerous-by-design/>

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2590198222001567?via%3Dihub>

²¹ <https://smartgrowthamerica.org/dangerous-by-design/>

²² <https://rosap.ntl.bts.gov/view/dot/14700>

²³ <https://www.propublica.org/series/walking-while-black>

²⁴ https://d3n8a8pro7vvhmx.cloudfront.net/mplsbike/pages/3970/attachments/original/1476137957/MBC_Police_Citations_Report_Final2_small.pdf?1476137957

²⁵ <https://nyc.streetsblog.org/2020/06/22/nypd-targets-black-and-brown-cyclists-for-biking-on-the-sidewalk/#:~:text=%E2%80%9CIf%20people%20are%20riding%20bikes,to%20ride%20in%20the%20street.&text=The%20stats%20follow%20a%202014,were%20mostly%20Black%20or%20Latino.>

²⁶ <https://academic.oup.com/ej/advance-article/doi/10.1093/ej/ueaa090/5898389>

²⁷ https://www.washlaw.org/pdf/2018_09_13_unfair_disparity_fair_evasion_enforcement_report.PDF

or African American and 46.2% White.²⁸⁾

- The majority of crash-test dummies are designed to represent the 50th percentile male; there is no good representative for female drivers or passengers, despite the fact that women comprise about half of all drivers and are 73% more likely to sustain injuries in a crash compared to men.²⁹ More representative crash test dummies could reduce these injuries by adding to the understanding of crash dynamics on females.
- The fatality rate in rural America per 100 million vehicle-miles traveled (VMT) is 1.7 times greater than in urban areas, and 43% of all highway fatalities occur on rural roads.³⁰
- Twenty-one percent of U.S. adults without access to a vehicle or public transit went without needed medical care last year. Black adults (8%), adults with low family incomes (14%), and adults with public health insurance (12%) were all more likely to forgo needed care due to difficulty finding transportation. Adults with a disability (17%) were more than three times as likely to report skipping care due to transportation concerns.³¹
- A study of nearly 100 million traffic stops over a decade across all 50 states found that Black drivers were stopped more frequently than white drivers.^{32 33} An analysis of 20 million traffic stops in North Carolina indicated that Black people were 63% more likely to be stopped while driving than white people, despite being 16% less likely to drive.³⁴ The same study revealed that Black drivers were more than twice as likely to have their vehicle searched during a traffic stop even though contraband was more likely to be found during searches of white drivers.³⁵
- A study in Connecticut found that Black drivers were searched at almost three times the rate of white drivers, and Hispanic drivers were searched at almost twice the rate of white drivers.³⁶

Incorporating equity considerations in transportation policies, programs, and discussions can work to address these and other existing disparities.

Equity and transportation are vital topics and part of the national dialogue. NSC believes this policy position will guide input on this topic from the Council and other stakeholders.

Through this policy position, NSC resolves to promote safe, fair, and equitable practices to ensure all community members – regardless of race, ethnicity, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, or other personal demographics and location – have safe and accessible mobility options. NSC also resolves to encourage partners and others to promote practices that ensure the same.

²⁸ <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/DC/PST045222>

²⁹

Kahane, C. J. (2013, May). Injury vulnerability and effectiveness of occupant protection technologies for older occupants and women. (Report No. DOT HS 811 766). Washington, DC: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

³⁰ <https://www.transportation.gov/rural>

³¹ <https://www.rwjf.org/en/insights/our-research/2023/04/more-than-one-in-five-adults-with-limited-public-transit-access-forgo-healthcare-because-of-transportation-barriers.html>

³² <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41562-020-0858-1>

³³ <https://madd.org/law-enforcement-2/>

³⁴ <https://fbaum.unc.edu/books/SuspectCitizens/SuspectCitizens-Representation.pdf>

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ https://uploads-ssl.webflow.com/6076e3f57e39855392637f16/6387a21d4a661b44796b8b20_2020%20CTRP3%20Traffic%20Stop%20Analysis%20and%20Findings%20Report.pdf

As such, NSC recommends the following:

Engineering: This includes changes to the built environment, roadway operations, or vehicle design to address safety and access. An equitable approach to engineering must consider and should include, but is not limited to:

- Addressing existing or historic bias, disenfranchisement, or overburdening of a specific group or population in any planning or proposal considerations.
- Creating contextually sensitive plans and solutions and avoiding one-size-fits-all solutions. Changes or improvements must be context-sensitive and meet the needs and desires of the individual communities they purport to serve.
- Identifying and assessing unintended consequences, including those related to adverse health and environmental impacts, that might result from well-intentioned infrastructure projects.
- Centering the needs of disabled people when designing and constructing new transportation infrastructure.
- Engaging from the outset community members, stakeholders, and users to ensure the solution is having the intended effect.
- Involving a diversity of people and body types in testing and design of motor vehicle crashworthiness to increase safety.
- Supporting the design of vehicle technology to improve safety outcomes for all roadway users.
- Supporting efforts to improve transportation and, ultimately, enhance access and mobility independence.

Education: This includes programs, communications, and campaigns to educate road users, community members, planners, and engineers to raise awareness and provide information with the goal of changing an attitude or behavior that will improve safety. An equitable approach to education must consider and should include, but is not limited to:

- Developing, executing, and implementing programming with community voices included in the process, particularly those representing disadvantaged and/or highly impacted communities.
- Using images, language, and media that is reflective of the community and audience.
- Working with the community to identify issues to be addressed, assessing what is needed, and defining what implementation and, ultimately, success would look like.
- Incorporating these data into driver education programs.
- Working with trusted ambassadors, spokespeople, and community leaders to help in the execution of any campaigns or programs.

Enforcement: NSC supports enforcement as a mechanism to support safe transportation and believes there are ways to ensure it is fairly applied. Evidence suggests that racial disparities in traffic enforcement can be mitigated while improving road safety and not impeding policing of non-traffic crime.³⁷ NSC acknowledges that in-person traffic enforcement presents concerns of harm and risk for communities of color. NSC supports equitable enforcement as a mechanism

³⁷ Fliss MD, Baumgartner F, Delamater P, Marshall S, Poole C, Robinson W. Re-prioritizing traffic stops to reduce motor vehicle crash outcomes and racial disparities. *Inj Epidemiol.* 2020 Jan 20;7(1):3.

to enable safe transportation and believes enforcement activities can and should be focused solely on ensuring the safety of all road users and focused on the most dangerous driving behaviors like impairment, speeding, and distraction. NSC defines equitable traffic enforcement as the fair and just enforcement of laws that address hazardous driving behaviors in a manner that promotes freedom and safety of mobility for all by mitigating implicit bias, prioritizing community trust and adopting reparative justice practices which address systemic inequities rather than simply punish individual behavior.³⁸ This includes efforts to educate and promote compliance with laws and regulations related to traffic safety and not used for other crime prevention. An equitable approach to enforcement must consider and should include, but is not limited to:

- Working with partners and stakeholders to create a plan to ensure engagement with representatives of the community, especially those who have been historically underrepresented, and government in the development and drafting of any law or regulation. This includes discussing effective means of enforcement within the community.
- Understanding whether and how enforcement of traffic safety laws or regulations can exacerbate existing racial, socioeconomic, or accessibility issues, and subsequently working with stakeholders to identify solutions.
- Assessing whether new or alternative forms of enforcement can be deployed to effectively address the issue at hand. NSC worked with other safety leaders to publish automated enforcement community guidance to ensure equitable and effective use.³⁹
- Advocating for data collection and assessment tools that measure whether traffic safety enforcement unjustly burdens specific communities or populations and providing appropriate solutions. NSC supports NHTSA 1906 grants that allow states to better collect and evaluate policing data.
- Reviewing law enforcement stop data to ensure standardized enforcement of laws and allow for addressing disparities where they exist.
- Evaluating data to identify and prioritize most effective enforcement to reduce crashes.
- Educating and training those working on enforcement on current best practices and techniques.
- Requiring validated implicit bias training for police officers. Scenario-based implicit bias training has been shown to influence attitudes and beliefs among police officers and acceptance of the presence of bias in traditional policing practices. Further study is needed to show a link between acceptance of reforms and reduction in racial disparities in enforcement.⁴⁰ Implicit bias training should be used with other tools.
- Focusing enforcement on hazardous driving behaviors, such as speeding, aggressive driving, failure to maintain a single lane, and failure to obey traffic control signals/device – indicators of impaired driving and increased crash risk – rather than

³⁸ Reparative justice centers on those who have been harmed and focuses on repairing past harms, stopping present harm and preventing the reproduction of harm.

³⁹ <https://www.iihs.org/media/431e551b-3f64-4591-8e30-ad35a069f41f/cF4n4g/News/2021/050621%20auto%20enforcement/AE-checklist-May-2021.pdf>

⁴⁰ Worden RE, McLean SJ, et al. (2020). The Impacts of Implicit Bias Awareness Training in the NYPD. University of Cincinnati (UC) Center for Police Research and Policy.

pre-textual stops.⁴¹ Research shows an enforcement focus on dangerous driving behaviors leads to a reduction in disparities of traffic stops and crashes and leads to safer roads.^{42, 43}

- Secondary enforcement should be reserved for administrative and vehicle equipment violations such as but not limited to expired tags and license plates, cracked or tinted windows, and objects hanging from the rearview mirror. Law enforcement agencies may consider mailing warnings or citations for these violations. Additionally, law enforcement agencies can issue vouchers for repairing vehicle equipment.⁴⁴ For repeat offenders of administrative infractions, there may be a grace period before it is moved to primary enforcement.

Emergency Medical Services (EMS): NSC recognizes that post-crash care provided by emergency medical services is a critical component to reducing fatalities and serious injuries on our nation’s roadways. EMS response and care to injured persons must be provided equitably and should include, but is not limited to:

- Providing socially equitable care in a people-centered EMS system regardless of the patient’s race, socioeconomic status, gender, gender-identity/orientation, ability, age, or other personal characteristics.
- Educating EMS professionals on how implicit bias impacts patient care and methods to recognize and overcome their own biases.
- Ensuring that EMS leadership, educators and clinicians reflect the diversity of their communities.
- Ensuring that EMS professionals collect clinically relevant demographic information regarding the patients served.
- Enhancing measurement of potential disparities in EMS care at local, regional, state and national levels, and undertaking performance improvement efforts to address them.
- Improving technology to support faster access to life-saving services.

NSC Commitment to the Fifth “E” Equity

In addition to incorporating equity into the existing four “Es” of transportation safety – education, enforcement, engineering, and EMS – NSC adds equity as the fifth “E.” This new element will incorporate equity into all our efforts, communications, and partnerships and the way in which we approach the topic of roadway safety.

NSC DE&I Statement:

At NSC, we demonstrate our commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion through our culture and our values. **Our culture embraces all people** regardless of ancestry, color, national origin, race, gender identity, sex, sexual orientation, age, religion, physical or mental

⁴¹ Pretextual stops allow stops of drivers for minor violations with the intent to conduct a non-road safety investigation.

⁴² Fliss MD, Baumgartner F, Delamater P, Marshall S, Poole C, Robinson W. Re-prioritizing traffic stops to reduce motor vehicle crash outcomes and racial disparities. *Inj Epidemiol.* 2020 Jan 20;7(1):3.

⁴³ <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/1745-9133.12528>

⁴⁴ <https://lightsonus.org/auto-shops/#:~:text=Police%20officers%20hand%20out%20vouchers,any%20participating%20auto%20service%20provider>

disability, or veteran status. We **boldly** empower our team to model respect and dignity. We find **impactful** opportunities for growth and development. We create a **safe** environment that includes mental, physical, psychological, and emotional protections. To **be NSC** is to deliver our mission by working together – our employees, members, and stakeholders – in such a way that everyone feels a sense of belonging.

We believe that you can't be safe if you don't feel safe. Feeling safe requires a commitment to equitable policy implementation and promoting diversity in the safety profession. We must cultivate our own diverse, inclusive, and equitable work environment to deliver on our mission to save lives, from the workplace to anyplace.

Internal

- NSC acknowledges there is a legacy of systemic bias in transportation planning and roadway safety and aims to address this through existing and future work.
- NSC commits to using images and examples that represent diversity in its work and communications.
- NSC commits to using best care to be sensitive and responsible in the language and terms it uses, taking its cue from the populations to and about which it is communicating.
- NSC commits to ensuring its planning, programming, and offerings are inclusive of a wide variety of factors with a goal of equitable access for all.
- NSC commits to not discriminate based race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, disability, or veteran status.
- NSC commits to continuing the conversation and sharing resources around the topic of transportation equity to learn, listen, and appreciate how the issue intersects with our existing body of work.
- NSC commits to seeking external review and engagement with those working in transportation equity to continue to learn and improve.
- NSC commits to recognizing and respecting the knowledge and expertise that comes with lived experience within the communities it is serving.

External

- NSC commits to highlighting examples of disparities when working with colleagues and partners and to incorporating equity in joint projects with external stakeholders. NSC commits to sharing resources and information related to addressing disparities and inequities in transportation safety with colleagues, partners, the public, and networks.
- NSC commits to seeking new organizations and networks working in transportation equity and other related areas to engage in this work.
- NSC commits to identifying and sharing examples of success in achieving equity in transportation.
- NSC commits to actively seeking information around best practices and new thinking from roadway safety partners and other groups.

NSC hopes this work will lead to safer and more equitable roadways and transportation systems and looks forward to working with partners toward this end. Equity and transportation is a topic that continues to evolve. These recommendations must not be a “one-off” attempt at addressing legacies of inequities and future work but rather must

evolve along with the needs of the sector. This requires ongoing assessment, planning, and implementation.

This position statement reflects the opinions of the National Safety Council but not necessarily those of each member organization.

Adopted by the National Safety Council, December 2023