ARC Transportation Equity Advisory Group

11/20/2017 - NOTES

Attendees:

Nathaniel Smith, Partnership for Southern Equity
MaKara Rumley, Hummbird Firm – attended on behalf of GA Stand Up
Kristen Cook, Partnership for Southern Equity
Sally Flocks, PEDS
Fatemh Shafiei, Spelman College
Nancy Flake Johnson, Urban League of Greater Atlanta
Simon Berrebi
Rebecca Serna, Atlanta Bicycle Coalition
Odetta MacLeish-White, Transformation Alliance
Teresa Hardy DeKalb NAACP

ARC:
Melissa Roberts
Kofi Wakhisi
David Haynes
John Orr
Byron Rushing
Maria Roell
Nosa Omokaro
Rebekah Kim

Melissa welcomed group to the room and gave a quick recap of meetings held thus far. February was an overview of ARC MPO process. April was a mini planning meeting. June was at GDOT focused upon MMIP. August was a shared visioning exercise. Today we will move forward into consensus on groups' vision and shared beliefs to ensure we can move in step with one another & have group agreement. As the group has come together, much of the focus has been about our process. We are hopeful to take a bit of a hybrid process where sometimes the focus is on ARC's work and sometimes we focus on the work of this group itself. We want you to know about and influence regional plans, and be able to advocate on behalf of your constituents. We also want to support the goals and strategies this group co-defines. Internally to ARC, we have recruited a mini-team, focused upon supporting this group by keeping this work present in our engagement, analysis and planning efforts and also conducting research to support group identified tasks. Today we will share an update on a few relevant ARC happenings, then Nathaniel will guide us through a discussion to gain consensus on shared group beliefs and if time allows we will start talking about the work plan. The meeting on December 13th will be focused on the intended work, both tasks and structure, for the group. In the first meeting of 2018, we will present all meeting dates for the year as well as the work plan. We expect to meet every other month.

This group is merely a "slice" of all the equity planning work that ARC is currently doing. TEAG should have a clear idea of all of the work that ARC is undertaking. It should also be aware of the "journey" along with way and how the work of the present is built upon a lot of years' of effort.

General discussion of the group:
The TEAG should be incorporated into the ARC committee process and report out to TCC and TAQC at times. The group would like to seek ways to identify and share out to their constituents about when is the best, most appropriate time to get involved in public discourse about planning. For example, by the time a project makes it to ARC's regional list, there is not as much opportunity to influence it as there is at the local level. Also, the exact project design can only be influenced after it leaves ARC.

ARC Transportation Updates:
We began with a presentation by Nosa Omokaro about the current project selection process that ARC is undertaking as part of the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) update. The presentation focused upon the total funding being awarded and how much of the funding is listed in ETA areas. It also included a breakdown of what types of projects were in this list (roadway, transit, active transportation, etc.) The project list was not yet shared as the recommendation from ARC staff have not been shared with senior ARC leadership yet, nor the ARC committee members.

The group asked many questions for clarity.

Some thoughts about ARC's Equitable Target Areas (ETA) and Environmental Justice:

How is ARC addressing demographic changes happening now and upcoming? For example if current demographic data is based on 2010 Census and we know neighborhood demographics have already changed, how are we accounting for that as we make investments in future plans? How do we ensure that the project investments continue to go to the people they were intended to serve when the data was current?

Can the % of funding for roadway projects be filtered by zero-car households?

Did we ask project sponsors about the goals of the project and intended impact on disadvantaged communities on their application? Can we make these goals public? Is this something that the communities could benefit from knowing and also use to keep their elected officials accountable? Can an overall summary of impact of investments in ETA areas be developed?

Has ARC established a target for % of or direct amount of projects or funds that should be invested in ETA areas?

Regarding public input, can we help identify at what point and where in the plan and project life cycle that public input is influential? Including master community plans, Comprehensive Transportation Plans, regional plans, and project specific implementation, including engineering and design?

Can ARC ask project sponsors upfront, what will you do to design a project well? What are you doing to ensure that this project is an amenity to the community? How can ARC help them to see the benefit of reporting back to ARC after the project is funded through the TIP?

How can this group become more involved in this solicitation process and help shape recommendations earlier in the process.

Other discussion:
Comments were made about the DBE process and outcomes, and it was mentioned that during one of the previous TEAG meetings a discussion about DBE goals and processes was had directly with GDOT

ARC briefed the group on the types of transit investments that will be included in the new funding currently being incorporated into the TIP.

There was acknowledgment by group members that investments in transit in DeKalb have been done inequitably, with no service being extended to south DeKalb. If a sales tax for expansion passes in the county, it is likely to go to extend service to Emory and CDC, but will this serve the most people in need of transportation access?

The group reiterated to ARC that they would like to have this type of information, such as the TIP solicitation ahead of time, presented in a fashion that helps them see and understand direct impacts on disadvantaged communities.

Discussion on Collective Values and Beliefs of the Group
Nathaniel Smith of Partnership for Southern Equity led the group in a discussion about the groups' collective values, acknowledging that all policies are ultimately based on values, therefore getting this right is of heightened importance for this group.

The values proposed to the group were drafted by ARC staff, but based upon notes and discussions from the group members over the past year. These were put together to give the group a prompt to begin with so that they can collectively address and rework each statement as need.

The discussion that followed included conversation about:
-are we discussing parity/equity access or are we talking about equitable access, with a particular focus on underserved groups of people?

We are not talking about parity, but about creating outcomes for people that are consistent with the need of their lives. It is about history of community and past policies that have created and sustained inequitable circumstances. It is about shifting demographic needs. It must be about context.

Diverse? What does this mean in relation to transportation? Should we state mulit-modal?
Communities should have a transportation system that meets their specific needs.

Transit investment and transit improvements:
What else do we want besides "efficiency"? efficiency does not lead to equity but equity often leads to efficiency. For example, a bus would be more efficient if it had fewer stops, but that would not be equitable. Or equity has led to curb cuts for sidewalks and ramps for wheelchair users, and that has made access easier for people pushing strollers or rolling suitcases.

What is included in a term like "efficient"?

We must ask for a "just" system, once that is inclusive, one that has balance. If we are afraid to ask for it as an equity advisory group, than we will not be effective in this work.

Investments ought to be priority for communities that have the least access or the greatest need. Equity must be intentional. Those in greatest need should be brought up via investments that strengthen the most vulnerable communities.

Time and access. We should seek a system that shifts the bounds of how we use time and space so that we realize many more opportunities to create quality communities, ones where land use is not designed around cars and roadways

We need a statement that transportation investment is linked to community improvements and not just hard core infrastructure investments. We believe that transportation investments can play a role in strengthening communities.

We should create an introduction or preamble to articulate why this all is so important anyway. It must address how we collectively believe or confirm the significance of transportation for communities. This system is complex and does not exist in a vacuum, should not be created in a vacuum.

Economic opportunity – need to change to inclusion. Look to see what is stated in CATLyst. Does it address this is a more deliberate way?

Opportunity and access to jobs, healthcare, education, makes our region more competitive.

Remove such things as the word "generally". All statements need to be streamlined and strengthened. Take out things like "advocates of" etc.

To transform communities through planning for their needs and investing in their outcomes.

In #4, how to change the planning process to be more inclusive of racial equity itself and therefore it will become more inclusive. Planning needs a lens of cultural competency.

Ex. At public meetings, maybe long-time residents are uncomfortable speaking candidly in front of their neighbors who are "re-gentrifiers". Instead of big public meetings, should there be mini meetings with focused groups? How do we change the way we do it so that everyone can speak and planners are better able to illicit input? How do we encourage participation throughout the life cycle of the planning and project development process?

Could Transformation Alliance, through SPARRC be helpful to introduce tools to regional planners around the topic of cultural competence?