

Creatively Transforming Transportation:

Collaborating with Artists for Reparative Planning in Transportation

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STUDY PURPOSE

This study examines how two transportation agencies are using the emergent method of incorporating artists into transportation planning to address the field's legacy of racial harm.

INTRODUCTION

Transportation agencies are attempting to address their legacies of harm in Black and Brown communities; however, these bureaucracies have limited tools to do so. Scholars have documented the inadequacies of public participation in transportation planning.¹ Scholars and practitioners have begun to examine how artists and creative practice can help transportation planners better connect with the communities they plan for.² This study examines one such method, Transportation Artist-in-Residence (TAIR) programs, in which artists are embedded into DOTs in fellowship-like positions, to provide creative solutions to social-justice challenges in transportation.

When communities lack a voice in the transportation planning process and infrastructure is designed with solely mobility in mind, a child's neighborhood is divided by transportation infrastructure in a manner that segregates one area from another, personal connections are cut, local businesses lose their customers, opportunity is lost.

— Former U.S. DOT Secretary Foxx in *Beyond Traffic 2024*

METHODS

I use a comparative case studies approach to compare TAIR programs at LADOT and MnDOT. Selected due to the number of completed residence iterations, level of operation (city and state), and access to practitioners, I constructed the sample using a snowball method. I draw from interviews with transportation planners (n=10), artists (n=4), and program administrators (n=2), for a total of 16 participants.

To code transcripts, I use Deterding and Waters' (2021) "twenty first-century coding approach" to index transcripts before conducting line-by-line coding for selected emergent themes. To examine how these artist in residence programs addressed current ideas in Reparative Planning literature, I created a model that draws on frameworks from William & Steil (2023), Giamarino et al. (2022), Song & Mizrahi (2023), and the Untokening Collective. I then compared the emergent themes from interviews against the proposed framework.

Table 1: Proposed Reparative Planning Framework

Category	Attributes	Framework
Recognitional	Acknowledgement of past and current racial harms as the starting point for reparative planning. Prioritization of the cultural claims of marginalized social groups within spaces and institutions.	William & Steil 2023; Untokening; (Giamarino et al. 2022); Song & Mizrahi (2023)
Distributive	Outcomes that provide material redistribution, compensation, and restitution to communities that have been dispossessed or excluded.	William & Steil 2023; (Giamarino et al. 2022); Song & Mizrahi (2023)
Relational	Approaches that heal past relational harms and build strong relationships that value the communities that have been harmed, including their joy, intersectional identities, priorities, and expertise.	William & Steil 2023; Untokening; (Giamarino et al. 2022); Song & Mizrahi (2023); Sandercock (2004)
Procedural	Processes that respond to local need through collaboration, valuing community voices as essential data, and co-created decision making processes, such that community is ensured of non-repetition of past harm.	William & Steil 2023; Untokening; (Giamarino et al. 2022); Song & Mizrahi (2023)
Institutional	Institutions mechanize reparative processes such that institutions own and atone for past racial harm, ensure non-repetition, advance democracy and build cross-community power.	William & Steil 2023; Untokening; Song & Mizrahi (2023)
Environmental	Climate solutions prioritize those most harmed by environmental racism in their solutions to mitigate the climate crisis becoming the latest arena for racial dispossession and harm.	William & Steil 2023; Untokening

The primary tenants [of the pilot] were getting better input in transportation projects, you know, healing divisions or working with communities harmed by transportation, [...] better partnerships, better solutions, better working with EJ [communities]. [...] We were interested [...] from the very get-go.

— MnDOT Planner

I think [the project] definitely opened the door for me to kind of approach community engagement in a way that wasn't so transactional. [...] I had always believed in like really leading with relationships, [...] seeing what the city could do if it was intentional about doing something like that, I think was really cool.

— LADOT Planner

RESULTS

- Transportation planners implicitly expressed a logic model that placed deepened and more equitable community engagement as the solution to past racial harms.
- Selected resident artists already had art practices that addressed issues of racial discrimination, trauma and healing, and positive public impact prior to their time at the agencies.
- LADOT and MnDOT attempted to use these transportation artist-in-residence programs as a means to deepen community engagement and provide new ways of thinking around human-centric transportation issues—such as racial harm, trust, and grief—that traditional practices struggled to address.
- Though not explicitly asked to conduct reparative planning projects, when compared with the proposed model, the four artists' projects fall across all six dimensions. Artists especially worked on projects that touched on the Recognitional, Relational, and Institutional dimensions.

Figure 1: TAIR Projects Compared to RP Framework

	LADOT		MnDOT	
	Artist 1	Artist 2	Artist 1	Artist 2
Recognitional	●●●●	○●○	●	●
Distributive		●		
Relational	●●●●	●○	●	●
Procedural	●	○	●	●●
Institutional	●●	●●	●●●	●
Environmental	●	○		●

● = Completed Project ○ = Planned Project (Canceled due to COVID)

CONCLUSIONS

- As transportation agencies work to acknowledge their legacies of harms, transportation planners need additional tools and methods to address social and emotional aspects of transportation's legacy of racial harm and current inequities in service.
- Artist residency programs show promising new opportunities to bolster key skill sets needed to address Reparative Planning in transportation.

¹(Arnstein 1969; Bratt & Beardson 2013; Wilson 2018; Lowe & Jones 2023; Lowe, Barajas, & Coren 2023; and Nostikasari & Casey 2020)
²(Taylor 2021; VanderSchaaf & Kayzar 2021; Transportation for America 2017; NASAA 2023; Metzger 2011; Garcia 2021; Eden 2016; Hanzlik 2020)

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