

# National Accessibility Evaluation Technical Advisory Panel Meeting

May 11, 2017  
Minutes

## **Present:**

Rafael Almario, Cambridge Systematics  
Deanna Belden, Minnesota Department of Transportation  
Regina Colson, Florida Department of Transportation  
Stephanie Dock, District Department of Transportation  
Brandon Geber, Iowa Department of Transportation  
Michael Henry, Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department  
Meredith Hill, Maryland Department of Transportation  
Michael Iacono, Minnesota Department of Transportation  
Gabe Matthews, Florida Department of Transportation  
Laurie McGinnis, University of Minnesota  
Stephen Miller, Maryland Department of Transportation  
Brendan Murphy, University of Minnesota  
Colleen O'Connor Toberman, University of Minnesota  
Peter Ohlms, Virginia Department of Transportation  
Andrew Owen, University of Minnesota  
Toni Rice, Wisconsin Department of Transportation  
Adie Tomer, Brookings Institution  
Monica Zhong, Florida Department of Transportation

## **Welcome and Introductions**

Deanna Belden welcomed and thanked participants. Introductions followed.

## **Discussion with Adie Tomer**

Andrew Owen introduced Adie Tomer of the Brookings Institution. Tomer provided an overview of the history of accessibility. He noted the challenge in helping communities move from saying they value accessibility to actually finding ways to put that into practice and measure progress. Tomer encouraged governments to set objectives and find ways to evaluate progress on those objectives.

Peter Ohlms asked for advice on how to communicate the value of accessibility to elected officials and the public. Owen noted the challenge of “grading” accessibility: what level of access is good enough? Tomer encouraged agencies to set goals first: getting a certain number of people to jobs, converting a certain percentage of auto drivers into transit riders, providing access to particular amenities, etc. Tomer noted that without buy-in on these goals, “congestion mitigation” becomes the primary, if not only, agenda. He suggested Portland, OR, as an example of a region that places high value on accessibility in their freight, air, maritime, bicycle, and other networks. However, Portland’s high

emphasis on placemaking over the past decades, while world-renowned, didn't necessarily improve access.

Owen inquired about accessibility metrics beyond access to jobs. Tomer responded that food deserts are a key priority in many communities, with healthcare as another emerging accessibility issue. Real-estate developers are often already measuring access to customer base or labor force.

Meredith Hill noted that Maryland has a large number of "mega commuters" who drive more than 45 minutes to work. She hopes to use accessibility metrics as a way to promote smart decision-making around worksite selection by encouraging employers to place their offices where their employees are already choosing to live. She noted that rural broadband access has emerged as a related challenge. Owen noted that workforce access is an area that this group should continue to discuss. Tomer commented that land value and jurisdictional competition are also factors in worksite location.

Rafael Almario observed that existing accessibility scores seem to naturally be tied to the total number of jobs in an area. He suggested adapting metrics to better show the proportion of jobs accessible by residents, rather than the total count of jobs. Owen responded that while the Accessibility Observatory's national reports focus on aggregate job counts, there are certainly other ways to display the data. Tomer added that demand-side data is another aspect that isn't being explored yet.

Stephanie Dock commented that she worked with the Center for Neighborhood Technology in Chicago to analyze where worksite development should be promoted based on their rail access to the workforce. This project provided an economic development consultation to communities struggling to maintain their economic base. She also commented that many DOTs lack the technological capability to analyze demand-side data. Her department has found value in purchasing INRIX origin-destination data but the amount of data provided is more massive than is sometimes practical.

Tomer asked agencies to share their experiences with integrating accessibility data into their work. Hill shared that Maryland DOT operates Baltimore's transit system and applied for a TIGER grant to enhance an economically-depressed corridor. The agency used accessibility data to demonstrate that improved multimodal services in that corridor would increase residents' access to jobs. This strengthened the agency's grant application and the funds were granted. (Link to Maryland's application: <https://mta.maryland.gov/tiger-viii>; look at Appendix B.)

Dock shared that D.C. is preparing to integrate accessibility data into its mobility website (<https://districtmobility.org>). She hopes to continue analyzing where investments should be targeted to improve local accessibility. This website is used by the public and policymakers as well as DOT staff.

Dock noted the challenge of the term "accessibility;" some of her colleagues interpret it as ADA compliance and not access to destinations. Ohlms concurred that terms and definitions make it challenging to discuss accessibility. Tomer agreed that the academic and policy communities have some responsibility to develop the best language that can easily translate these concepts to different audiences.

Owen thanked members for their participation in the conversation. Tomer's earlier presentation and slides are available to view and share at [www.cts.umn.edu/events/luncheons/2017/spring](http://www.cts.umn.edu/events/luncheons/2017/spring).

## **Project Update**

All Year 1 datasets and reports are available at [https://netfiles.umn.edu/xythoswfs/webui/xy-e18129632\\_1-t\\_x9AwlMv9](https://netfiles.umn.edu/xythoswfs/webui/xy-e18129632_1-t_x9AwlMv9). Owen asked members to contact Colleen if they have any challenges accessing this hosting site. Now that the files are compiled in an accessible location, Year 1 project reporting will be completed in the coming weeks and the TAP will be able to review the draft final report.

Year 2 (2016) datasets and draft partner reports are nearing completion and will be uploaded into the same Netfiles folder shortly. The national Auto report is targeted for release in September and the national Transit report is targeted for November. TAP members will receive these reports before public release. The project team will also provide draft press releases to agencies for them to customize and use.

Future datasets will include five-minute thresholds for auto travel, which provides a greater range of travel time thresholds (for instance, 15 minutes) and improves other flexibility in data analysis.

The project team is developing the contract amendment for Year 3, which will go into effect in July. Year 3 (2017) datasets are targeted for a January 2018 delivery and partner reports are targeted for a February 2018 delivery. National report release dates for Year 3 will be selected in consultation with partner agencies at the January 2018 TAP meeting.

The TAP member website is up at <http://access.umn.edu/research/pooledfund/formembers/index.html>. O'Connor Toberman shared that this site will be updated soon with current meeting minutes, a current TAP roster, and a password-protected link to the datasets and reports.

Owen asked members about their preferences for sharing data with the public. Gabe Matthews stated that while she's happy to share data, she'd like to grant access so that she knows who is accessing it. Dock shared that D.C. will be posting their datasets for download on their public website. Owen emphasized that there are no restrictions on partners publicly posting their datasets and reports or sharing them however else they choose. For now, the project's own Netfiles folder will continue to be password-protected so that members can control with whom they choose to share their datasets.

Owen shared that walking accessibility data has been compiled, but that annual Walking reports might not provide much value given that walking accessibility doesn't tend to change much year-over-year. He asked members for their comments on how to make walking data useful to agencies. Dock shared that walking data might reveal other aspects of accessibility—for instance, a high level of retail jobs provides useful information about an area's commercial variety and entertainment options.

Hill noted that walking access to community institutions (churches, etc.) is important to her agency, as is nonmotorized access to transit for all travelers as well as paratransit users.

Miller asked whether walking travel times account for intersection wait times. Owen responded that this isn't currently included, but might be possible in the future. Gathering data about intersection wait time could be challenging.

Owen commented that the walking data can be analyzed to show how much transit service enhances local accessibility beyond what travelers could reach solely on foot. Owen will continue work in this area and will bring some application examples to share with members.

Brendan Murphy shared that the research team is in the early phases of gathering bike accessibility data for some pilot communities. They are testing calculations based on “level of traffic stress” to account for cyclists’ different levels of tolerance for certain kinds of roads. Owen asked members to suggest areas for pilot case studies. Dock volunteered Washington, D.C.. Hill noted that Montgomery County, MD, did very in-depth analysis of bike stress levels. Ohlms shared that Arlington County, VA, has done similar work and suggested combining D.C. with both of these counties for a fuller analysis. Dock suggested Baltimore, San Jose, Oakland, and Pasadena as other communities.

Owen shared that the project is also exploring freight metrics. This area raises many questions about scale and types of destinations. He would like to hold a focused conversation about this in June; some members have already expressed interest in participating. Owen invited other TAP members to participate. Michael Henry from Arkansas volunteered. Ohlms suggested Eric Johnson from Virginia. Owen will report back to the full TAP at the next quarterly meeting.

Owen shared that he is continuing to investigate the technology platforms to host an API/visualization website for members and the public. The team needs to find out what types of access are most important to prioritize (GIS mapping, data queries, etc.). Miller and Dock commented that GIS would be most preferable, particularly if the maps could be queried. Monica Zhong requested both maps and data queries. Hill commented that MDOT is pushing more of its information to mapping dashboards. Owen concluded that the team will prioritize maps first, but build the website in a way that allows datasets to be hosted down the road. Dock requested the ability to browse beyond a jurisdiction’s boundaries. She requested the Center for Neighborhood Technology as a resource as the site develops.

Owen shared that the project team and MnDOT continue to pursue new pooled-fund members. Tennessee, Massachusetts, and Michigan have all expressed interest in joining the project. MPOs are also high priority. MPOs within current partner states will pay reduced fees due to reduced data purchase costs. MPO-targeted recruitment materials are under development and will be shared with partners when complete. Dock shared that she was recently discussing the project with New York City and suggested cities as another potential member base.

Owen and O’Connor Toberman thanked members for their participation and adjourned the meeting.