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# Collaborating With Artists for Reparative Transportation Planning



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## Issue

Transportation planning in the United States has disproportionately impacted Black and brown communities. As planning scholars and practitioners have called for the transportation planning field to address its legacy of racial harm, many agencies have taken on this charge via deepened community engagement efforts. Yet, scholars have found limits to these methods in delivering substantive reparative planning processes that address past harms and ensuring equity. In an effort to conduct planning processes differently, some agencies have begun incorporating art and artists into projects and programs to better address human dimensions of transportation. Organizational theorists have studied the impact of incorporating artists into institutions to develop new modes of thinking and provide creative problem-solving skills. State and local transportation agencies have begun to experiment with these cross-sector collaborations, called Transportation Artist-in-Residence (TAIR) programs, through which they hire artists to creatively approach challenges in the transportation landscape.

## Study Approach

This study compares case studies of TAIR pilot programs at Los Angeles Department of Transportation (LADOT) and Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT). Interviews with 16 program participants — all four participating artists, 10 of the collaborating planners, and two partnering program administrators — focused on their professional background, experience at their agency, and their participation in the TAIR program. Ultimately,

nine LADOT participants and seven MnDOT participants were interviewed. The interview transcripts were analyzed by categorizing large thematic topics, relative to the six dimensions of the synthesized reparative planning framework (Figure 1). Upon identifying the emergent theme of racial redress and equity, the researcher then analyzed the relevant categories line-by-line to develop findings.

## Findings

With regard to racial redress and equity at each agency:

- Transportation planners at both programs readily discussed racial harm and racial equity in their work.
- Transportation planners expressed that addressing racial harm in the current system was challenging and often mismatched current practices.
- When discussing current agency efforts, transportation planners primarily discussed areas of procedural justice (through community engagement), institutional justice (as hiring practice), and distributive justice (through using data to better focus efforts and attention on historically harmed or neglected communities).
- Transportation planners did not readily discuss relational approaches to planning, nor did they discuss outward efforts for recognition justice that publicly communicated the agencies' acknowledgement of past harm.

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 (2017); 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); Giamarino et al. (2022); Untokening (2017); 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 (2017); Giamarino et al. (2022); Song & Mizrahi (2023)
Institutional	Institutionalized reparative practice, such that as an institution staff and leadership own and atone for past racial harm, ensure non-repetition, advance democracy and build cross-community power.	William & Steil (2023); Untokening (2017); Song & Mizrahi (2023)
Environmental	Climate solutions that prioritizes 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 (2017)

Figure 1. A Synthesized Reparative Planning Framework

With regard to the role of the artist residencies:

- The selected resident artists already approached their personal artistic practice in ways that aligned with the specific approaches and skills outlined in the reparative planning framework.
- During their residency, the artists devised artistic interventions that deeply aligned with the reparative planning framework.
- Specifically, artists used a relational approach to transportation planning processes, which aided them in providing deeper recognitional, procedural, and institutional dimensions toward reparative justice.
- Nonetheless, institutions struggled to institutionalize the artists’ approaches, despite their appreciation for the paradigm shift.

## Conclusions

TAIR programs offer the transportation planning field a unique model to incorporate relational planning and aid in furthering reparative planning approaches to address racial harm and build more just futures. The inherent tension between artists’ relational approach and traditional transportation methods is at the crux of racial harm and healing. Agencies must develop solutions to bridge this gap if they plan to meaningfully embark on reparative planning.

Reparative justice is a cross-sector effort that needs the unique skill sets of a variety of disciplines, especially planners and artists. As the field of transportation pursues racial redress work at the highest level through programs like the Reconnecting Communities Grant, agencies should continue exploring opportunities to collaborate with artists in the pursuit of authentic racial redress and equity that goes beyond infrastructure repairs.



Winkler-Schor, L. (2024). Creatively Transforming Transportation: Collaborating with Artists as a Model Towards Reparative Planning in Transportation (Master’s thesis, UCLA). Retrieved from: <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/71s8r4nj>

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