

URP 561: TRANSPORTATION AND PUBLIC POLICY

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Most people in the United States take for granted how easy it is to travel from place to place in ways that allow them to enjoy a high quality of life: good transportation fuels the economy, allows workers wide choice in earning a living, and enriches travelers with access to culture, recreation, and social gatherings. Unfortunately, despite these life-enhancing dimensions of travel, our transportation system suffers from flaws that have long been neglected. The transportation system is expensive: few Americans realize that transportation accounts for about one-fifth of their household expenditures – more than any other single item except housing. It's damaging to our planet: for most people, the single most destructive act of each day is starting up a car. It's dangerous: a frighteningly high number of people are killed each year, a trend worsening over time. Finally, and most pertinent to this class, it's highly unjust: far too many people are left behind in ways that intensify longstanding disadvantages. This course focuses on the policy environment of passenger travel, primarily focusing on the United States, and aims to help you be a planner who can contribute to reforming our transportation system, to help shape it into a more inclusive and emancipatory tool so that more people can access a broad array of opportunities safely and less destructively. Whether or not you intend to work as a transportation planner, the course will help you make better decisions in an urban policy environment because transportation influences a range of urban dimensions such as land use, economic development, environmental quality, and social justice.

Learning Goals:

- Explain the effect of federal, regional, and local laws and regulations on urban development patterns.
- Collect, analyze, and interpret data from a variety of sources commonly used in the profession.
- Critically analyze strengths and weaknesses of real-world transportation plans using plan evaluation criteria.
- Apply social justice and environmental sustainability concepts in the formulation of transportation policies.
- Understand the prevalence of racial discrimination through the history of policies and to recognize contemporary examples.
- Argue for a position on several of the most crucial transportation issues facing public officials today, including social equity, the Complete Streets movement, and climate change.
- Demonstrate effective public speaking and visual and written communications about transportation issues.

Course Requirements:

Course assignments include (1) an exercise to expose you to data sources commonly used by transportation planners; (2) written evaluation of transportation plans, (3) a midterm quiz; (4) a group field-based project with a written report and oral presentation, and (5) peer evaluation of presentations.