



UNTOKENING

Mobility Justice and COVID-19

April 2020

As mobility justice advocates, we created the Untokening network because we believe in a different vision for mobility and transportation in our communities. In 2017, we curated the **Principles of Mobility Justice** from the experiences of advocates, practitioners and community members from marginalized identities across the country to outline recommendations for mobility justice that are rooted in the liberation of our communities. In response to the current pandemic, our network convened a virtual conversation, in collaboration with Pueblo Planning, to share **reflections and recommendations for mobility justice in the COVID-19 world.**

Reflections on this Moment

While freedom of movement is at the core of our vision, the current context calls for us to be critical when thinking about what that means. Freedom is foundationally about having the ability to make choices in our lives. Freedom of movement in the current context means having the choice not to move at all and being able to work from home. While we are facing unique challenges, what is not unique is that the most marginalized have the least choice to stay safe at home and are more likely to have a precarious safety net in weathering this moment.

The most marginalized find themselves on the frontlines stocking our grocery shelves, delivering goods, driving our buses, picking our food, caring for the sick, making supplies in prisons, among many other roles throughout our country. It is critical to center their lives and ask how we can make their movement safer, whether on public transit or at their jobs. Mobility justice requires that we hold the lives and the work of our BIPOC front line workers and communities as sacred, rather than sacrificial. It means keeping them from unnecessary harm and risk exposure while they perform essential duties that society relies on. Mobility justice cannot exist in a world where economic justice and workers' rights do not exist and these inequities are even more glaring now.

As we grapple with public safety and health concerns in our communities, we envision a world beyond policing. For some people, walking outside has never been safe and this moment further amplifies that. We envision street safety for the people who must expose themselves to feed their families. We envision

mobility justice for those behind bars but within the pandemic's reach. In a time of crisis, the immobility of imprisonment does nothing to ease the trauma and pain in our communities.

Our interconnectedness reveals the way forward towards healing and protecting our communities. As we face uncertainties and fear, we must refrain from seeing each other as moving threats. Collectivism is the only way we will survive this moment, which we are being shown by mutual aid efforts throughout the country and countless other ways people are supporting and uplifting each other.

As we take on the sacred responsibility of remaining physically distant, we can continue to build together from afar. We can continue to center community care and everyday joys that nurture us, such as cooking, gardening, and connecting with our loved ones. We can feed the relationships that went unnoticed in the hustle of our overtime lives. We can imagine new systems in which our liberated communities move for themselves instead of being stuck in oppressive systems that endanger their lives.

Those of us with the privilege to choose physical immobility must protect and uplift those in our communities who are continuing to be mobile. Mobility justice calls for us to see our lives as interdependent with the movement of all other people and to honor their stories and histories. Being rooted in a vision for mobility justice in this moment means embracing the collective responsibility that we all have to keep each other safe and to see mobility and immobility as an integral part of that.



Mobility Justice Responses to COVID-19

Do not plan future projects at a time when **equitable public participation is impossible**.

Redirect mobility planning staff to **meet essential needs** for vulnerable communities.

Support the organizing efforts of exploited **delivery and mobility workers**.

Provide safety supplies for frontline workers and/or contractors. This applies to all mobility and service delivery providers, public and private.

Make public transit and para-transit **free**.

Center those most in need in any transportation improvements and **connect them with services** such as food distribution and medical care. Access to mental health care is essential.

Define street safety in a way that centers the most oppressed and vulnerable groups. **Policing is not a tool** for healing our divided communities, and official street closures usually involve police. These are not a solution for equitable street safety in communities of color.

Stop police harassment of delivery workers doing vital work – and ticketing people surviving by living in vehicles or on the street.

Support efforts to release those immobilized in **jails and detention centers**.

Direct public funding to **community bicycle shops** that can distribute vehicles and provide repair at a neighborhood level.

Support neighborhood-based **mobility employment** at locally owned companies.

Join **mutual aid networks** to keep neighborhoods strong.

I work for a city transportation and mobility department and we are in the middle of a Master Plan that included extensive in-person engagement. The consultant company and department leadership have decided to keep the project timeline, which is forcing us to rely only on digital engagement. I'm struggling with the idea of proceeding and asking for ideas on how to engage communities while being safe and not coming together in person. How do city staff push on the importance of shifting timelines to ensure we reach and work alongside communities we have failed to involve in transportation planning decisions in the past?

I have been thinking a lot about the privilege to 'work from home' and how many 'essential' employees in transportation – bus drivers, janitors, station agents, customer service providers, traffic control officers – cannot work from home due to the importance of their jobs yet their pay grade and benefits, especially in comparison to planners, managers, do not reflect their 'essential' status.

Who's willing to sacrifice movement is very telling. Which raises the question: are frontline workers 'choosing to sacrifice' or are they being made 'sacrificial'?

I'm concerned about the repercussions on transit systems across North America, that are already chronically underfunded, having significant budget shortfalls going forward.

Many of the most vulnerable are also affected by public transit. I had a cousin pass away from the virus that was traveling back and forth to the hospital by bus in Sacramento. He was sent home three times. Two buses to hospital. Two buses home.

Who is getting policed is definitely an issue, especially as more municipalities start to fine people for being outside and not self-isolating. In a crisis moment, how do we keep more policing out of our communities?

Thoughts on COVID-19 from our Untokening Network



Before laying down a bike lane or keeping a trail open, instead look at the lives lost and address that.

I'm feeling pressure from white advocates to advocate for open streets.

In my city, police have been used to break up crowds and patrol the trails. I've been conflicted because people haven't been following measures to stay home but I don't want to rely on police to make sure people are making the "right moves."

Autonomous vehicles are being spec'd out as a sharing economy / subscription service. Will they have low income options? Can they be activated by governments to provide transportation to essential health services? Will they serve all neighborhoods?

The kind of transportation I want – free, frequent, accessible – doesn't work within capitalist frameworks. We need to stop deciding if things 'work' or 'don't work' based on profit margins or overall cost. I understand budgetary constraints but we have to start restructuring how we think about and fund equitable transportation as an essential public right.

It feels like we're focusing on moving our work online to keep with grant deliverables, which will essentially leave out the low-income, BIPOC communities we normally work with.

Money can certainly address some part of the crisis but a lot of it needs to also be relational, cultural. How do we treat and show respect to people all the time, rather than in "special cases?"

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This moment reminds me of how my grandparents and parents used to live. Able to live in a balanced relationship with the land. Aunties who were midwives and healers. Interesting how in these times we're getting rooted in what our families have been doing for generations. We have it in us, I think we should use this time to learn and remember.