

# Dismantling Systemic Racism and Inequities Working Group

July 12, 2021

## A Message from Secretary Gramian

Race and transportation have long been coupled in the United States, whether it be federally funded highways constructed through Black and Brown neighborhoods; or segregated streetcars, busses, and trolleys. Our nation's infrastructure investments and policies have not always been aligned to address systemic racism, impacting generations of people of color and posing challenges in mobility and access for minority communities persist. An in-depth examination of systemic racism and its relationship to transportation at large is long overdue.

PennDOT's Dismantling Systemic Racism and Inequities (DSRI) Working Group represents staff from across PennDOT, charged with assessing PennDOT's diversity and inclusion efforts, better understanding structural racism in transportation generally, and evaluating programs and initiatives that could help with these issues.

This report divides its inquiries into five focus areas: internal, contracting, public involvement, community investment, and boards and commissions. Information was gathered through discussions with community leaders, PennDOT staff who are people of color, and leaders at other state departments of transportation. The data collected is broadly focused, ranging in topic from racial makeup of our seasonal employees to survey respondents for our Twelve-Year Plan, but the overall message is clear: in order to affect change within PennDOT and the transportation industry overall, we must act decisively and systematically. PennDOT is committed to making these initiatives an operational priority, and we will now work toward further analysis and implementation strategies for the recommendations identified in this report, as well as ongoing agency diversity initiatives.

Yassmin Gramian, P.E., Pennsylvania's Secretary of Transportation



## Report

At the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, we impact the daily lives of all Pennsylvania residents and those traveling throughout our Commonwealth. We have a responsibility to evaluate and update our policies and procedures to ensure that we are achieving positive impacts and serving residents and communities in an equitable way. Our vision of equitable transportation cannot be achieved without addressing systemic racism.

Systemic racism is a term that acknowledges systems and practices that can create and maintain racial inequity. As a department, we are called to evaluate whether systemic racism is impacting our business. Some of the questions we are asking ourselves include: Are we spending taxpayer dollars equitably across all communities or can we help assist communities of color that may have fewer resources to advocate for themselves? Are there unnecessary barriers when doing work for PennDOT that prevents disadvantaged business enterprises, specifically Black American owned businesses, from submitting proposals? While progress has been and continues to be made through existing department policies and programs that address racial equity, there is a lot more that can be done.

In 2020, ongoing issues of racial inequality and systemic racism were thrust to the forefront of the national discussion prompted, in part, by the police killings of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd. To show unwavering support for the concerns of our employees of color and to reemphasize and enhance our organizational commitment to a culturally diverse, safe, and welcoming work environment, PennDOT convened the Dismantling Systemic Racism and Inequities Workgroup (DSRI). The workgroup consists of a diverse group of representatives from all Deputates and met weekly in 2020 to evaluate various measures of equity across PennDOT's operations and identify areas that can be improved.

Initial efforts focused on information gathering and evaluation of the current programs and metrics used to gauge organizational diversity. With this information, the group then reached out to other state's departments of transportation (DOTs) to hear about best practices and innovative programs, to sibling agencies within the Commonwealth to seek opportunities for collaboration, and to local community leaders to gain insight into the specific transportation issues impacting communities of color in Pennsylvania.

The group discussions and outreach efforts yielded many ideas for improving the diversity and organizational culture of PennDOT and ensuring equity and diversity considerations are an integral part of our planning, programming, and project delivery operations. The group identified recommendations that were important to them in overcoming perceived barriers to equity within PennDOT and improving how we could serve the residents of the commonwealth. While the problem statements and corresponding recommendations put forward by the workgroup members and conversation participants were developed independently, they mirror many elements of the strategic goals identified in PennDOT's 2020 Internal Equal Opportunity Plan. The

problem statements also align with the efforts of our national partner groups, identified in both the 2020 AASHTO Resolution Addressing Race, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion and the Resolution of the Northeast Association of State Transportation Officials (NASTO) Addressing Systemic Racism within Transportation Agencies.

## **Internal**

### Problem statements:

- PennDOT seeks to ensure that people of color are appropriately represented within the PennDOT workforce as compared to populations it serves both statewide and regionally, both in in “rank and file” positions as well as at the management level.

### Recommendations:

1. **Retention, Training and Career Development:** Consider additional strategies to bring persons of color into all areas of PennDOT.
  - a. Explore options to expand/strengthen our apprenticeship program specifically for under-represented groups in construction and maintenance areas.
  - b. Increase the number of trainees, mentoring and job shadowing opportunities.
  - c. Create job shadowing opportunities that allow an employee to experience what certain jobs look like on a daily basis.
2. **Recruitment, Hiring Practices, Interviews:** Enhance the diversity pipeline of candidates by developing strategies of recruitment that use schools, universities, media, Governor’s Affinity Groups, etc. to improve diversity of workforce.
  - a. Engage with historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) – for example, Lincoln and Cheyney in Pennsylvania.
  - b. Engage with clubs/groups at colleges/universities, high school STEM students, and within communities that are led by people of color.
  - c. Include topics such as unconscious bias in annual interviewer training for any person who is serving on an interview panel.
  - d. End “resume bias” by using nameless resumes.
  - e. Increase recruitment efforts at trade schools.
  - f. Promote transportation careers earlier in the education pipeline – including elementary, middle and high school age materials/presentations/videos that can be easily shared by any PennDOT employee.
3. **Culture Building:** Strive for an inclusive working environment.
  - a. Develop definitions and goals for equity and equitable transportation.
  - b. Create awareness by educating the organization with real world examples of systemic racism.
  - c. Create a diversity council with dedicated staff to work towards implementing the identified recommendations and moving other diversity initiatives forward. The council would meet regularly, similar to the Safety Committee framework.
  - d. Understand impact of previous diversity training and ways to improve culture moving forward by evaluating and updating the questions used in post-training surveys.

- e. Allow opportunities for employee engagement groups to form organically.

## ***Contracting***

### **Problem statements:**

- The 2018 PennDOT Disparity Study showed Black American owned firms disproportionately face obstacles to business ownership and accessing human and financial capital.
- The Disparity Study revealed that the only disparity in highway and highway related contracting at PennDOT was for Black Americans. When analyzing prime contracts versus subcontracts; all groups showed a substantial disparity on prime contracts except non-Hispanic white women-owned businesses.
- PennDOT typically spends more than \$2 billion annually in construction contracts and \$500 million in consultant contracts (these figures vary annually). The 2018 Disparity Study showed that only 0.8% of dollars from construction contracts and 0.2% of dollars from professional services contracts are spent contracting with Black American-owned businesses.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Continue to implement recommendations flowing from Disparity Study.
2. Review our prequalification process to see how it impacts DBEs.
3. Continue to evaluate our current DBE and DB Supportive Service Contract with Pro Rank to determine if enhancements can provide more opportunities for minority business. Evaluate methods of assisting minority businesses with working through the complexities of initiating and sustaining business with the commonwealth.
4. Analyze barriers to contracting such as bonding, insurance requirements, and capital access.
5. Analyze the results of Small Business Set Aside Pilot program and pursue additional strategies that increase opportunities for SBE/DBE's to compete for prime contracts on smaller projects, build capacity, and gain the experience needed to pursue larger scale projects.
6. Continue development of a mentor protégé programs to increase black American owned business participation.

## ***Public Involvement***

### **Problem statements:**

- PennDOT should increase its rate of direct involvement and engagement with communities of color. PennDOT receives low engagement from people of color in our surveying efforts.
- Public involvement can be hampered without language access accommodations. Physical copies of PennDOT documents are not always available due to paperless initiatives, and staff may not be consistent in its response to requests for paper documents.

### Recommendations:

1. Improve participation of diverse populations in our surveys.
2. Include questions and prompt conversation about vulnerable populations when meeting with local officials during the PennDOT Connects process. Consider putting a focus on engaging communities of color as part of the process.
3. Review our public involvement process to determine the community demographics of project scope impact areas to increase broad community participation and input, especially in areas where data shows a lack of diversified representation of attendees at public meetings and outreach sessions in the past.
4. Collaborate with sibling agencies serving disadvantaged populations to include questions related to transportation on their surveys and other data collection efforts.
5. Meet people where they are – give transportation related public comment/involvement opportunities in settings where people are already meeting/gathering.
6. Continue to develop relationships with the members of the Governor’s Affinity Commissions.
7. Analyze bilingual employee availability for customer facing jobs.
8. Develop a plan for the installation of additional multi-language signs in PennDOT facilities.

## ***Community Investment***

### Problem statements:

- Disadvantaged communities often face challenges in mobility and struggle with access to vehicles which can impact the ability to access jobs, accumulate generational wealth, procure healthy foods, and obtain quality healthcare.
- PennDOT’s spending on highways does not always provide a direct benefit a to large percentage of Pennsylvanians of color who rely on modes other than the personal vehicle. 34% of Black, 21.7% of Latino, 22.8% of Native American, and 14.3% of Asian Pacific Islander households in PA do not have access to a vehicle as compared to 8% of white PA households (2015 Census/IPUMS data).
- Historically, some projects have adversely impacted some communities and benefited other communities disproportionately based on minority and/or low-income status.

### Recommendations:

1. Identify racial disparities in mobility and access in Pennsylvania and work to ameliorate impacts on Pennsylvanians’ ability to access jobs, generational wealth, healthy foods and healthcare across all transportation modes.
2. Evaluate equity of spending.
  - a. Evaluate spending per capita (e.g. by zip code or census tract) and see who is benefitting from our capital and/or maintenance projects ensuring PennDOT money is being spent equitably. Map it to see impact.
3. Emphasize public involvement and an understanding of the needs of persons of color, low-income, and underserved populations in the Office of Transformational Technology,

in Long Range Planning efforts and all other work designing the long-term future of mobility.

4. Provide support and engagement to communities of color in all aspects of the transportation planning and funding processes:
  - a. Educate communities of color on the planning process and grant opportunities
  - b. Identify grant writing resources for communities that cannot afford it
  - c. Engage District staff to help facilitate the project implementation process to ensure success
  - d. Enhance access for people and communities of color
5. Work with MPOs and RPOs during project selection to ensure disadvantaged persons needs are considered, including all groups without meaningful vehicle access.
6. Work with sibling agencies to explore strategies for collective grant opportunities for underserved communities.

## ***Boards & Commissions***

### **Problem statements:**

- PennDOT's boards and commissions are responsible for advising the Secretary and PennDOT on important topics ranging from innovations to aviation. With 13 public boards and commissions and approximately 200 members across many industries, these boards help advise the work of the agency to help shape the agencies policies and programs. While many of the boards have statutory membership requirements, including some elected officials, there is still opportunity to improve the diversity of the members.
- While not under PennDOT's direct control, the makeup of the MPOs and RPOs members are not representative of the overall population of the commonwealth.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Look at the diversity of our advisory boards and commissions and set a path forward to making sure that membership better reflects our communities and provide an opportunity for those boards and commissions address racial equity in the provision of transportation services or programs.
2. Create a location on PennDOT's website where individuals can submit a resume for consideration to any PennDOT boards/commissions openings/vacancies. Resumes will be kept for a pool of future candidates.
3. Create and implement a survey to formally understand the current demographics (race, gender, disability, geography) of our boards/commissions.

## **Results from Executive-Led Group**

In addition to the work of the internal DSRI Working Group, in August 2020, in response to Governor Wolf's direction to develop a holistic approach to dismantling systemic racism within state government, nine executive-level work groups were established, including one focused on Transportation. PennDOT's executive-led Transportation Workgroup has embarked on the

following initiatives through enabling legislation and within the current budget. These initiatives will have an incremental impact, some short-term and some long term, within vulnerable populations and communities of color.

### *Reducing reliance on the state gasoline tax by replacing it with more sustainable funding sources.*

At 58.7 cents per gallon, Pennsylvania's state gas tax is the second highest in the nation. Like many taxes, our gas tax hits those with low and moderate incomes the hardest. In addition, as more fuel-efficient cars and technologies are created, the gas tax for state revenue is a less dependable source of revenue. Gas tax revenues go into the Motor License Fund, which supports Pennsylvania's 40,000 miles of state-owned roads and over 25,000 state-owned bridges, as well as 80,000 miles of locally owned roads and 6,500 locally owned bridges. We recently launched a new initiative called PennDOT Pathways, through which we will analyze new future-focused sources of funding for our highways and bridges that could better serve our communities and reduce our reliance on gas tax. As a part of this program, we are embarking on a Planning and Environmental Linkages study, evaluating potential funding solutions that will meet our growing needs while serving our communities and all Pennsylvanians for generations to come. Revenue from these alternative funding options could provide opportunities to enhance Pennsylvania's transit system or help subsidize its cost, resulting in better access and mobility for economically disadvantaged populations. This program could also provide opportunities for on-the-job or other workforce training and mentoring, allowing minority-owned businesses to grow and prosper as we are addressing our transportation needs.

### *Homeless ID: new law allows for individuals experiencing homelessness to obtain a free Pennsylvania photo ID.*

There are huge racial disparities in homelessness. On any given day there are approximately 15,000 individuals in Pennsylvania experiencing homelessness, 52 percent of whom are Black as compared to the 11 percent of Pennsylvanians whom are Black. Thanks to Act 131 of 2020, individuals who need identification but cannot afford to obtain it through traditional means can get an initial, free Pennsylvania photo ID, which is needed for critical benefit services, employment, housing, and to obtain a bank account. As of April 9, 2021, PennDOT has issued 335 Pennsylvania IDs to individuals experiencing homelessness.

### *PennDOT's On-the-Job Training Programs*

PennDOT's On-the Job Training (OJT) program was developed under the auspices of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, to provide an avenue of employment and economic development in the construction industry for historically and socioeconomically underserved people of color and women. The program authorizes federal funds to be paid to the highway contractors to assist in locating, qualifying, and increasing the skills of trainees and applicants for employment. PennDOT has invested nearly \$1 million in state funding for IT upgrades that will allow it to better track the success of the program through improved reporting and analysis of completion rates and

program participation. Additionally, PennDOT is exploring a construction and consultant Mentor/Protégé Program to increase participation from Black American owned businesses, which currently receive only .1 percent of highway construction dollars.

### *Transit Partnership to facilitate Workforce Development*

PennDOT has created the Workforce Development Pilot Program to help eliminate transportation barriers in low income, transit-dependent communities. This program subsidizes transit service focused on providing access to employment opportunities in areas not accessible within the current public transportation network. Employers pay for a portion of the service and will match shift schedules with transit service to maximize effectiveness of transit service. The pilot began February 8 and will run for 12- 24 months to determine local needs and feasibility of long-term commitment. The pilot is currently running at two locations: Gettysburg to Hanover providing 200-plus jobs, and Coatesville to Gap providing 400 jobs.

### *Grant program to help under-represented communities*

Current grant program rules can work against underserved municipalities and neighborhoods. Often these municipalities do not have resources to hire grant writers, lobbyists, or engineers to do basic studies required to secure grants. Sometimes they are not even aware of the grant programs themselves. Affluent communities have a huge advantage in this regard. PennDOT is working with sibling agencies to develop grant equity principles and continues to evaluate PennDOT's current grants process in how to make it more equitable.

## **Conclusion**

The dozens of recommendations in this report are just a fraction of the strategies the DSRI group collected and developed. While there are many potential paths, the most important thing is that we – PennDOT – take decisive, data-driven, and strategic action aimed at making a significant and sustained impact to our organization and to the lives of Pennsylvanians. As a first step, all of these recommendations and more will be analyzed by leadership and program staff experts for feasibility and implementation strategies. Throughout implementation, this work will continue to require difficult conversations and meaningful reflection. However, if we persist, we can pass along a transportation system that is demonstrably fairer and pass along a PennDOT that has enhanced workforce policies and procedures to embrace diversity and effectively partner with communities to drive change.

For our DSRI group, it has been an honor to take the lead in setting a foundation for our department's conversation on dismantling systemic racism. We have appreciated all of the support, data, advice, and information that we have received from across PennDOT and across the nation. We look forward to being active participants in the implementation of these strategies and to support the diversity.