THE UNSEEN COMMUTERS: NAVIGATING INJUSTICES IN URBAN MOBILITY

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PREFACE

In the stories you will read in this book, the characters are fictional; the facts are very real. The fictional lives are a collage of real world occurrences. The challenges that many of us face because of mobility poverty[1] are not new, surprisingly, there is not much awareness about it yet. Fortunately, this is changing. Data and numbers are not enough to bring the attention this problem deserves. Worse than that, in some cases, people living with mobility poverty and their lived experiences are still invisible.

Mobility poverty manifests both at an individual and systemic level, sustained by the unequal distribution of resources—be it financial, temporal, human, or intellectual—favoring those already privileged in various aspects of life.

This entails being deprived of job prospects, lacking access to fresh or any food, and possibly even being confined to one's home, thus remaining invisible in conventional traffic assessments that influence urban mobility infrastructure projects. It involves opting for environmentally friendly choices like reducing car usage, only to sacrifice convenience and freedom when it comes to accessing local amenities within the city.

Individuals experiencing mobility poverty are stripped of fundamental human rights including the right to safety, freedom of movement and the right to live. Building a city that caters to everyone requires recognizing the daily hurdles confronted by many of our most vulnerable members.

Traditionally, we address our social problems in a compartmentalized and disconnected way. The data collection to develop the stories present in this book used an SDG[2] lens to approach urban mobility as a window to many other issues such as food security, housing,

climate change adaptation, decent work, anti-oppression, belonging and many other intersecting challenges that we are facing today.

Our hope is that these stories and the illustrations that you will see in this book here will put a face to the numbers of traffic data, that it will make those hardships a little more visible, and will ensure that the ones that need our help the most won't be forgotten.

The people portrayed in the stories are all subjected to the universal human condition in search of happiness, purpose and love. People who care for their children, people who want to enjoy life, people who want to leave a positive mark after they are gone. We all have a little bit of Victoria, Jerry,Aria, Rose, and Jess and all the others in this book. We are all a collage of facts in the same reality; we are only rearranged in a different way and order due to the unique life circumstances each of us has.

This book is rooted in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the arts. The SDGs serve as a common language, intertwining environmental, social, and economic dimensions to illustrate the interconnectedness of our problems and solutions.

Art, being a universal language, has the power to resonate with us all. Moreover, it plays a vital role in fostering a functioning democracy and promoting a healthy society, as emphasized by Max Wyman, a leading cultural commentator and writer, throughout his decades-long career.

From this shared understanding and connection through the SDGs and the arts, we can finally care enough to take effective action.

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[1] Transportation (or mobility) poverty refers to situations where socio-economic marginalization combines with transportation barriers to mutually reinforce problems in peoples' lives, preventing them from thriving. Transportation-related social exclusion is the outcome of

transport poverty, as it results from the activities that people miss out on due to one's transportation situation, things like missing job interviews and doctors' visits, as well as feelings of isolation (Mobilizing Justice, 2021).

[2] The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) are a network of targets, collectively agreed among nation states around the world, to achieve a thriving future for people and planet.
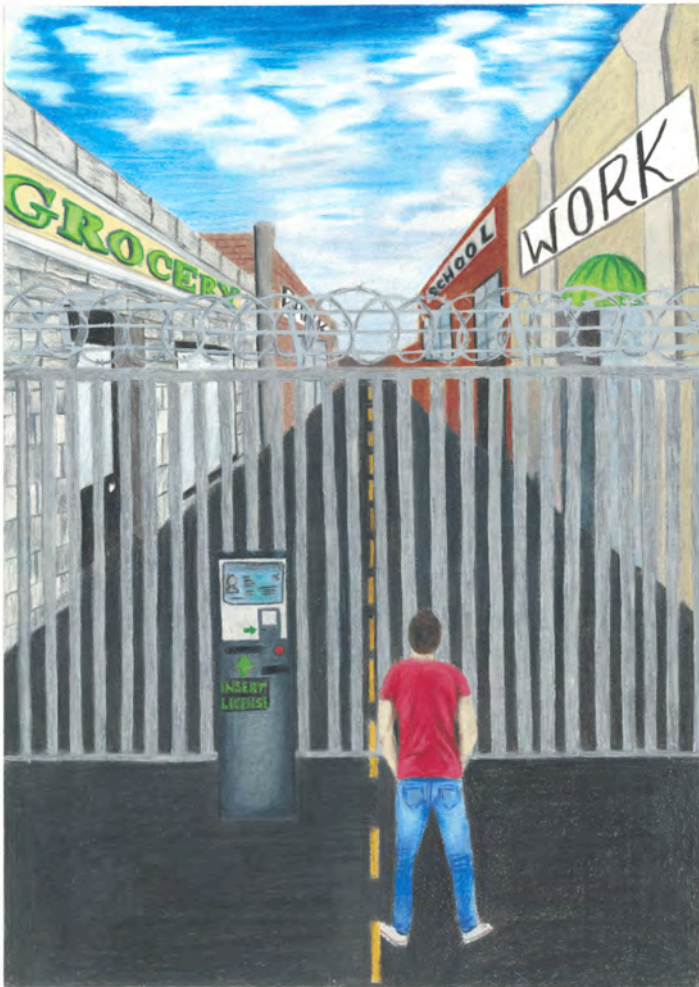
Table of Contents

Dedicated to Jibin Benoy, David Smith, Nicholas Keddy, Shawn George, Tristan Roby, and all the vulnerable road users who perished, to all Victorias, Jerrys, Arias, Roses, and Jesses that are daily oppressed on our streets and roads, and denied basic human rights.

THE STORY BEHIND THE BOOK

Jibin Benoy, a 29-year-old Indian immigrant, was returning from his shift at a downtown restaurant in London, Ontario. He was pursuing his engineering studies at Fanshawe College while working diligently to reunite with his wife in Canada. Tragically, while riding his bicycle along Hamilton Rd, he was struck by a hit-and-run driver. Despite being rushed to the hospital with severe injuries, Jibin passed away the following day, on September 18, 2022.

Since then, there was a memorial ride with a ghost bike, a protest at City Hall, a partnership with Crouch Neighbourhood Resource Centre running a Vision Zero Campaign, several meetings with City staff and elected officials, a Town Hall event, learning sessions hosted by SDG Cities and even changes to the City of London's new strategic plan to include mobility poverty as one of the guiding principles of transportation projects and mobility plans.

The fatal crash on September 17, 2022, was the event that set in motion this project, which expanded beyond its original focus on a specific neighborhood in London, Ontario. Through research, meetings, and workshops, it became evident that these challenges were not limited to one neighborhood but rather affected the city as a whole.

This book is one of the outcomes that recognizes mobility as a network and should be treated as such. And it's not just a London problem. The Mobilizing Justice initiative - a Canadian consortium with several partners from prominent universities, municipalities and civil society organizations - came together to address this very issue across the country.

One key takeaway is our realization of how much remains unknown. This lack of information also reflects the systemic injustices ingrained in our mobility systems. Despite our concerted efforts, significant change is still necessary. This underscores the ongoing

work ahead of us, suggesting a need to make different decisions if we want different results.

HOW TO READ THIS BOOK

The heart of this publication are the human stories, they are a universal language that will resonate with most audiences. To read the personal stories based on real life situations in London, just proceed to the next chapter to read **Our Stories**.

What is the alternative? How life could be different if we are bold enough to change for the better? For one of the possible futures, read the **Mobility Wealth** chapter.

Do you like numbers and stats and/or want to understand better how many of us are impacted by mobility inequality issues? You can read **The Data Story and Data Gap** chapter.

If you are an action-oriented person and want to know what can be done to address the mobility equity challenges that we are facing, you can skip to the chapter **Lessons Learned** and what to do next.

If you are a big picture kind of person, trying to look at the issue from a systemic view, check out **Our Guiding Frameworks** chapter.

Finally, those are just suggestions to help you enjoy this book. Feel free to read it all or simply skim through the pages on your own.

OUR STORIES

Victoria

"BUZZ BUZZZ BUZZZ!" Sleep that feels like it just started, is abruptly interrupted. It's still dark outside, but the clock says it's 6am. I hit snooze, but the alarm yells at me again, only a minute later. Every morning, this is the routine. I get up resentfully, but quickly. Every minute of every weekday morning counts. Falling behind in my daily morning schedule is not discipline, it's a necessity.

9:03 am is when the LTC bus headed downtown, to my office on Queens St., is scheduled to come. 8:55 a.m. is when my daughter, Melissa's school bus is scheduled to arrive. 8 minutes between the two scheduled arrivals. 8 minutes that blossoms quickly into anxiety because the school bus is late. If the LTC bus comes early, it leaves early, and my next bus is scheduled for 9:25 a.m. I start work at 9:30 a.m. The next "best scenario" is if the LTC bus is late. A few minutes late to the office, but at least not 30 minutes late. Scheduled times are an estimate that I measure time around and plan against. I'm a single parent. There is no other parent to wait with Melissa at her stop, while I make my way to the LTC stop.

I could save money if I could rely on transit, but I have a car too. I had to get one. Otherwise, we'd hardly leave home. I don't drive it to work. Parking is expensive.

It's 8:59 a.m., and Melissa's school bus arrives. I wave as I walk as quickly as possible to the bus stop. I check the Google map for my bus's location. Perfect! My bus is 2 minutes behind schedule. I slow my stride to a normal pace. 2 minutes behind gets me to the office front door just in time.

The bus pulls up. I step on. There's usually a couple of seats towards the back. There's a free seat beside a young person with a very full backpack, earbuds in, gazing out the window. I sit down beside them, put my own earbuds in, and stop holding my anxious breath. For the next few minutes, I don't think about time. If the bus ride goes as expected, the next 20 minutes become "me time" - a highly treasured, and much-needed respite.

Recently, among a group of friends, "What do you fear?" came up. I replied with the usual spiders or clowns. It's not completely true though. Sure, they creep me out but my real fears have to do with the ability to take care of my family.

When my car makes a weird noise or the engine light goes on, I mildly to moderately panic. Honestly, I'd rather a spider land on my forehead. I fear that my car will need a repair so big that I cannot afford it or afford to buy another car. I fear the loss of just being able to do what I need to on a daily basis. I question why I ever moved here. I traded the high cost of rent in a big city for the high cost of mobility, despite the majority of tax dollars already flowing to cars. I moved with hope. Those first 10 months of living here, when I relied on transit deflated that hope.

In our attempts to take transit, especially when we first got here, we had trouble finding bus stops. Unless there's an obvious bus shelter, the small blue bus stop signs look like any other street sign. During snowy winter months, Melissa and I precariously climbed over snow-bank peaks getting on or off buses. I'd hold her hand tightly and dig my boot down into the snow because a misstep could land you down the side that goes under the bus or, if you're lucky, down the side into the unplowed bus stop area. I suppose, though, it's still better than not being able to climb on or off the bus at all.

Spring and summer weather made transit time a bit more bearable, or maybe it was the desperate need to shake the feeling of isolation off.

Whatever it was, it was enough to try and take the bus and explore the city.

But, there were bus reroutes and regular bus stops not in use. A few times we had to hunt for the temporary stops like some strange transit scavenger hunt. I tried to decipher reroute signage that had chicken-scratch, not-enough information. I'd call LTC customer service who were friendly, but had limited information too. Often, calls ended in "sorry I couldn't help you more". Finding the right temporary stop in time to catch the bus was the prize, that made me feel like a sore loser.

In the big city, I was never self-conscious about my choice to use transit as my mode of transportation. In fact, I got rid of my car because I rarely used it and I saved money. Within months of arriving in London, the difficulty of getting around added to the loneliness of moving to a new place. I felt limited in more than mobility, but in what mobility provided. I hate the dependence I've developed on my car. I resent that the absence of my car would obliterate opportunities I could provide my daughter. I hate that I feel self-conscious and embarrassed. I hate that it's starting to not feel like the systemic barrier that it is, and that it's starting to feel like it's my fault - that I'm less than.

Aria

"We all deserve a place. My actions don't impact just me."

Aria is a self-described bleeding heart who thinks about her engagement with the community. She talks about Seven Generational thinking - how to make it better for generations after. "What's my contribution?"

Aria bikes by choice. Now in her thirties, she lived in Stoney Creek, a suburban neighbourhood in London through elementary school and high school where she had access to a car. Then, she got to where she needed to go by walking or by car.

After university, she moved to Old East Village, a walkable neighbourhood. The need to drive wasn't great except for maybe when she needed to get groceries. So, when she first got into biking, it was for fun.

Aria is on the leadership team of the organization she works for, located in downtown London. She now lives about a 10 minute bike ride from the office. "For anyone that cycles as part of their routine, the threshold for what's walkable or bikeable is much higher," she notes with a smile. Her smile is warm and sincere. Her dark curly hair is in a single casual braid. We're on Zoom, but her calming presence comes through the laptop screen, as does her genuineness. Before she speaks, she always pauses briefly as if reflecting on her thoughts before committing them to words spoken and now out there. She listens in this manner as well, with consideration.

One reason Aria walks or bikes is because she feels unsafe on transit. She had a negative experience on a bus when she was a kid. Another reason is that she cares about the environment and advocates for supporting "more than just me". She has a car, but makes a conscious environmental and physical choice to avoid

driving as much as possible, even with the risk of situations with aggressive drivers.

Aria loves riding on the TVP, short for Thames Valley Parkway, a beautiful and quiet route along the river connecting various parts of the city. Unfortunately, she can only use it during day time. Being completely isolated from all the streets, the lack of lighting and people turns the TVP into a terrifying experience at night for a lone young woman. When winter comes along, Aria still chooses to cycle when she can, but the days are much shorter. She would probably do it more often, but many cycling routes, including the TVP, are not plowed, even when the roads are.

Since Aria often chooses her bike as an option for transportation, she invested in buying one that is more expensive. Bike theft is an issue in the city. She knows where to park her bike safely at her usual destinations, but if she is going somewhere new, she more than likely will drive. The possibility of losing her bike is something she doesn't want to risk.

It is a privilege to have options for mobility. Aria is very aware of this. She can choose to drive when she wants or needs to. She agrees that it is easier to choose to drive but also understands that it's "a choice for me, but not [a choice that exists] for others" Therefore, she uses her privilege to advocate for the environment and for the community.

Aria loves nature, and as part of that travel and hiking. In fact, her travel often - if not, almost always - involves hiking. There are nearby trails and beaches that Aria would love to bike to during the summer season, but it can be dangerous. At the least, it is inconvenient because of the lack of infrastructure. She would love to bike if conditions were better. Instead, she drives to nearby trails and beaches. She is lucky she has this option though. If you don't have a car, transit or inter-town buses are rare or don't even exist.

For Aria, community matters. Her lifestyle choices, including mobility, reflect her relationship to the community. The choice to walk or bike is - within the bigger picture of her lifestyle - a small manageable action with a mighty intention behind it. Each person has a relationship with the community whether they realize it or not, and even whether they are active in it or not because it is a relationship. Why? Because communities aren't a framework or system. They are relationships.

Reciprocity in good relationships is a mutual exchange of support, respect, and care where Recognizing this in her own life, Aria admits "I am who I am because of the people around me. I wouldn't be where I am without community." She adds, "Community is more than your friends. They are people who also challenge, who make you uncomfortable. We need compassion because we're all dealing with shit."

Every choice has an impact on those around us. "Choices are reciprocity. So, your choice is your relationship with the community."

Jerry

In the heart of not-so bustling downtown London, Jerry pedals through the streets on his 'seen-better-days' bicycle. His life, much like his bicycle, feels worn out. He had everything until one fateful moment when a careless driver sent him sprawling to the pavement. Between injuries and addictions, his life had evaporated like morning dew on a hot day. His body emerged bruised and battered from that accident, but his heart and soul never recovered. The job, the house, and the love of his life all found a convenient exit out of his life. As he once told a friend, "I lost my heart, my soul, and my being that day."

"A man without someone to love or be loved by is just an empty shell. Unless," he added with a smile, "unless he has a bike."

As Jerry approaches Queen and Richmond, he sees a lot of people in the bank building. He wheels his bike into the bank, ignoring an accusatory 'no-bikes-allowed' look from a red-haired woman holding her designer monogram bag closer as he passes her.

Jerry notices a mother and daughter waiting in line. The little girl, clutching her mother's hand, gazes up at him with wide eyes, fascinated by his bicycle. Jerry smiles faintly at them. He had always wanted to have kids but his wife wanted to wait. So he waited. Then the accident happened. Nearby, a man in an expensive-looking suit stands at the counter, exuding an air of confidence and success. He glances briefly in Jerry's direction, only thinly masking his disdain at the sight of the scruffy cyclist in 'his world'.

Jerry sighs as he remembers his own former world, not that long ago - a beautiful, characteristic 3-bedroom bungalow in the Old South. The house was an essential part of his being, at least he who was back then. Losing it, on the heels of losing his wife and job, buried him into a bottomless pit of no return.

Ah, the agony, and comfort of memories. "Next, please," beckons the bank teller, a young kid who looked like he was just plucked fresh from a college campus.

Jerry handed the teller his Ontario Works check and waited. In a few moments, his pockets are thicker, courtesy of the $733 he gets from cashing it. He smiles at the young girl as he wheels his bike out of the bank, never to return until the end of the month. He thinks about how to get to the food bank from downtown. He likely needs to get a box or basket so that he can carry more stuff. He feels lucky because his bike helps him carry more stuff easily than people who walk to the Food Bank.

Just outside the bank, Jerry spots an old neighbour from his previous life in the Old South neighborhood where he once had a house. He waved eagerly, a glimmer of hope sparking within him at the prospect of reconnecting with someone from his past. However, his heart sank as the neighbor ignored him, walking briskly past without so much as a glance in Jerry's direction. It was a painful reminder of what he had lost.

A motorist quickly turns onto Carling Street, narrowly missing Jerry as he bikes down Richmond Street. He holds his breath as he realizes he was a hair's breadth away from being hit. A compassionate voice breaks through his daze, and he looks up to see a young Southeast Asian woman staring at him with concern. He nods that he is okay. She mumbles something about irresponsible drivers who seem to think they owned the street as she walks away.

With a deep breath, Jerry resumes his journey down Richmond St. He is headed to his secret storage place, nestled within an abandoned building on South Street.

All around him, he sees symbols of forgotten dreams and shattered aspirations - the old, unused, unwanted bank buildings and stores. The joys and bustle of the storied downtown streets had vanished. If

anything, the downtown is a mirror of his own lost soul, and lost dreams. Two weary souls searching for a bright morning but lost in the darkness of uncertainty and doubt.

As he gets to the corner of Horton St, Jerry ponders with a chuckle: who would recover first, him or the downtown?

Minutes later, he maneuvers his way along the familiar route back to the abandoned house, the squeaky sounds from his bike a calming companion to his solitary thoughts.

The house stands silent and forgotten, its windows boarded up and its walls adorned with graffiti. To the casual observer, it's just another derelict building, but to Jerry, it's a sanctuary—a shelter from a harsh world that has tossed him out like a discarded toy. There were no monuments to mark his old life. Only the scars in his heart and soul seem to remember.

Inside, he looks around, taking comfort in the familiarity of his surroundings. He carefully inspects his meager belongings—the most prized being photos of his early years and his family.

Jerry retrieves a sturdy basket, preparing for his next destination and the day's second most important date: the food bank.

Carlos

It is a typical weekday, Carlos returns from his class at Fanshawe College and parks his car in the driveway. He greets a few neighbours out walking their dogs as he checks the mailbox. On the surface, everything appears normal and fine. Yet, a sense of dread washes over Carlos as he retrieves the mail from the mailbox.

Three years ago, Carlos and his family embarked on a new chapter, moving from Latin America to Canada. Despite already holding a degree and boasting fifteen years of professional experience, Carlos finds himself navigating life as a college student once again. The prospect of living in London, Ontario, filled him with anticipation. He had always envisioned Canada as a more inclusive and affluent society, far removed from what he had known back home.

Upon entering his house, Carlos leaves his jacket on; they are trying to save on heating costs by keeping the thermostat at a mere 17°C. Staring down at the envelopes in his hand, Carlos attempts to do some mental math, but the figures blur together inside his head. The task isn't that complicated; however, fatigue and anxiety cloud his mind. He knows all too well what the envelopes contain—bills for college tuition, rent, and car payments, reminders of the financial pressures weighing on him.

Before relocating, Carlos had carefully considered various expenses, including tuition fees and the rising cost of housing. He had dreamed of adopting a healthier lifestyle with significant savings on transportation, envisioning a city with reliable public transit and safe cycling infrastructure, where children could independently commute to school and other daily activities.

Such amenities were absent in his homeland, but he remained optimistic, believing that Canada would offer a stark contrast with its advanced urban infrastructure and equal opportunities for those committed to sustainable living.

Despite these aspirations, Carlos's commute to college by bus took a grueling 90 minutes each way. Occasionally, he opted to cycle, seeking a quicker alternative. They soon realized that navigating London, a city with a population of only 400,000 yet the same geographical size as their 2.7 million-populated hometown, was a challenge without a car. But the tragic death of a Fanshawe student—an immigrant from India killed on the road—was the last straw that prompted his wife to advocate for purchasing a car, an unforeseen and substantial financial burden.

Fortunately, their children were able to walk to a nearby public school. At first, nearby activities such as movie nights in the local park, ice skating at Victoria Park, library visits, and enjoying splash pads were exciting. Once the novelty wore off, it became increasingly complex to coordinate extracurriculars as the kids were yearning to partake in soccer practices, camping trips, and other activities that were not readily accessible. A playdate across the city, for example, would consume a significant part of their day.

Carlos was dismayed to find a scant number of cyclists on the roads, despite the presence of some bike lanes and seemingly safer traffic conditions. He noted the advantages of less crowded buses but was disheartened by the infrequent service, lengthy waits, and the often indirect routes to his destinations. It was shocking to him that public transit in London was less efficient than his experience back home. He felt like a second class citizen with much of the city not available to him and his family as a cyclist or bus passenger.

Resigned to abandoning his vision of a sustainable lifestyle, Carlos resolved to obtain a driver's license. Hindered by his limited English proficiency, it took considerable time and several attempts before he succeeded, further complicated by the difficulty of reaching the Driver's Centre without a vehicle, which he wasn't allowed to drive anyway, even if he had one.

The challenges of navigating London, coupled with the unforeseen expenses of purchasing and maintaining a car, placed a significant strain on Carlos's family. They now confront difficult decisions, grappling with the realities of their new life far from what they had imagined. This transition, marked by anticipation and followed by the harsh truths of adaptation, underscores the complexities of settling into a new country, where dreams often meet the hard surface of reality.

Rose

41 years together. It's a long time. Three months out of that is a drop. Three months is how long my husband Helmut was sick. In a blink, he was gone. Forever is permanent, and this is how my grief feels. Though I pride myself on my independence, old age is a force that slowly increases its grip, while it greedily steals chunks of it away from me. In a place that used to feel like home, the rooms and the furnishings are the same as before he left. Being retired with a decent pension and without my Helmut, there was nothing keeping me in my city anymore. I moved from Vancouver to London to be closer to my 41 year old daughter, Helen, and my 7 year old grandson, Luke. In a matter of months, most of my things - objects infused with our life's memories - were thrown away or sold. I arrived with what was remaining of my life packed into a few suitcases.

I try to busy myself with the things that bring me joy and help with Luke. I need to because sadness is always quietly lingering around now, and deep sorrow likes to appear unexpectedly and drown hope. During the weekdays when Helen was at work and Luke was at school, I went to church, the Jalna library branch, art exhibitions at Museum London, TAP Arts Centre or the Forest City Gallery and different cafés around the city. In the evenings or weekends, when I wasn't visiting Helen or looking after Luke, I would go to watch plays at the Grand Theatre and films at the Hyland Cinema, a cozy and independent movie theatre.

Then, it happened. I had a stroke. Probably caused by all the stress of losing the love of my life and moving to a completely different city. My recovery was quick, I am physically healthy again but it affected my vision permanently and I am not allowed to drive anymore.

Because of that, I started to feel loneliness and isolation stack like heavy bricks on my shoulders atop the existing grief that clings to me.

All I can do now is to go for short walks that I come home from sooner than I wished because even though I am quite shy, I do enjoy being out among people and there are no cafes or theatres, which I really enjoy, that I can get to easily on my walks.

Helen helps as best as she can, taking care of both me and Luke while working full-time. I thought I would be helping her. Now, I feel like a burden. I get a cab every now and then, but it's pretty expensive to use it everyday, so I try paratransit not only to get around, but so I can feel useful… so I can feel like myself.

I don't feel like myself, though. I rarely go out at all during the week. When I call to book paratransit, it takes hours to get through on the phone. I get a busy signal and when I finally get through after calling dozens of times, I can be on hold for a really long time. LTC says one can book paratransit up to three days in advance, but what is the point if by the time I get through, the time slot I need is already taken? I'm exhausted and frustrated by the number of times I hear "I'm sorry" and "unfortunately" when I'm just trying to get to an appointment or pick up a few items.

So, I give up. Now, I sit alone for much of each day. I don't mind alone. I am shy. But, no church. No library. No cafés. No concerts. No movies. No art shows. No visiting my daughter. This, in addition to losing Helmut, leaving my memories and leaving my home. Alone can be a state of being that one chooses.The idea of paratransit seemed like a sound option that I could choose. However, it's not much of a choice. I didn't choose loneliness and isolation.

Jess

The early morning air cut through Jess's cheeks as she emerged from her modest apartment building on King Street, her two children in tow. Sarah, the eldest at nine years old, was already chatting away about her plans for the day. Jacob, six years old, was the quietest of the two. He adored his mom, secretly calling her the Magician for her ability to do so much for their family. Secretly too, he worried it was all too much for her.

As they made their way towards the bus stop, Jacob couldn't shake the guilt gnawing at him. He hated the idea of inconveniencing his mom, knowing she would have to take time off work to accompany him to the doctor's office. Missing school didn't bother him much, but he understood the strain missing work put on his mother, who juggled a lot of responsibilities.

As Sarah boarded the Long Bus bound for her French school on the eastern edge of the city, Jess waved her off with a smile. The ride would take about 40 minutes—a small sacrifice for Sarah's education, but one that added to Jess's daily juggling act.

"Come on, we don't want to miss the bus," Jess called out to Jacob as they turned onto Dundas. Spotting Sherry at the bus stop, Jess breathed a sigh of relief—the 7:15 bus had not yet passed.

Sherry is a student at Fanshawe College, her eyes betraying a weariness that belied her youth. Despite her struggles, she tirelessly juggled work and education, often picking up extra shifts at the diner to cover tuition fees. Jess marveled at Sherry's determination to navigate the challenging balance between education and financial obligations.

As Jess and her son boarded the bus, she exchanged a nod with Kathleen, who sat in the front row. Kathleen, with her perpetual optimism, greeted Jess with a sympathetic smile.

"Running a bit behind today, eh?"

Jess nodded, a hint of frustration in her voice. "Yeah, the kids were dragging their feet this morning. And my Jacob isn't feeling well. It's probably nothing but I don't want to take any chances," said Jess pointing to her son.

"We were lucky the bus was running late today."

Settling into their seats, Jess and Kathleen struck up a conversation, their shared experiences as working parents forging a bond between them. They commiserated about the rising costs of childcare and the constant juggling act between work and family life.

"I don't know how much longer I can keep up with these childcare fees," Jess admitted, desperation creeping into her tone. "And finding something closer to home seems impossible."

Kathleen shared her own worries about the high cost of living and the struggle to balance work and family commitments. "It's a constant juggling act," she reflected, "trying to be there for my kids while holding down a job. And the constant driving only adds to the environmental burden."

Jess nodded, understanding Kathleen's plight. "The guilt... it's overwhelming sometimes."

As the bus rumbled through busy Dundas Street, the two women continued to bond over their shared challenges.

"How's Paul?" Jess inquired, shifting the conversation toward Kathleen's personal life.

"He was his usual grumpy self this morning," Kathleen chuckled, her expression softening.

Over the years, Kathleen and Paul had built a life together, marked by their commitment to simplicity and environmental consciousness.

They had opted for a car-free wedding, choosing bicycles instead of the traditional wedding car—a symbol of their shared values. However, with the addition of their two sons, the simplicity they once cherished seemed increasingly out of reach.

"I really wish we didn't add as much carbon as we do," Kathleen confessed, her voice tinged with regret.

Jess offered a sympathetic nod, her heart heavy with the weight of shared concern. "I understand, Kathleen. It's hard not to feel overwhelmed by the impact our daily activities have on the environment."

With a sigh, Kathleen leaned back in her seat, her thoughts swirling with a mix of guilt and determination. "I know we can't change everything overnight, but sometimes it feels like we're not doing enough."

Jess reached out, placing a reassuring hand on Kathleen's arm. "Even small changes can make a difference, like carpooling or biking whenever possible. Maybe we could even start a community garden to reduce our carbon footprint."

Kathleen's eyes sparkled with excitement. "You're right. There are two other kids on my street who go to the same school as mine. We could carpool."

Jacob watched the exchange between his mom and her friend with keen interest. He had recently read a book about people in the Global South—he wasn't sure where that was— that grew their own food.

"It'd be cool if we could grow our own food," he thought.

As Jess' stop approached, she rose from her seat. "I'll call you," she promised Kathleen as she stepped off the bus.

"Mom, that woman seems to be strong like you, and smart," said Jacob. "Are we really gonna start a community garden?"

Jess pretended not to notice the excitement in her son's voice.

"Only if you promise to help me," she smiles at him as they open the door to the doctor's office.

Yuusuf

Yuusuf trudged along the pavement on Huron west of Highbury, homeward-bound after finishing his shift at the big box store at the mall. The bus was out of the question until his next paycheck in two weeks, and the last $50 to his name had already been sent to Uganda through Western Union, earmarked for his five siblings still living there.

As he walked past a three-story residence at the edge of the mall, his mind wandered to the love of his life, Elizabeth.

He missed her life-filled laughter, the warmth of her hand in his under the sprawling branches of their Baobab tree. Three years, three broken promises. A wave of guilt washed over him, momentarily erasing the ache in his tired legs.

"I will send for you," he had promised her that fateful night when he fled his hometown.

Yuusuf glanced at his watch, noting the time and realizing he needed to pick up his pace if he wanted to rendezvous with Gustavo, his friend of two years. Gustavo, whose family originated from Fortaleza in northeast Brazil, was 26 years old; he was wiser beyond his years. Financially prudent, he always biked to work or to go anywhere in the city's east end. He was gifted with the power to see and hear people without any words being spoken. He reminded Yuusuf of those wise, all-knowing teachers in early Chinese martial arts movies.

Lost in his thoughts, Yuusuf walked on, his Skechers sneakers striking a rhythm against the rain-soaked pavement. As he got past McNay St, a four-year-old with long, curled hair waved at him and smiled. His heart warmed at the innocence of the gesture, and he instinctively returned the wave with a smile of his own. But his smile soon faded as he caught the wary gaze of the girl's mother. The

woman appeared by her daughter's side and swiftly snatched the girl's hand.

"Tiffany, you need to be careful. Don't speak to strangers. You don't want to be taken away from Mommy, do you?" the woman cautioned sternly, her tone laced with fear and suspicion.

Yuusuf felt a sharp jab of hurt. He instinctively relaxed his shoulders and put his hands to his sides, so he wouldn't be perceived as threatening. Before he could even respond, the woman shot him a glare filled with mistrust. "If you ever come near us again, I will not hesitate to call the police," she warned.

Yuusuf nodded and quickly walked away. The last thing he needed was to have the police called on him, even though he had done nothing wrong. He adjusted the satchel on his back. It seemed heavier now, and was weighing him down as much as the constant judgements and whispered suspicions.

"If I were to die today, the epitaph on my grave would read: Here lies Yuusuf Mburu Makau, the accountant who couldn't afford to pay bus fare," he thought to himself with a chuckle. "And a child kidnapper. And a thief! Can't wait to tell Gustavo about all this."

He flinched as a car sped past him at Briarhill Lane, drenching him in a cold spray. A curse almost escaped his lips as he looked down at his mud-caked Neymar T-shirt khaki jeans. The cold, wet fabric clung to his skin like a leech.

For a fleeting moment, he was dejected. But that feeling quickly vanished as he looked up to the coy, late-afternoon sun. The warmth caressed his face, whispering promises of respite. Memories of Elizabeth chasing him in the corn fields at harvest time flashed in his mind. A calmness descended into his body.

As he rounded the corner, a familiar 6-feet-figure caught his eye. Gustavo, with his ever-present grinning smile, stood waiting by the roadside. He seemed slightly occupied.

"Dude, what did you do to Neymar?" Gustavo asked, pointing to his wet and muddy clothes.

"A driver on Huron thought I needed a shower," Yuusuf responded as he unsuccessfully tried to wipe clean his T-shirt.

Both friends laughed. Gustavo's laughter faded as a new realization dawned on him.

"Huron?" asked Gustavo with concern. "You walked all the way from work? Bro, that's a long way away."

"I am broke 'til my next paycheck, bro."

"You can use my bike Monday till Wednesday," Gustavo offered. "I am not working 'til Thursday."

Yuusuf smiled in appreciation.

"Just don't lose it," Gustavo added with a teasing grin. "Or give a ride to any girls."

Despite his joyful laugh, Yuusuf could sense that Gustavo was troubled. Could it be something to do with his mom, he wondered. She hadn't been feeling well lately. Or perhaps his sister, Clara, who had just moved to a new city to start college?

He resolved to ask him as soon as they sat down at home.

Suraj

"Get the f… out of the road! Are you dumb or what? You idiot!"

Suraj was taken aback, his heart racing with shock and fear. Such harsh language and aggressive tone were jarring, especially since he had come to expect the customary politeness pervasive in Canada. It was his first encounter with such hostility. Suraj was riding his bike on the road, exactly where he should be. Following all the rules of the road, exactly as he should do.

The encounter filled him with dread, fearing that the irate driver might attempt to run him over at any moment. His daily commute, already a significant challenge, was further marred by such incidents.

Six months prior, Suraj had secured a position in a warehouse located in the industrial sector of London, on the city's east end, near Veterans Memorial Parkway. His manager, Bill, often faced difficulties in staffing due to high turnover rates. "I manage to recruit some excellent individuals who enjoy their work here, as we always ensure they are well-treated. The challenge lies in the commute," Bill remarked, sharing a narrative all too familiar to him.

"Many of my employees don't have a car, and the public transit system hardly serves our needs. It's common to see staff catching up on sleep in the lunchroom, waiting for the first morning bus after a night shift. Operating round-the-clock, we struggle to accommodate shift workers and those with late night or early morning commutes," Bill lamented.

After months of job searching, Suraj, desperate for employment, was recommended by an agency for an interview with Bill. Generally if the

commute is longer than one hour, employment agencies are unlikely to recommend it to clients, but Suraj was in an extreme situation.

It is a common practice in London for job postings to require applicants to have a valid driver's license and access to a personal vehicle, even for roles that do not involve driving. Bill, aware that his case is an exception and such a requirement would significantly reduce his applicant pool, chose not to include it. Hence, Suraj landed the job.

Suraj was relieved to finally have some income and really grateful for his job. But after a few weeks spending more than three hours per day just to get to and from work was starting to weigh on him. He had never considered cycling as a viable mode of transportation, assuming that driving was the only alternative and, honestly, the only efficient way to navigate London.

However, his perspective shifted upon learning about the bikes for newcomers program. Embracing the opportunity, Suraj received a donated bike and was educated on wayfinding and safe cycling practices in London. Despite his lack of prior experience with cycling for transportation, Suraj quickly adapted. He began by cycling for short errands, gradually gaining confidence and noticing an overall improvement in his mood and autonomy. Remarkably, even his English proficiency improved significantly as he gained confidence and spent more time out in the community.

Resolved to bike to work, Suraj found the journey far more efficient than commuting by bus, cutting his travel time in half. It was in one of those rides to work that he got verbally attacked. It was the first time but unfortunately, it wasn't the last. "It's the only situation that I am

openly treated as if I am a criminal or worse, it's when I am biking." Says Suraj with a mix of sadness and disbelief in his face.

Despite these challenges, Suraj continues to cycle to work occasionally, especially when the weather permits. Cycling remains a joyful activity for him, though it is occasionally overshadowed by fear. His partner, concerned for his safety, still perceives biking in Canada as peculiar or downright dangerous. Suraj is currently seeking a job closer to home, hoping for a safer and more serene commute.

MOBILITY WEALTH

A DIFFERENT STORY IS POSSIBLE

This final story is not about what is but what it can be. Imagining a future where reality is upside down. Instead of a car-centric city, we live in a **people-centric city**.

In this reality, London's strategic plan might be similar, but the budget looks quite different. Public transit, bike lanes, and sidewalks receive the lion's share of investments in infrastructure and projects. As the saying goes,'What you feed grows…'. Around 40% of urban trips are made by bicycle, another 35% by public transit, and 12% on foot. Car trips now represent only 15% of all urban trips.

In this reality, we are all wealthier when it comes to mobility. Anyone can get anywhere they need anytime. Kids can go to school by themselves safely, quickly, and conveniently. Bus service is phenomenal, with short waiting times, operating 24/7 to all parts of the city, and equipped with well-lit bus shelters. Women feel much safer now. With so many people using it, public transit has become a lucrative operation.

Even car drivers benefit financially. With minimal traffic, parking spots are easy to find, and congestion is non-existent. However, London is now much more compact, making driving unnecessary most of the time. The savings from a much smaller and more efficient road system are more than enough to pay for the new services, buses, and infrastructure.

This is the context for the story you are about to read. Please note that this is not a complete fictional story either. Globally, only 18% of the population drives a car. Many cities around the world include some form of free public transit, while others have cycling as the

primary mode of urban transportation, even in winter cities. Some cities are even planning to become completely car-free in the next few decades. This reality could be closer to us than we might think.

Mobility Wealth

In London Ontario, this city's heart beats with a chorus of laughter, chatter, and the gentle whirring of bicycles. On this crisp morning, Maria steps out with her three year old son, Jon, ready to face the day. "I'm not two anymore, Mommy. I'm a big boy now. No stroller! I want to walk." Thankfully the bus stop is a short walk away. The well-lit sidewalks and accessible parks make their strolls not just safe but a cherished routine. Perfect for Jon who is curious and active, and loves being outside.

As a single parent balancing the demands of being a mom and work, London's public transit system is very helpful for Maria and Jon which they use for getting to work and daycare. Though they live outside the city's core, Maria can get most things done near their house. There is an affordable grocery store, a small library, a playground, a drugstore, even a local theater and a few different restaurants where she can get some takeout when there is no time for cooking. Jon loves to watch all kinds of plays. Because of that, She gets home at a decent time and spends precious quality time with Jon until his bedtime at 7:30 p.m. This is important to her because she knows that time flies and kids grow up fast! How is he already three years old?

Ahmed, a recent immigrant, has deep appreciation for London. He arrived alone from his homeland and misses his family who he'll be reunited with here, in a few months. Coming here and integrating into this city was a significant adjustment. So, he explores the city as much as possible to get to know what will now be home.

Ahmed remembers his first day here, and stepping off the plane with a suitcase filled with dreams and uncertainties. London's all ages and abilities extensive cycling network planted a sense of hope for a new

beginning. With a map in hand, he confidently hopped on a bicycle whisking him through vibrant neighborhoods and diverse cultural hubs. Since then, Ahmed has lost count of all the places he has visited, including community centers, events, local attractions. He enthusiastically shares his adventures with his family back home, and he cannot wait until he gets to share these experiences together when they finally arrive.

He feels safe here. There are plenty of pedestrian-friendly spaces, and he has made friends that he knows will last a lifetime. It has helped him start to feel like a part of the community. In a sense, London isn't just a city; it's Ahmed's welcoming companion on his journey to a new life.

Mr. Wilson, a spirited independent senior, and Maya, a friendly 21 year old student, find a shared haven within London's pedestrian-friendly embrace. On this unusually warm winter Saturday morning, Mr. Wilson strolls along accessible sidewalks that journey through his neighborhood. The neighbourhood is an extension of his home. There are cafés, shops, and public spaces within reach.

Maya glides easily, with her wheelchair, along the same paths enjoying the warmth of the sun in the clear sky. Mr. Wilson's and Maya's paths meet, shortly, at a community center which is a lively place in the middle of their 15-minute neighbourhood. London's dedication to inclusivity shines here. There are accessible workshops, art classes, and social events, offering something for all their diverse residents. Beside the community center is a park designed with accessible pathways and benches. It is a shared oasis for Londoners.

A few families are in the sensory garden. Two toddlers become fast friends over the discovery of fallen pine cones. The garden's windchimes, children's laughter and bits of conversation feel like a perfect film score for this scene. It's better than that though, because it's real. Mr Wilson spots Maya, and waves hello to her.

They met here, for the first time, one summer. Maya was reading a book in the shade of her favourite tree which happened to be where Mr. Wilson's favourite bench is. "Hello there. Do you mind if I sit here?" Mr Wilson asked politely. Though he wasn't wearing a hat, Maya was amused that she could hear the tipping of his imaginary hat in his greeting. "Of course," she said, smiling. "This is my favourite spot of all the spots in this park. Know why?" asked Mr Wilson, with a twinkle in his eyes. A pause. Then, coincidentally, "You feel life here" they say at the same time.

Their eyes widen in surprise at each other's reply, and they smile widely now at each other. Right there, under their favourite bench under their favourite tree sparked a genuine connection. They have been friends since then. London's commitment to walkability and accessibility is more than just urban planning; it is the foundation of a genuine connection between individuals from different walks of life. For Mr. Wilson and Maya, as well as for their neighbours, it's a nurturing ecosystem creating a tapestry of shared experiences that contribute to their wellbeing, community and belonging.

THE DATA STORY AND DATA GAP

The chapter *Our Stories* don't cover all mobility equity issues but provide valuable insights into the harsh realities that many of us face on a daily basis. Unfortunately, those are not exceptions. When all social groups facing those challenges are accounted for, we have a better understanding of the systemic problem we have in our hands. Furthermore, the severity of those conditions are worse when an intersectional approach is taken into account. Consider for example: a black old woman or a refugee child or a low income person with disabilities.

In support of the stories you read in this book, this chapter contains some statistics to paint a more clear picture of the pervasiveness and urgency of the challenge. A better understanding of how mobility equity intersects with other social issues is helpful in determining how much of our population might be affected. A recent national study (Williams et al.,2023) found that over one million Canadians experience mobility poverty. The following local statistics provide some insight into the importance of this topic in London, Ontario.

1. **21.6%** of London area residents are immigrants with permanent status. This figure doesn't include refugees, people with student visas or work permits (Juha, 2022).
2. **18.8%** of Londoners and **34.1%** of lone-parent families have an income below the LIM-AT threshold. Looking at disaggregated data, some of the disproportionately affected groups are: visible minorities (35%), Indigenous (35,4%), immigrants that arrived in Canada between 6-10 years (35.9%) and the majority of newcomers (**55.2%**) (Child and Youth Network, 2020).
3. Cities and Countries with appropriate cycling infrastructure see similar levels of cycling across genders. The rate of women cycling is actually used as a proxy for the quality of

cycling infrastructure. In London, less than one third of cyclists in London are female cyclists (Winters et al., 2023).

4. Near **20%** of families in London, ON are lone-parent families. **81.5%** of those are female lone parents (City of London, 2022b) (CityData.com, n.d.).

5. Lone parents were less likely to be employed and more likely to be working in occupations that require relatively lower levels of education than those who were in a couple (Statistics Canada, 2015).

6. People with disabilities (PWD) represent the largest minority group in Canada. PWD represents 22% of the population in Canada, more than one in five people. Many PWD rely more heavily on public transportation than the general population (Zhang et al., 2024).

Those are some of the demographics who experience mobility equity issues. The literature suggests that under those situations people would opt for transit and/or cycling as their primary mode of transportation if those options were reliable, convenient, safe and affordable. However, transit ridership and cycling represent only a small percentage of all urban trips in the city. A recent article (Newcombe, 2023) shows how appropriate infrastructure can play a role in increasing those numbers.

"Year over year on our core cycling network, it's another 45 to 50 percent increase. People are learning about the lanes and they're becoming habits."

Daniel Hall

Active Transportation Manager, City of London

Gaps

The available data shows that there is a general understanding of the problem and how it is a city-wide issue. Surveys and community engagement initiatives by the City of London (2022a) and this research project confirmed that mobility poverty is an important issue in our city and obtained more insights into this "wicked' problem.

However, there is very little data available that can be used to effectively inform and prioritize transportation projects. Data is very scarce about specific areas in the city, the demand based on different modes of transportation, depth of mobility poverty, the different needs for different demographics, and the social impacts of new/existing road projects. Even more challenging is to collect data regarding suppressed trips – trips that can't be done at all.

The stories contained here are powerful qualitative data points that can be integrated with SMART metrics to guide the Mobility Master Plan.

The Data Hub from the London Community Foundation (n.d.) is a promising initiative. Currently, it is one of the most relevant local efforts to address the data gap, harnessing community knowledge and experience. Given the high costs associated with data collection, decentralized strategies to crowdsource data are instrumental to address the data gap.

Despite the lack of detailed data, there is enough information to take action whether they are directed to specific groups, neighbourhoods, modes of transport or urban infrastructure. An experimentalist governance approach can enable the development of processes, methods, incentives and measurements that can lead to an effective and transformative change. To get it started, we don't need to have all

the answers from the beginning, but we need to commit to finding those answers together.

LESSONS LEARNED

How can we make London a mobility-wealthy city? This section contains some of the lessons we learned during this research project that can get us a few steps closer.

It is important to understand that prioritizing and implementing mobility equity is an urban planning and also a political challenge. Dr. Linovski is a Professor at the University of Manitoba. Her research focuses on the links between professional practice, political processes, and the shaping of urban space. In her findings, she identified that "ensuring that everyone has access to reliable transportation" is the top priority for elected officials and the most significant transport barrier people face is "long transit travel time". She also identified that when asked to vote on transportation issues, transportation-related staff is the number one group they would consult with, followed closely by their constituents (Linovski, 2023).

In addition to the stories based on real-life experiences. During our research project, we conducted meetings with different stakeholder groups and analysed the existing literature on the topic to map relevant information about structural elements and processes that could make mobility equity a reality. Findings are listed here in this section. Considering those three groups: Elected officials, Transportation staff and constituents, we found this to be a relevant resource to advance mobility equity in cities.

Five main challenges

According to the report Practices and Inspirations for Sustainable Transportation Equity (Williams et al., 2023) put together by a pan-Canadian collaboration of scientists, city builders, community partners, and residents studying the design of healthy cities. The five major challenges that hinder cities' progress in advancing transportation equity in Canada.

1. The transportation profession needs to evolve

Making more space for community expertise and experiential knowledge is a key aspect that needs to shift in the profession.

The publication and distribution of this book are instrumental in deepening our understanding of mobility equity issues beyond the practical options and possible projects, adding the perspective of individuals with lived experience, people experiencing mobility poverty on a daily basis.

2. Incomplete data limits our ability to act

Data is crucial not only to understand the current situation but also to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of transportation projects.

3. Barriers to engagement are structural

There is progress in the logistical barriers to engagement, however, structural barriers are still very prevalent.

As a complex and intersectional challenge, efforts to address mobility inequality can benefit from a collective impact approach where multiple groups and people with lived experience participate not only in the data collection but also in the analysis, design and shaping of the MMP.

4. Equity goals need to be adequately resourced

Someone once said, "if you want to know what the priorities are, don't show me your plan, show me your budget." Plans need to translate into policy and projects. Requiring dedicated staff and resources to coordinate internally and externally the implementation of equitable mobility system

5. Car dependency is slowing us down

North American cities are built for cars, creating obstacles for sustainable transportation due to entrenched policies and a

car-centric culture. Despite knowledge of creating walkable and transit-friendly spaces, the lack of political and public support hinders progress towards equitable urban design.

Defining an equity denied population

One of the first and most important steps is to define and identify what groups need to be taken into account. Then, what data is available to inform meaningful action toward equity?

Initial Ideas

The Ontario Marginalization Index 2021 (Public Health Ontario, n.d.) is a tool that combines a wide range of demographic indicators into four distinct dimensions of marginalization. As a multifaceted index, ON-Marg measures multiple axes of marginalization in Ontario, including economic, ethnic-racial, age-based and social marginalization.

Considerations

- How to include different forms of marginalization identified in the mobility equity literature (Hidayati et al., 2021) that are not explicitly present in the ON-Marg. For example: Black populations, Indigenous populations, women, LGBTQ+, families with children and people with disability may experience marginalization in ways that may not be captured by ON-Marg.
- From a mobility equity perspective, data needs to be analyzed at the individual level rather than the household level (Simard, 2023), since specific life conditions play a major role in the types of barriers and challenges faced by each person(e.g.: age, gender, ability, personal financial resources)

- How to find information and insights about the specific barriers that are unique to each equity-denied group regarding mobility and accessibility.
- Once the barriers mentioned in the previous item are identified, data collection methods need to be designed to map our current state and evaluate how a project will directly serve an equity-denied population.

How to move forward

- Identify other tools that can address the considerations above.
- Create a long-term plan to work towards a more effective approach to mobility equity.
- Consider the Transportation Equity Dashboard (http://dashboard.mobilizingjustice.ca) and other tools from the Mobilizing Justice Hub to complement the evaluation.

Measuring success

We can only manage what we can measure. Shifting to a model that embeds mobility equity is only possible if we understand how the projects and practices impact equity-denied groups. Particularly identifying unrealized travel from equity-denied groups.

Initial Ideas

One of the proposed indicators in the Mobility Master Plan is to count the number of people using the project. This can be a feasible and important indicator to evaluate the relevance of the project.

Considerations

- It is important that the evaluation can identify if project users are part of an equity denied population or not. This should be based on a benchmark, to measure how the project is

advancing mobility equity compared to previous projects or alternative solutions.
- Beyond counting project users, it is critical to map and understand unrealized urban trips due to transportation-related social exclusion and associated mobility barriers. Both the current situation and new project impacts. Equity-denied populations face more travel suppression for work, education, and other essential trips (Palm et al., 2024).

How to move forward

- Beyond quantitative measurements, it's necessary to evaluate if the project will improve the experience of people using it. Personal perceptions and experiences of safety, convenience, and satisfaction are key components to ensure mobility equity (Lucas, 2012). For example, a crowded bus might move more people, but women might feel unsafe, and seniors and people with disabilities might not have a space to sit.
- For road projects, since they are for general use, it might be relevant to adopt a Multimodal Level of Service (MMLOS) evaluation to measure the impact on all modes of transportation supported by the road.
- For road projects, since they are for general use, evaluating how the project alters the dynamic among different modes of transport supported by the road is highly relevant because it can have a significant impact on mobility equity.
- Include suppressed travel measurement and tracking in all transportation projects (Palm et al., 2024).

Prioritization from a quantitative & qualitative perspective

There are two important considerations when prioritizing transportation projects. The number of people experiencing mobility poverty and the severity of issues. Obviously, the top priority should

be projects that can cater to the highest number of people with the most severe issues. However, choosing between benefiting a large group of people with minor mobility poverty issues and a small group of people with severe mobility poverty issues is not a simple decision.

Initial Ideas

The Ontario Marginalization Index 2021 contains information about the concentration of equity-denied groups within a geographic area at different scales (quantitative). That way, the Index provides valuable information on how people in equity-denied groups are spatially distributed. The severity of mobility poverty issues is not clear (qualitative).

Considerations

- Include information about the severity of inequalities and the types of inequalities those groups face to inform decision-making. This can enable a better informed decision to prioritize between projects that might cater to a smaller group facing more severe barriers that threaten their basic human needs (e.g. safety, access to food, work and shelter) versus a larger group with less pressing needs (e.g. shorter and faster trips).
- Devise tools to include forced driving, suppressed trips and unwanted trips in the evaluation framework, since observing only the amount of project users ignores those issues and can leave out equity-denied groups' needs and exacerbate mobility inequalities.

How to move forward

- Identify what is the minimum acceptable for mobility equity. A sufficientarian approach where a minimum threshold of what is considered acceptable in terms of urban mobility has been

increasingly accepted and incorporated in mobility equity initiatives, particularly in Canada (Martens et al., 2019).

- There is a general understanding that the threshold for mobility equity is a community decision and therefore a political one, not simply a technical one (Linovski, 2023). The mobility master plan can include a process to identify this threshold.

Additional comments and considerations

- The Mobilizing Justice Hub (https://hub.mobilizingjustice.ca) provides comprehensive data about accessibility to destinations based on different social groups and modes of transportation. It can be a valuable source of information for the evaluation framework. The national consortium includes several Canadian municipalities and leading Universities. It has the potential to be a valuable source of information and even collaboration.

- The current evaluation framework has three types of projects (road, transit and cycling). It is not clear how pedestrian infrastructure fits into this model. A category on its own should be considered.

- Urban Mobility significantly overlaps with other urban planning aspects. For example, Edmonton mapped historical negative externalities produced by zoning practices (Williams et al., 2023). Equity-denied populations could benefit from compact places and using less transportation (kids, people with disabilities, low income). Consider how spatial dimensions as an equity issue can be included in the criteria (e.g. How does the project affect density and/or land use?)

- Property value as impact beyond mobility. How gentrification and displacement triggered by a transportation project are included in the equity principle?

- Different groups have different needs and mobility challenges and projects will have a different impact for each one of them. Evaluating equity by lumping together all the different groups might be counterproductive and even exacerbate mobility inequality. Those differences need to be taken into account when evaluating projects to better understand and measure success. Some of those aspects include, but are not limited to:
    - Poverty
    - Indigenous heritage
    - Gender
    - Race
    - Age
    - Citizenship status
    - Ability
    - Level of education
    - Household composition

OUR GUIDING FRAMEWORKS

The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) served as the foundational framework for the research project that includes this book, acknowledging the intertwined nature of urban mobility issues with some of today's most urgent challenges. Delving deeper into the societal repercussions, this book embraces a mobility equity perspective that views accessibility as the key element of urban mobility and a fundamental human right. This segment offers a brief overview of these two frameworks.

Urban Mobility through an SDG lens

According to the United Nations, transportation and mobility are central to sustainable development and have the potential to improve social equity. Sustainable transport primarily falls under SDG11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) but is also present in several other SDGs and targets (United Nations, n.d.).

The SDG framework, conceptualized as a network of targets that require a whole-of-society approach, is perfectly suited to address 'wicked' problems. From the beginning, this research project approached the challenge beyond specific mobility issues, considering the ramifications into other realms.

As a network of targets, the SDGs can be used to analyze the interconnections of a specific topic with many of the other crises.The SDG framework shows that mobility equity can have a significant positive impact on many of the challenges that we are facing today. Reduced Inequalities (SDG10) and Gender Equality (SDG5) are obvious connections. Besides those, we can identify 1. ensuring that London is a fiscally responsible city (SDG9), 2. efficient ways to connect people to jobs maximizing economic development (SDG8), 3. reducing poverty (SDG1), 4. tackling climate change (SDG13), and 5. promoting belonging (SDG11) and healthy communities (SDG3).

1. According to the 2023 Corporate Asset Management Plan report to the City of London (Barbon, 2023), the infrastructure gap to achieve the proposed level of service for municipal assets (i.e. road network) is approximately $546.3 million. Based on the City's 2022 Annual Budget Update, this gap is expected to grow to $1,378.1 million by 2031.
2. Employers and job seekers regularly report that there are not enough options for shift work and late night or early morning commuters. And commuting by bus can take more than 1.5 hours each way to reach industrial areas. The Employment Sector Council's former executive director stated this is one of the biggest barriers to fulfilling job vacancies in London.
3. The average cost of owning a car is CAD$16,644/year (Alsharif, 2024) and it represents more than 50% of minimum wage earnings. Very onerous or inaccessible to many Londoners living at or below the poverty line.
4. Private vehicles are the number one source of GHG emissions in London.

5. It's well-known that stress, traffic injuries/fatalities and obesity due to sedentary lifestyles are some of the negative impacts associated with private vehicles (McCormack & Virk, 2014).

Mobility Equity/Poverty

Mobility Poverty was one of the terms used throughout this book and in the amendments included in the 2023-2027 City of London Strategic Plan. Poverty is one of the most significant dimensions when it comes to inequalities related to urban mobility, intersecting with almost all other dimensions. This is reflected in the attention dedicated to this topic compared to other dimensions of inequality (Hidayati et al., 2021). The term poverty also draws attention to one of the core issues related to mobility inequality: the inequitable distribution of financial, physical, political, and technical resources.

Another term used throughout this project was Mobility Equity. A more encompassing term, equity invites us to look beyond poverty and the level of income. It considers multiple dimensions of privilege such as gender, age, ethnicity, ability, citizenship status, level of education, culture, religion, among others.

There are many other concepts and approaches that address the social impacts of urban mobility systems. Some of them consider specific equity-deserving groups (gendered mobility, racialized mobility) or specific conditions (forced car ownership, suppressed travel, driving cessation). Others propose a more comprehensive analysis (transport-related social exclusion, transport justice, mobility justice, arrested mobility, differential (im)mobilities, mobile commoning). Their conceptual and methodological differences are outside the scope of this book.

One last important observation: This project adopted a critical view of labels such as marginalized or vulnerable (Nakshi, 2023).

Recognizing that this language can be misleading in a few different ways, explicitly failing to recognize that:

- Equity-denied individuals are as capable or more capable than those with mobility privileges.
- Typically seen as minorities, all equity-denied groups combined actually constitute a majority, or at least, a large part of the population.
- Labeling promotes 'othering' where separate transportation infrastructure projects are created for the so-called 'marginalized'. Those projects tend to be under-resourced as they are perceived as add-ons or nice-to-haves, in addition to conventional projects that are mainstream and perpetuate mobility inequalities.
- Finally, systemic issues rather than individual characteristics are the root cause of transport-related social exclusion.

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ABOUT

Pillar Nonprofit Network

Pillar Nonprofit Network is dedicated to enhancing the operational capabilities of the impact sector. We promote equity through shared knowledge and community collaboration. We act as a catalyst and advocate for transformational change. To learn more about Pillar Nonprofit Network, please visit www.pillarnonprofit.ca

SDG Cities

SDG Cities is a collaborative initiative between Pillar Nonprofit Network and 10C. It is a community-driven project supporting localization of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Guelph and London.

The Team

Luis Patricio
Project Lead, Research, Story Writing & Art Concept
Luis works at Pillar Nonprofit Network. As the co-lead of the SDG Cities program, he coordinated the Vision Zero Hamilton Road research partnership, collecting and analysing the data that informed this book. With a national award for corporate mobility projects, a M.A. in urban mobility and not owning a car since 2007. Luis has lived, professional and academic experience in Mobility Equity.

Veronica Antipolo
Story Writing
Veronica works at Pillar Nonprofit Network. She is also a professional oral storyteller and coaches individuals and organizations from a lens of diversity, equity and inclusion. Her work focuses on storytelling's impact on individuals sharing their experiences, its contribution to community building and its ability to spark social change.

Silence Genti
Story Writing
Silence was born in Zimbabwe and now lives in London. A self-professed community geek, he has spent most of his life exploring storytelling and technology as tools to build and enhance communities. As a father of two (Louis and Lua), he is always keen to contribute to a better community for his children.

Sara Organ

Art Concept & Illustrations

Sara works at Crouch Neighbourhood Resource Centre, guiding the children of the Afterschool Program through the streets of Hamilton Road each day and seeing firsthand the complexities of Mobility Inequity. As a self-taught artist, she works to bring stories to life, utilizing a range of creative concepts and designs to uncover hidden depths within narratives.

Cicil Sandra Benny

Design & Layout

Cicil Sandra works at Pillar Nonprofit Network as driven by an unwavering passion for change, Cicil Sandra has dedicated herself to advocating for progress through her work. At the core of her mission is a fervent commitment to advancing and amplifying the voices of historically marginalized individuals, rooted in her desire to effect positive change in society through effective communication.

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Mobility Equity is a fundamental human right!

One of the outcomes of a community research partnership in London Ontario. Unseen Commuters is a collection of fictional stories fully grounded on real world occurrences involving local mobility equity issues.

The book also includes an alternative view of the future, local numbers and stats related to mobility equity, lessons learned, and suggestions on how to move forward based on the information gathered during the project from experts and people with lived experience.

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