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# Environmental Justice UPDATE

*Fiscal Year 2005*



DELAWARE VALLEY  
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REGIONAL  
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# Environmental Justice Technical Work Program Activities Annual Update: 2005



**Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission**

## **Introduction**

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the 1994 President's Executive Order on Environmental Justice (#12898) state that no person or group shall be excluded from participation in or denied the benefits of any program or activity utilizing federal funds. Each federal agency is required to identify any disproportionately high and adverse health or environmental effects of its programs on minority populations and low-income populations. In turn, Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO's), as part of the United States Department of Transportation's Certification requirements, are charged with evaluating their plans and programs for environmental justice sensitivity, including expanding their outreach efforts to low-income and minority populations.

The Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC) is the MPO for the nine-county, bi-state Philadelphia-Camden-Trenton region. In furtherance of DVRPC's mission "to plan for the orderly growth and development of the Delaware Valley region," and to respond to federal guidance on environmental justice, the agency published "*...and Justice for All: DVRPC's Strategy for Fair Treatment and Meaningful Involvement of All People*" in September 2001. That environmental justice report provided background information on what environmental justice (EJ) is; summarized DVRPC's existing EJ-related plans, policies and public involvement activities and described a quantitative and qualitative methodology for evaluating the long-range plan, the Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP) and other programs. DVRPC has since published annual updates, providing a summary of activities conducted by the commission and new data and analysis related to EJ. This memorandum serves as the update for Fiscal Year 2005 technical activities.

## **Transportation Equity Research Project Participation**

The Harvard University Civil Rights Project (CRP) is a research institution whose mission is "to help renew the civil rights movement by bridging the worlds of ideas and action, and by becoming...a forum for building consensus within that movement." One of the projects undertaken by the CRP was "Racial Equity in Transportation: Establishing Priorities for Research and Policy." DVRPC was asked to contribute to the project by providing a case study of its EJ methodology. The agency's staff, with editorial feedback from the CRP, produced a document that outlined the steps in its methodology, discussed its applicability

to agency programs, self-assessed its limitations and how they may be addressed, and explained how the methodology may be usable by other geographic locations. This case study, along with others from across the country, was included in a report prepared by the CRP.

DVRPC staff was also invited to participate in a panel session at the 84<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Transportation Research Board and at a day long, roundtable discussion at the Brookings Institution in Washington, DC, in January 2005. The TRB session provided an overview of DVRPC's EJ methodology and evaluation process. The Brookings Institution session included participants who were practitioners and educational researchers, as well as representatives from non-profit organizations and other advocacy groups. The intention of the roundtable was to bring together people involved in different aspects of transportation equity to foster discussion, forge connections among representatives involved in interrelated activities and initiate formulation of solutions.

Through this participation, new interest was sparked from outside of the Delaware Valley region for information on DVRPC's EJ technical work program. The Conference of Minority Transportation Officials (COMTO) contacted the agency and asked the staff to present at their annual conference in July 2005. In addition, after discussion between CRP and staff at the Journal of Planning Education & Research (JPER), DVRPC's case study paper was recommended to be review for submission. If confirmed for publication, the process, including feedback and editing, may take about one year, with publication in 2006.

### **DVRPC Public Involvement/Environmental Justice Conference**

DVRPC's Public Involvement EJ Work Program in Fiscal Year 2005 included the agency's first EJ conference, which was held in the Philadelphia Convention Center in September 2004. Panel session participants and attendees included representatives from the Federal Highway Administration (FHA), the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT), private consultants and university educators. DVRPC Public Affairs, Regional Planning and Transportation Planning staff, presented their respective and related work activities at one of the panel sessions held at the conference.

### **Online Mapping**

Staff in the EJ Technical Work Program and the agency's GIS unit collaborated to begin the process of providing a public online mapping system for the compiled environmental justice data. The goal of this project is to further promote the EJ data collected by DVRPC and to provide easy user access to the data. A person or agency would be able to specify the data or combination of data they would like to see to suit their purpose, whether for personal insight, gathering background information for a grant application, etc. The data will be presented as map layers and/or tables, providing a significantly greater amount

of information than the hardcopy EJ reports currently available. In addition to public access, all DVRPC staff will have access to this information. This will enable and encourage staff to utilize the information collected by DVRPC, increase awareness, consideration and use of the information and analyses in their projects and strive to address the needs of and involve disadvantaged groups located in their respective study areas.

Existing data tables are being reviewed to ensure that the data available on the online mapping will be accurate and useful. An introduction, definitions of the disadvantaged groups and quality of life factors and links to related websites have been drafted. The staff intends to produce an online mapping system that will be informative, practical, organized and visually inviting to use.

### **EJ Updates in DVRPC Documents**

The EJ Technical Work Program staff contributed sections to several of the DVRPC's documents, working with the agency's Transportation Division and EJ Public Involvement/Public Affairs Division:

***DVRPC Environmental Justice Protocol*** – An updated description of DVRPC's EJ Technical Work Program activities was provided for the latest revision of the Protocol.

***New Jersey Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) FY 2006*** – An assessment of the latest highway and transit projects prioritized for New Jersey as they relate to the identified EJ disadvantaged groups was provided in the TIP for Fiscal Year 2006. Both the highway program and the public transit program each include a TIP project in 30 percent of the state's 63 most highly disadvantaged tracts (those with 5-8 degrees of disadvantage). These numbers may be skewed due to the fact that not all TIP projects are mappable (some, such as bus purchases, road drainage and projects in the New Jersey Study and Development Program and the Job Access and Reverse Commute Program, are not illustrated on the associated TIP map layers and, therefore, not counted toward the final percent). Additionally, some regional TIP projects may not be located in a census tract, per se, but may still benefit the population of this census tract.

***Congestion Management Study (CMS)*** – Staff introduced the EJ Technical Work Program and recommended strategies to address congestion issues faced by disadvantaged groups. These strategies included: multi-lingual outreach; more affordable transit alternatives; recognition of "non-traditional" transit; promotion of multi-purpose transit, such as paratransit; job access and reverse commute route program; and safety and security provisions.

## Conclusion

DVRPC will continue to implement environmental justice activities as part of its annual work program (in fulfillment of federal certification requirements) and to meet commission-stated goals for the Delaware Valley region. DVRPC will also:

- Monitor the effectiveness of the policy statement and policy participation strategies developed in Fiscal Years 2001-2005;
- Assess DVRPC studies and processes, including the Transportation Improvement Programs for Pennsylvania and New Jersey and the *Destination 2030* Long-Range Land Use and Transportation Plan, adopted by the DVRPC Board in June 2005, to identify the regional benefits and burdens of different socio-economic groups;
- Keep abreast of legal developments related to Title VI;
- Participate and collaborate in national programs that will bring fresh ideas to the region and allow DVRPC to share its ideas with others; and
- Continue to explore methods to further heighten EJ awareness that will result in greater incorporation of such issues in reports and programs conducted by the commission. The online mapping system that is currently being developed will be a significant vehicle for this objective. Any feedback that DVRPC receives once the system is publicly available will be used to refine and enhance it to better meet the needs of the region and system users.