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Social justice implications of municipal transportation apportionments in Massachusetts: A case of disparate impact

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Social Justice Implications of Municipal Transportation Apportionments in Massachusetts: A Case of Disparate Impact

Respectfully submitted to be considered for publication in Transport Policy

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Abstract:

The question of how social justice interacts with transportation has inspired a long-standing and partisan debate in the U.S., mostly focusing on social exclusion and inequitable distribution of resources. This study adds to this literature by empirically analyzing the extent to which municipal transportation apportionments in Massachusetts put marginalized groups at a disadvantage. An analysis of seven-year data of 351 municipalities in Massachusetts receiving reimbursable grants through the Massachusetts Department of Transportation's Chapter 90 program show that municipalities with a higher percentage of non-white individuals received less apportionment through the program. While these disparities exist for African-American, Asian, and Hispanic populations, they are found to be incidental, not deliberate. Lagged effects show that Massachusetts is investing in municipalities with higher percentage of marginalized individuals to reduce this historic resource gap. Theoretical and practical implications of the findings are discussed.

Keywords: Budgetary apportionment, transportation, social justice.

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