Research in Progress

Measuring Accessibility to Improve Public Health

Research Need

Transportation is an important determinant of public health. Inequitable access to jobs, health care services, and food have been shown to be significant contributors to health disparities. Data from a variety of sources can be used to identify gaps in accessibility, but there remains a need to systematically identify these gaps and the actions that can be taken by public officials to address them.

Goals/Objectives

The objectives of this research are twofold:

1. Link metrics of access to social determinants of health, such as access to health care, open space for physical activity, educational opportunities, housing, and food, with demographic and socio-economic data to identify the most critical accessibility gaps.

2. Recommend targeted actions that can be made by public officials to address inequities.

The main outcome of this research will be a methodology for identifying accessibility gaps and a set of recommendations for various stakeholders (e.g., transportation and health agencies) that can be used to address accessibility-induced transportation inequities. These products should support MassDOT's existing accessibility initiatives and data dashboards to continuously monitor accessibility gaps and inequities that affect public health.

Methodology

1. Review of metrics and methods for assessing accessibility, the relationship of accessibility gaps with health inequities, and the availability of accessibility-related data
2. Identification of accessibility gaps in Massachusetts using available data
3. Stakeholder focus groups for communities with low accessibility to gather additional insights
4. Development of recommendations for best practices to address accessibility gaps, grouped by type of stakeholder that is responsible for taking action.