

2021  NTICC

WEDNESDAY
SEPTEMBER 29
2021

BARRIERS & FACILITATORS TO THE CREATION, MAINTENANCE & GROWTH OF TRIBAL TRANSIT SERVICES

10:30 AM - 12:00 PM
PACIFIC TIME /
1:30 PM - 3:00 PM
EASTERN TIME

SESSION MODERATOR:

WALT DIANGSON, NATIONAL RTAP

PRESENTER:

KURTIS JOHNSON, EASTERN WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY, SMALL URBAN RURAL AND TRIBAL CENTER ON MOBILITY

JASON SCULLY, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, EASTERN WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

MARGO HILL, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, EASTERN WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

ANGELENA CAMPOBASSO, SURTCOM PROGRAM MANAGER, EASTERN WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

MATTHEW ANDERSON, DIRECTOR, URBAN AND REGIONAL PLANNING, EASTERN WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY



MEETING DETAILS

Join the meeting on your mobile device, computer, or by phone.

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/89841156100?pwd=YIMyV3dDUXRHVWdvWWFsZGVYYVlzdz09>

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Passcode: 613720

One tap mobile

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MEETING HOUSEKEEPING ITEMS

- Today's webinar is schedule to last 1 hour and 30 minutes, including Q&A
- All participants will be muted to enable the speakers to present without interruption
- Questions can be submitted via the chat option at the bottom of your screen
- Private chat messages can be sent to the host(s), or chat messages can be sent to everyone
- The presentation slides and a recording of the presentation will be available at nticc.org by October 8

Barriers & Facilitators in Tribal Transit

EWU-SURTCOM

Kurtis Johnson, Student, Eastern Washington University, Small Urban Rural and Tribal Center on Mobility

Dr. Jason Scully, Assistant Professor, Eastern Washington University

Angelena Campobasso, MPA, MURP, Project Coordinator, EWU-SURTCOM

Dr. Matthew Anderson, Associate Professor, Urban and Regional Planning, Eastern Washington University

Margo Hill, JD, MURP, Associate Professor, Eastern Washington University



What is SURTCOM?

The Small Urban Rural and Tribal Center on Mobility (SURTCOM) is a U.S. Department of Transportation Tier 1 University Transportation Center that combines the talents of the Western Transportation Institute at Montana State University, Upper Great Plains Transportation Institute at North Dakota State University, and the Urban and Regional Planning Program at Eastern Washington University (EWU).

SURTCOM seeks to enhance mobility in small urban, rural, and tribal areas through research, technical assistance, and capacity building.

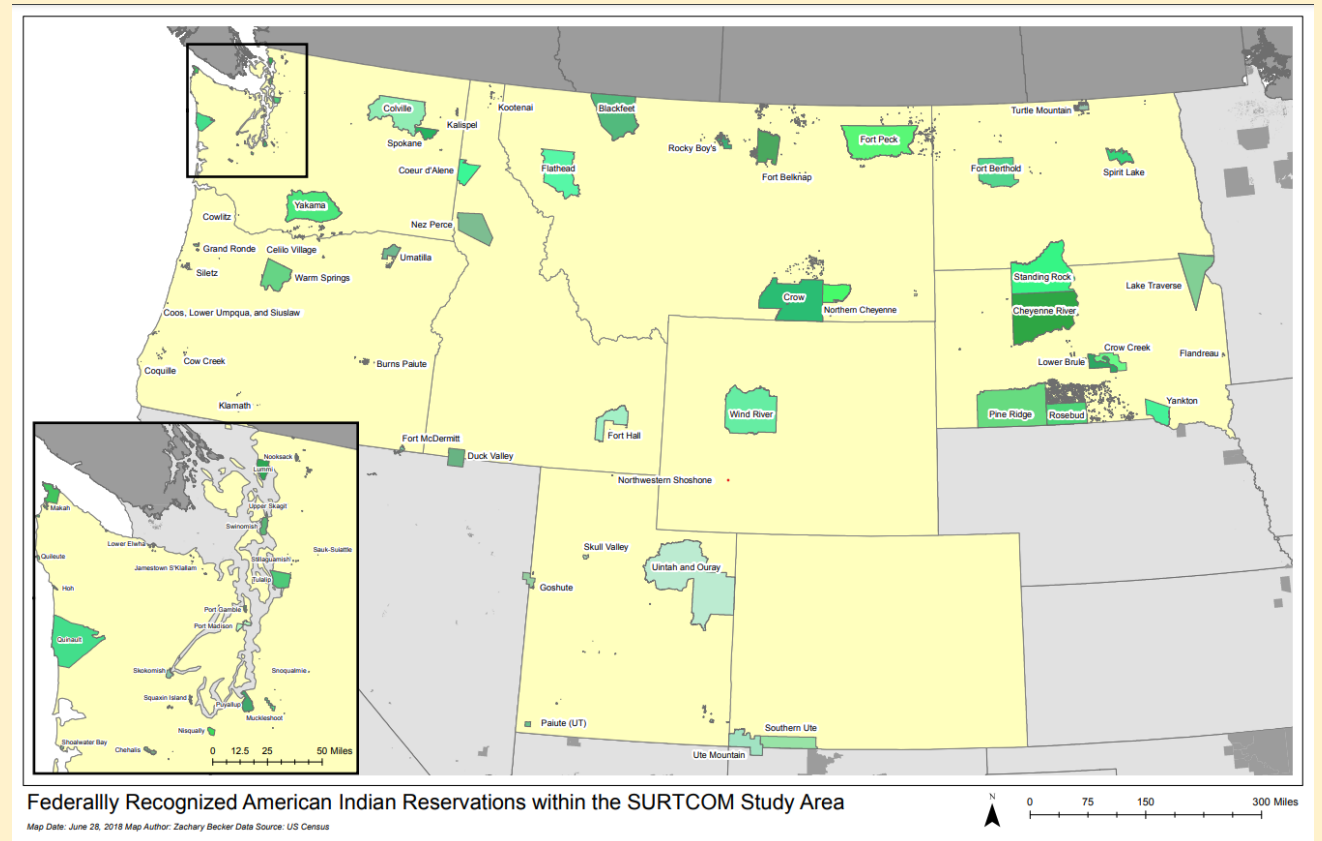
Our Mission



The mission of the Small Urban, Rural, and Tribal Center on Mobility is to conduct research and provide leadership, education, workforce development, and technology transfer in all transportation-related aspects of mobility for people and goods, focusing specifically on small urban, rural, and tribal areas.

Background

- 71 federally recognized tribal reservations in the SURTCOM 9 state area.
 - ▣ 47 of which have Tribal Transit Programs.
 - ▣ Most utilize on-demand, commuter buses or fixed bus routes.
 - A few utilize ferries.
 - Other tribes have been able to contract transit routes from local, non-tribal transit authorities.



Other EWU Projects

Established an EWU Tribal & Technical Assistance Program for a Summer Institute in Tribal Planning;

Administered the Northwest Tribal Technical Assistance Program (NW TTAP) & the Alaska Tribal Technical Assistance Program (AK TTAP); and

Created a graduate-level Executive Certificate Tribal Planning Program and a BA-URP degree specialization in tribal planning.



The Need for Tribal Transit.

Equity for People

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- Anyone can get anywhere
 - ▣ Is the Level of Service adequately meeting the needs?
 - Rural populations lose out on the level of service.
 - Further need for transit connected outside of reservation.
 - Last mile transit is vital.
- Mobility options for disabled, elderly, and low-income families to reach important locations and appointments.
 - ▣ Medical, employment, education, etc. services without needing a car.

Transit's Effects on Transportation Safety

- Less cars on road decreases risk of traffic accidents, in general.
- Elderly/rural/high-risk drivers have more mobility options without having to drive.
- Safe transport home when needed.



Better for the Environment



SouthAmericanPostcard.com

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Total reduction in carbon emissions.

- Cars for each family member is not necessary.
- Cleaner air & water.

Reduction in car infrastructure.

- Space meant for parking lots can be used for other public investment in tribal lands.

Socioeconomic Benefits



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Allows low-income families save on personal car costs

- Insurance payments.
- Fuel costs.
- Maintenance costs.

Could inspire change in other infrastructure and policymaking to create more equitable built environment for all tribal members.

- Decreasing rural/urban inequity.
- More walkable and bikeable.

Could increase health and wellness

- Less time only driving to/from anywhere you want to go.

State of Tribal Transit Now



Credit: CBC

Funding

- Funding has increased since 2010.
 - ▣ MAP-21, TTP and state funding grants.
 - ▣ TTAP, RTAP TCRP provide networks for assistance in planning and funding.
- Tribes that have casinos, hotels, or other local revenues do have potentially more funding for transit.
 - ▣ Not all use that money for investment in transit.
- Despite increases, funding remains unreliable to meet the continued needs for tribal transit programs.
 - ▣ Departments need more money for operations, maintenance, and expansion.

Service Gap

- 23.6% (152 tribes) of reservations have tribal transit programs.
- Of the 23.6% that do have tribal transit, many still suffer from service needs.
 - ▣ Connecting to rural locations to denser urban population centers.
- Difference in access between rural and urban tribes.
 - ▣ Rural lands have more distances to cover.
 - More distance = More hours operating.
 - ▣ More remote locations to connect to transit infrastructure.
 - ▣ Ridership is difficult to build in rural areas.
 - Despite the need increasing throughout rural areas.

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Communication Breakdown

- Through TTP, TCRP, TTAP, RTAP, cooperation/collaboration has increased the communication between the tribal governments and the US government.
 - ▣ There are now multiple grant programs for tribes to secure funding for planning, operating, and expanding tribal transit.
- Working relationships with state planning organizations have increased and bore fruitful results.
 - ▣ TTP bus stops connected to local, non-tribal transit systems have been established.
- Encourages collaboration between tribal government and local transit agencies to create “coalitions of transit”.

- Efforts like Washington's Centennial Accord, or Arizona's more informal Arizona Tribal Strategic Partnering Team (ATSPT) have fostered **key** relationships for tribal transit leads.
 - ▣ Our informants have said that they have used these **key** relationships to the state DOT to get funding instead of FTA grants, where **key** relationships do not exist.
 - ▣ Training/retaining employees for TTP.
 - ▣ Promotes pooling resources to share between tribal/non-tribal governments.

Methodology

- Methods
 - ▣ Semi-structured interviews and focus groups
 - Questions centered on the barriers and facilitators to starting, maintaining and growing tribal transit agencies.
 - ▣ Conducted and recorded using Zoom teleconferencing software
- The Sample
 - ▣ The staff of the 47 tribal transit programs within the SURTCOM study area
 - Staff were identified via:
 - their transit program websites
 - professional contacts of SURTCOM staff
 - snowball sampling
 - sending out emails to contact info listed on websites
 - cold calling transit programs

The Data

- 15 participants
- 10 focus groups/interviews
- Average 2 participants per focus group/interview
- 11 hours of recorded focus group/interview
- 284 transcript pages
- 416,029 characters

Analysis

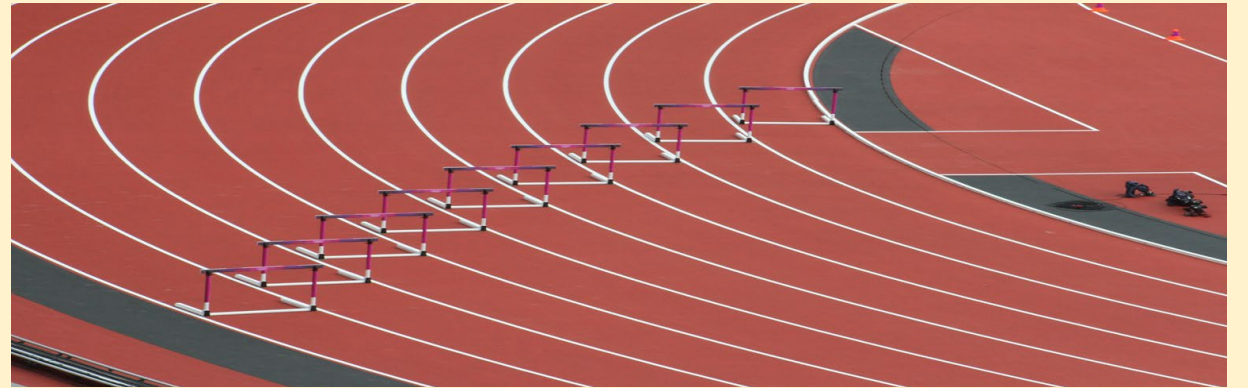
- Transcripts were analyzed with an emphasis on identifying and classifying barriers and facilitators to starting, maintaining, and growing tribal transit programs.
- Zoom recordings were reviewed to better comprehend context of transcripts.



Results

Barriers & Facilitators

BARRIERS



Distances

- The reason transit programs exist is to overcome distances.
 - ▣ Long distances are the primary challenge faced by both tribal and non-tribal transit agencies alike.
- Long distances put added stress on vehicles and will require more frequent maintenance for a fleet.
 - ▣ This adds more necessity for funding, but also put stress on staffing, operational knowledge, and maintaining facilities for mechanical service.
- Long distance can be defined as the necessary distance to cover the transit needs of all tribal members.
 - ▣ Many reservation trust lands are not connected, so transit connection requires passing between non-tribal and tribal lands.
 - This conceptualization of distance is key to filling the service gap that exists in tribal transit services today.

Funding

- Not enough funding, in general
 - ▣ The FTA 5311 grant is not enough to keep up with higher costs to operation, expansion, and start-up for all the tribes in the country to share.
 - Other state and federal grants are not enough to make up the difference.
- “Means-Testing” method for funding.
 - ▣ Tiered formula funding has certainly increased
 - ▣ However, the tiered formula has enforced a means-tested “success bias.”
 - Transit services that already built successful will receive more funding.
 - Smaller tribes, rural tribes, or tribal trust lands will fall by the wayside from lack of VRM and population.



Expensive Operations

- Funding for maintaining vehicles, mechanics, support staff, and departmental leadership must be shared from an already slim, grant fund budget.
- Contending with hazards.
 - ▣ Environmental hazards.
 - ▣ Time hazards.
 - ▣ Wildlife hazards.
- Training for staff further stresses the funding mechanisms of the tribe.
 - ▣ Turnover adds to the stress of funding to restart training programs.
- High infrastructure costs.
 - ▣ Requiring their own support structures.

Partnerships

- Our informants we interviewed said that they have experienced a lack of positive partnerships within the vital state, federal and local agencies.
 - ▣ Lack of communication.
 - ▣ Lack of support from federal agencies.
- Tribal Transit directors can feel like they floating alone with no support depending on the state and local relationships.
- Lack of tribal representation on councils and boards of transit authorities.
 - ▣ Increases collaboration and cultural competency in connecting transit services between tribal and non-tribal communities.



Jurisdiction & Rights-of-Way

- Tribal sovereignty and Rights-of-Way (ROW) are important for tribal self-determination on planning, construction, and implementation of transportation infrastructure.
- Tribal transit departments, often just one person, will have to write grants, navigate different agency contacts, and communicate with tribal council and elders.
 - ▣ Processes put in front of tribal governments are tedious to navigate.

Public Support

- Losing public trust in tribal transit service is an obstacle that can grow exponentially.
 - ▣ It is not the fault of the tribal transit departments.
 - Rather, lapses in service from funding and maintenance instability.
- Our interviewees claimed how vital it was for marketing and advocacy to get the public to “buy-in.”
 - ▣ Public trust can motivate the support from the tribal council.

Tribal Council Support

- Our informants repeated how tribal council support exists as a “potential ally.”
- Wholistic push toward transit expansion and service from governmental departments, leadership and the public.
- When tribal transit directors or coordinators do not have the ear of the tribal council, it can be hard to get policy or legislation that could help the transportation department.

We want to know what you have experienced!

How would you rank these barriers from most substantial to insignificant:

1. Distances
2. Funding
3. Expensive Operations
4. Partnerships
5. Jurisdiction & RoWs
6. Tribal Member “Buy-in”
7. Tribal Council Support

10-minute Break

- Please respond to poll @ URL
- We will reconvene to see how everyone responded in ten minutes!

FACILITATORS



Distances

- Our informants highlighted the focus on community feedback and **key** partnerships with local transit authorities to help connect isolated, *stuck* rural populations.
 - Increased public support and participation.
 - Also, helps prove the need to tribal council and US governmental agencies.
- Connecting rural populations led to other benefits to help tribal members.
 - Unemployment decrease.
 - Expansion/upgrades to existing infrastructure.

Funding

- The more funding a tribe received, the more successful a tribal transit program was planned, built, and operated.
 - ▣ Tribes that received large grant funding were able to build and expand much sooner.
 - This allowed them to build better service to convince more riders to use the transit service.
- In other situations, tribal transit coordinators have been very creative in using their budget to adapt their transit service to rider needs.
 - ▣ Informants built new transit shelters, stops, and new routes with redistributed funds.

Key Partnerships

- **Key** partnerships were some of the most common facilitators in our interviews.
 - ▣ Interviewees related how they can feel like they are on an island.
 - Some informants noted just one or two **key** partners who facilitated them in overcoming that barrier.
- **Key** partnerships assisted all our informants in the planning, implementing, and monitoring processes.
 - ▣ Contacting direct representatives, knowledgeable transit employees, etc.
- **Key** partnerships have been monumental in subsequent upgrades, public support, and further coalition building.

Partnerships (Grants)

- Our informants consistently highlighted **key** partnerships aided successful grant writing strategies by transit department leads.
 - ▣ Guidebooks were written to codify the institutional knowledge of how to write grants.
 - ▣ **Key** relationships and persistent communication to the direct representatives (State DOT/FTA/BIA).
 - ▣ Another informant told us that they pulled successful grant proposals from the internet to use a template.
 - ▣ Consulting with other established transit programs.

Partnerships (Institutional Knowledge)

- Our interviews revealed that partnering with established transit agencies created institutional knowledge and memory.
 - ▣ Coalitions/partnerships like this set codified guides to be a tribal transit director.
- When possible, templates, plans, and standards were created to be used by transit employees or other tribal officials.
 - ▣ Solidifies and insulates the successes and achievements of tribal transit from any future crisis they could face.

Support from Tribal Members and Council

- Our interviews recounted how their adjustments in marketing to tribal council got their support.
 - ▣ Tribal government became advocates for transit when communicating with other governments.
- Tribal member feedback was paramount in making sure all voices are heard and standing in solidarity for the betterment of transit service.
 - ▣ Feedback in route placement, feedback on quality of service, feedback on rider demand, etc.
- Advocacy and sponsorship as a united front.
 - ▣ Creates an environment where tribal transit is seen as a public good to sustain.

Jurisdiction/RoWs

- Tricky jurisdictions of governments and transit services facilitated by having **key** partnerships.
- Sole tribal decision making assisted in efficiently addressing transit needs.
 - ▣ Building from these **key** partnerships can act as solidarity amongst inter-tribal governments.

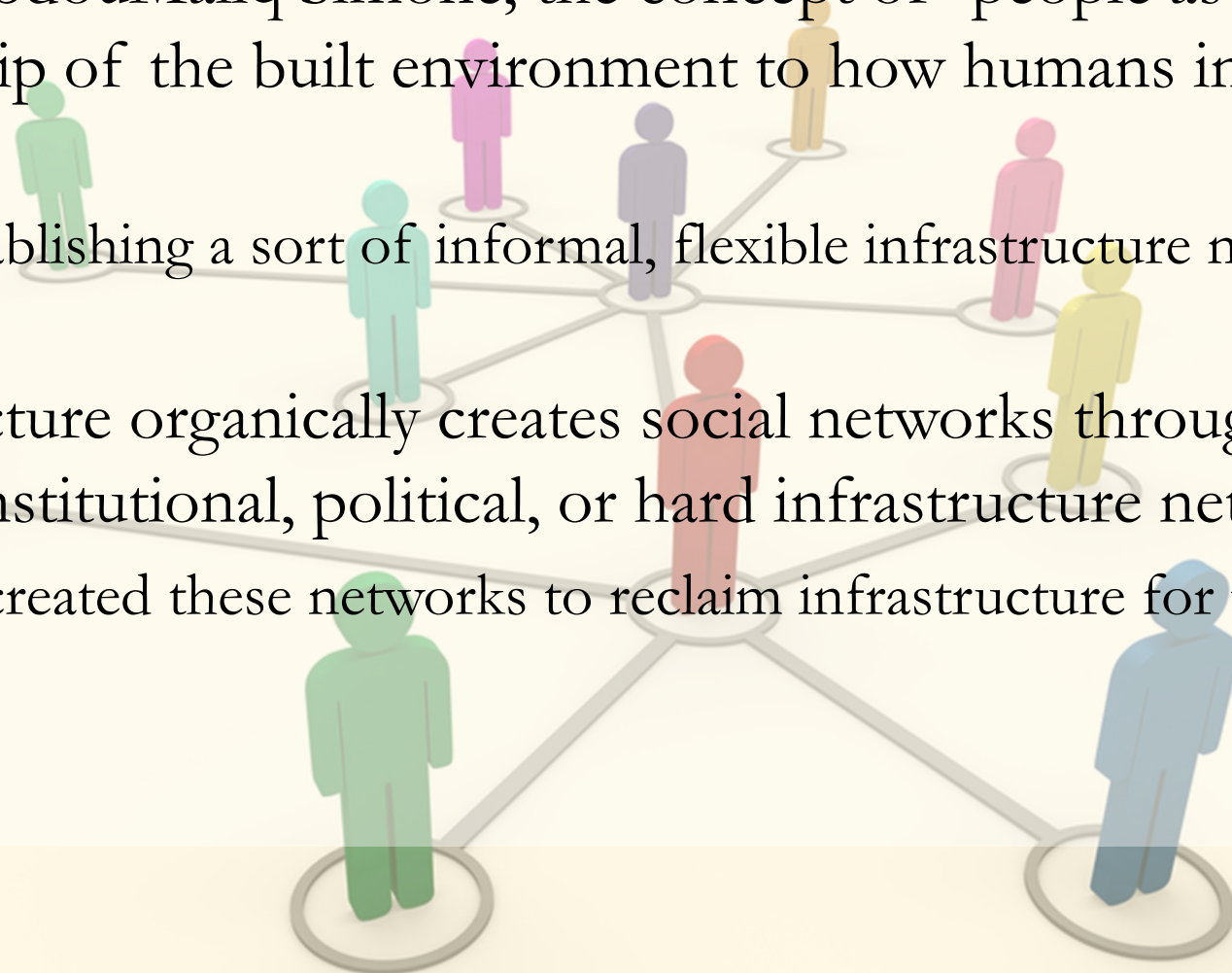




Social Infrastructure

Social Infrastructure

- According to AbdouMaliq Simone, the concept of ‘people as infrastructure’ is the relationship of the built environment to how humans interact in that environment.
 - ▣ Essentially, establishing a sort of informal, flexible infrastructure network of communities.
- Social infrastructure organically creates social networks through interactions separate from institutional, political, or hard infrastructure networks.
 - ▣ Humans have created these networks to reclaim infrastructure for themselves.



Partnerships & ‘Social Infrastructure’

- Our informants frequently repeated how important **key** relationships were in establishing a tribal transit program.
 - ▣ These **key** partnerships act as figurative transit stops in the social infrastructure.
 - From each node, the routes will branch off to form other key nodes.
 - **Key** relationships create more connections in the social infrastructure.
- Proactiveness and persistence in cultivating these relationships were fundamental in building the social infrastructure.

Robust Social Connection Avenues



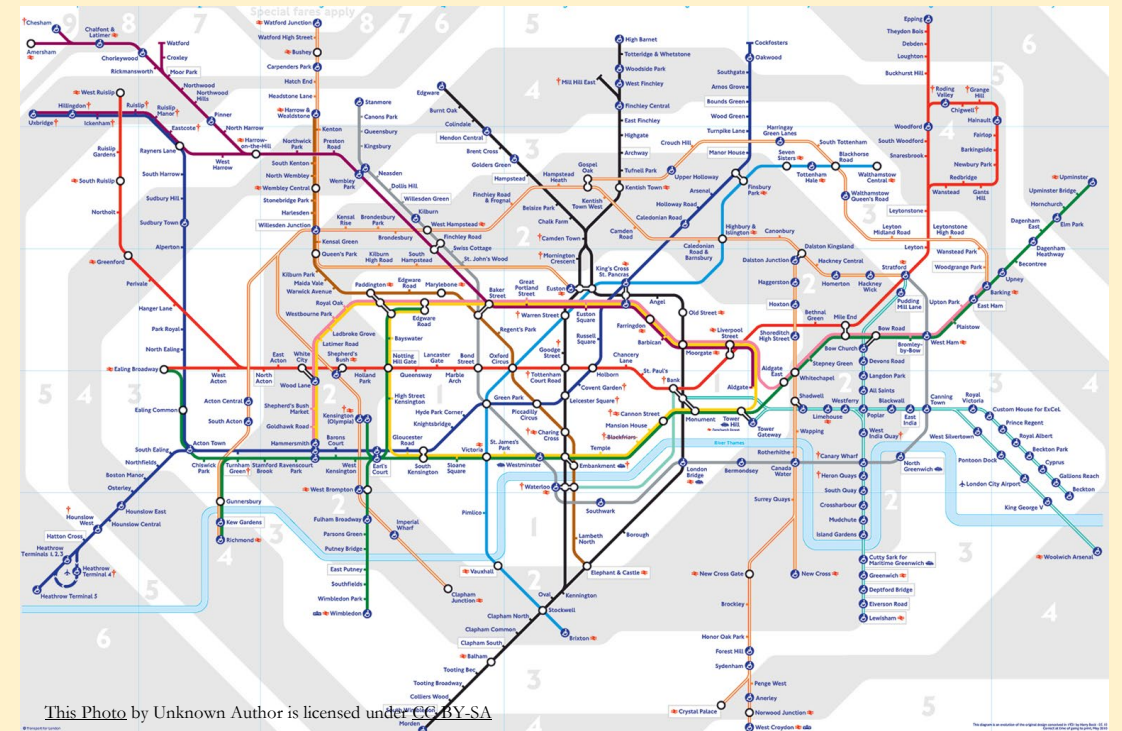
- The **key** people in government agencies, transit authorities, planning orgs, etc. are the connecting nodes in the network of people.
 - ▣ Solidified social transit stops can be used by others who need access to the social knowledge.
- Social infrastructure is the essence of a new vision for constructing hard infrastructure as well.
 - ▣ Built social connections act as hard infrastructure in their transportation of knowledge.
 - All parties can do better in maintaining and expanding the built infrastructure.

Socio-spatial Relationships

- Socio-spatial relationships link the people within social infrastructure to the environment that they are trying to connect.
- Collaboration with non-tribal transit authorities ranked high on the success of a tribal transit program in our interviews.
 - ▣ These partnerships started from establishing connections with **key** people.
 - ▣ Coalitions made between governments benefit both.
- This not a universal application, but it something to consider for tribes in similar positions.

Isn't This Just Networking?

- No. Networking is defined as just talking with people and making acquaintances/contacts.
- Social infrastructure is the centering of **key** people in the proverbial infrastructure in which traffic can pass through.



□ The apparatus of gaining these communication avenues

- Technology/social media
- Community outreach
- Conferences
- Focus groups
- Events



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This increases cultural awareness, social transit network connections, and wider mobility options.



Cultural Competency

- Cultural competency is essential protecting the sovereignty of tribes.
 - ▣ Cultural sensitivity, awareness, and self-determination builds trust between governments.
 - In our interviews, there still exists a distrust between tribal and US government.
- Surface ownership, land rights, valuable historical, cultural touchstones are all things that need to be considered when planning infrastructure projects
 - ▣ Transit stops, routes, facilities, etc. could go through culturally sensitive land, as revealed in our interviews.

Affects of Infrastructural Deficits

- Infrastructure has material affect in development of urban and rural environments.
 - ▣ How infrastructure is built will change how people exist in the specific environment.
- Multimodal infrastructure disciplines expand our definitions of a “region.”
 - ▣ Singular focus on a single mode will limit the how infrastructure is seen and interacted with by the people and the government.
- Consider infrastructure from a regional perspective.
 - ▣ Our informants described how beneficial transit connections, from tribal land to non-tribal land, were to all communities.

Tribal Representation beyond the Reservation

- Tribal representation on boards/committees of organizations outside of reservations.
- When transportation authorities are making decisions, having stakeholders from both tribal and non-tribal communities is decisive.
 - ▣ Reservations should be seen as part of the greater community, while still respecting and protecting tribal sovereignty and rights-of-way.

Timeline for research - What's next?

- In the coming months, SURTCOM will work on getting a full written report on the concepts we have laid out
- If anyone wants to contact me, I am open to hearing any future feedback, input or questions on this research report

Q&A

Does anyone have any questions, comments, or input?

Thank you!

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