Summary of Proposal

Transportation barriers limit the opportunities for many Canadians to participate in jobs, healthcare, and social services. These limitations exacerbate the problems faced by disadvantaged households and create a feedback loop known as transportation-related social exclusion (TRSE). Transportation barriers will worsen social inequalities as population growth, gentrification, and unaffordability continue to push disadvantaged populations to the peripheries of cities, where it is difficult to provide effective transit and active travel options. The risks of TRSE have been magnified by the COVID-19 pandemic, with disparate impacts of the disease reinforcing many prevailing urban inequalities. Governments across Canada are aware of these issues, yet lack critical knowledge about who is most at risk of TRSE, its varied manifestations for different populations, its overall scale, and its significance in terms of social and economic impacts. Public transportation is also on the cusp of technological changes that will transform how people move through cities. Transportation technologies like ride-hailing and on-demand buses could either reproduce extant urban inequality or, if properly managed, increase access to daily activities for priority populations such as low-income households, immigrants, and racialized and Indigenous residents. We are at a critical juncture as technologies are developing during a period of rapid urbanization, economic polarization, and transportation systems disruption. Intersectoral research is needed to inform what transportation services, infrastructure, and policies can provide effective and equitable solutions to TRSE.

Mobilizing Justice is a multidisciplinary and multi-sector partnership that will build sustainable connections for research and knowledge exchange to solve transportation poverty problems in Canadian cities and mobilize findings into action. Over 5 years, we will conduct the first national systematic study to measure and describe the Canadian population living with transport poverty (simultaneous socioeconomic and transport disadvantages). Mobilizing Justice is an unprecedented coalition of multisectoral partners and academic experts: 33 academics from 6 provinces and 2 states, 14 government agencies, 7 industry partners, and 7 non-profit organizations, all steadfastly committed to addressing transportation poverty. We will work together to achieve our primary goal of improving transport outcomes through evidence-based transportation equity research and produce: (a) the first-ever assessment and compilation of community-led transport equity advocacy work; (b) a national, large-sample survey of transport poverty (n=20,000); (c) a comprehensive set of validated guidelines and processes for setting and meeting transportation equity goals within official plans and transportation business cases; and (d) a robust body of empirical evaluations of mobility technology and policy pilots which are designed to serve the needs of people experiencing transport poverty.

Through our investigation and application of distributive justice theories to transport evaluation and planning, we will make novel contributions to theory while producing critical and practical knowledge for the international transportation planning and research communities. We will fill major knowledge gaps about transport poverty in Canada, provide stakeholders with empirically validated pilot evaluations, and leverage our partnership to implement transport equity standards nationwide. Our actionable findings will transform how governments adopt principals of justice as they plan and provide transportation infrastructure and services, thereby reducing the consequences of transport poverty for disadvantaged residents in their communities.