

Transportation Artists in Residence

A Landscape of an Emerging Field

2024



Smart Growth America
Improving lives by improving communities

Who we are

Smart Growth America helps create healthy, prosperous, and resilient places to live for all people through research, advocacy, and direct community support. Our work spans housing and land use, transportation, and economic development to find solutions to communities' most pressing needs. We work with elected officials at all levels, real estate developers, chambers of commerce, transportation and urban planning professionals, and residents to improve everyday life for people across the country through better development.

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Transportation for America, a program of Smart Growth America, is an advocacy organization made up of local, regional, and state leaders who envision a transportation system that safely, affordably, and conveniently connects people of all means and ability to jobs, services, and opportunity through multiple modes of travel.

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Project Team

This report was written by Cross-sector Artists in Residence Lab (CAIR Lab) : Johanna Taylor, Amanda Lovelee, and Mallory Nezam

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The report layout was developed by Mary Welcome.

Acknowledgments

The Transportation Artists in Residence Network has been generously supported by the National Endowment for the Arts, the Kresge Foundation, the McKnight Foundation, and ArtPlace America. Smart Growth America and Transportation for America recognize the significant leadership and contributions of our former Arts and Culture Director Ben Stone in this field.

From the Director

Smart Growth America believes unreservedly in the power arts and culture can wield to reimagine and transform our transportation systems. From our decades-long experience fighting for safe, well-designed, well-maintained, and equitable transportation infrastructure, we recognize that our structures, policies, and processes far too often hew to the status quo. To counter and overcome these conventions and constraints, different and compelling approaches are urgently needed, all the while building power to nurture new worlds.

The pilot transportation artist-in-residency programs at the heart of this report were created by Smart Growth America to galvanize creativity within state transportation agencies in achieving goals such as improving safety, supporting multimodal systems, and creating healthier communities. For five years and an ongoing global pandemic, these artists-in-residence and agency administrators, with Smart Growth America providing intermediary guidance and support, developed

aspirational projects that, for example, highlighted essential maintenance operations and fostered internal conversations around process and culture. It became apparent that each residency developed in an organic way unique to the alchemies and energies among artist, administrator, agency, and intermediary.

Nonetheless, there were some key similarities and shared experiences, including witnessing an abundance of inventiveness, imagination, and a willingness to reflect and explore at every level throughout the participating agencies. Culture change doesn't happen overnight, and new processes and practices that shift culture must be given time, space, safety, and resources—funding, support staff, and leadership commitment—to breathe, take root, and grow. By clearly identifying the limitations that surfaced during this pilot program, and providing recommendations and strategies for what must be strengthened, what must be changed, and what is still needed, we aim to inspire more people

to join us in thoughtfully considering the parameters for these and similar programs.

We remain deeply committed to instigating creative cross-sector collaboration and mobilizing change to meet the transportation challenges our communities face. As we envision our work ahead in this area, and particularly with respect to transportation artists-in-residence, we seek partners in this ecosystem who share our vision and values in these specific ways:

- A firm commitment to equity;
- Demonstrated investment in culture change and shifting power; and
- Clear alignment with Smart Growth America's priorities and principles.



Marian Lou
Director of Arts and Culture
Smart Growth America

Contents

Introduction	1
The ecosystem	3
Program models	8
Barriers, challenges, & impacts	11
Future dreams	16
Recommendations & actions	19
Acknowledgements	22

Introduction

The Transportation Artist in Residence (TAIR) Network was convened virtually in August 2023 with the support of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Grants for Arts and the Kresge Foundation. The convening brought together transportation artists in residence and the partners within the transportation agency. This report shares high-level current state-of-the-field observations and recommendations for the future.

Background of the TAIR Network

Artists in residence at a state transportation agency is an approach developed by Smart Growth America with the Minnesota and Washington State Departments of Transportation (MnDOT and WSDOT, respectively) at the end of 2018. This nascent effort was informed by the Arts, Culture, and Transportation: A Creative Placemaking Field Scan, produced by Transportation for America (T4A) with ArtPlace America in 2017, which identified state DOTs as a promising but untested venue for artistic intervention.

In the summer of 2019, MnDOT and WSDOT launched inaugural artist-in-residence programs in partnership with SGA. The intent was to bring a creative approach to advancing the agencies' and Smart Growth America's goals of improving safety, reducing congestion, promoting economic vitality, supporting

multimodal transportation systems, and creating healthier communities. SGA and T4A served as administrators of the funding and the overall program, including providing staff and consulting assistance to the artists and the host agencies. The program was made possible with generous support from the Kresge Foundation and the McKnight Foundation, with seed funding provided by ArtPlace America. MnDOT also provided funding.

WSDOT and SGA selected the artist team of Kelly Gregory and Mary Welcome. Gregory and Welcome's approach included several months of listening and intentionally "getting lost in the weeds with WSDOT." From their extensive research and travel throughout the state, they identified a number of themes that shaped their final products. Those final products included transforming their office space at WSDOT headquarters into a gallery and gathering space, creating a bumper sticker campaign and DOT-specific conversation cards, as well as

writing and printing **The Maintenance Post**, a newspaper highlighting WSDOT's maintenance efforts.

MnDOT and SGA selected Marcus Young 楊墨 as MnDOT's Community Vitality Fellow. He began his residency with rotations through the agency, discussing with hundreds of MnDOT staff members their thoughts about their work, their relationship to the communities MnDOT serves, and the idea of working with an artist. Following these rotations, Young focused his time on creating three projects: the **Land Acknowledgement Confluence Room**, a repurposed conference room where staff will be able to gather, be creative, and explore new everyday cultural practices of land acknowledgment; a **Sense of Place Convening**, bringing MnDOT leaders together for an intensive day-long event around placemaking and placekeeping; and **Creative Conversations**, tackling topics such

as equity, land acknowledgment, sustainability, and imagination during times of great change

MnDOT and SGA selected Sarah Petersen in 2022 to serve as MnDOT's Sustainability and Public Health Fellow supporting sustainable and equitable multimodal transportation at MnDOT. Petersen experimented with artistic projects, tools, and strategies around mode shift that centered community voices and experiences. These projects included a **Move Around Map Game** to play with place and individual transportation choices, barriers, and options in everyday life. A second activity experimented with participants producing prototypes of personal "safety attire," exploring user vulnerability and differing concepts of safety. Themes from these engagements led to a **What if You Could** Poster campaign and a pop-up **Tell Us How You Move Around** kit for use for in-person public engagement.

It's important to recognize that the majority of the WSDOT and MnDOT residencies took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, which drastically altered initial plans for engagement both within the agencies and with communities. However, each artist was diligent in adapting techniques and plans to continue effectively advancing their work.



The Ecosystem

TAIR Network Collaborations



Shared Purpose

TAIR Network participants were given a MadLib-inspired prompt to help develop a collective sense of purpose for the practice of transportation artists in residence. Responses were fairly unique to each respondent, using little shared language. A collective purpose statement emerged that can be mobilized to unite the diffuse practitioners working at the intersection of art and transportation across the US.

“

TAIR collaborative practice is guided by innovation, justice, and curiosity. TAIR programs impact transportation agencies by imagining different and more just futures, demonstrating to the public that DOTs care about marginalized residents, and improving services through public participation. When programs meaningfully partner artists, DOT staff, and possibly include third-party intermediary facilitation and support, they can build relationships, design new approaches to transportation, spark bigger dreams, and evoke mindset change.

”

The Ecosystem

Collaborations that embed artists inside of transportation agencies require an awareness of the ecosystem of partners and stakeholders that make these programs possible and hold the keys to their growth and success. This ecosystem is in the early stages of development, with interested stakeholders experimenting as they develop collaborations and negotiate what types of work should be a part of TAIR. At this stage, we must acknowledge that the field is in flux and its boundaries and contexts are not yet defined. The field welcomes experimentation.

We currently see this ecosystem in two ways: 1) a collective TAIR Network ecosystem of all of the practitioners across geographies; and 2) smaller TAIR ecosystems that allow for individual programs to thrive.



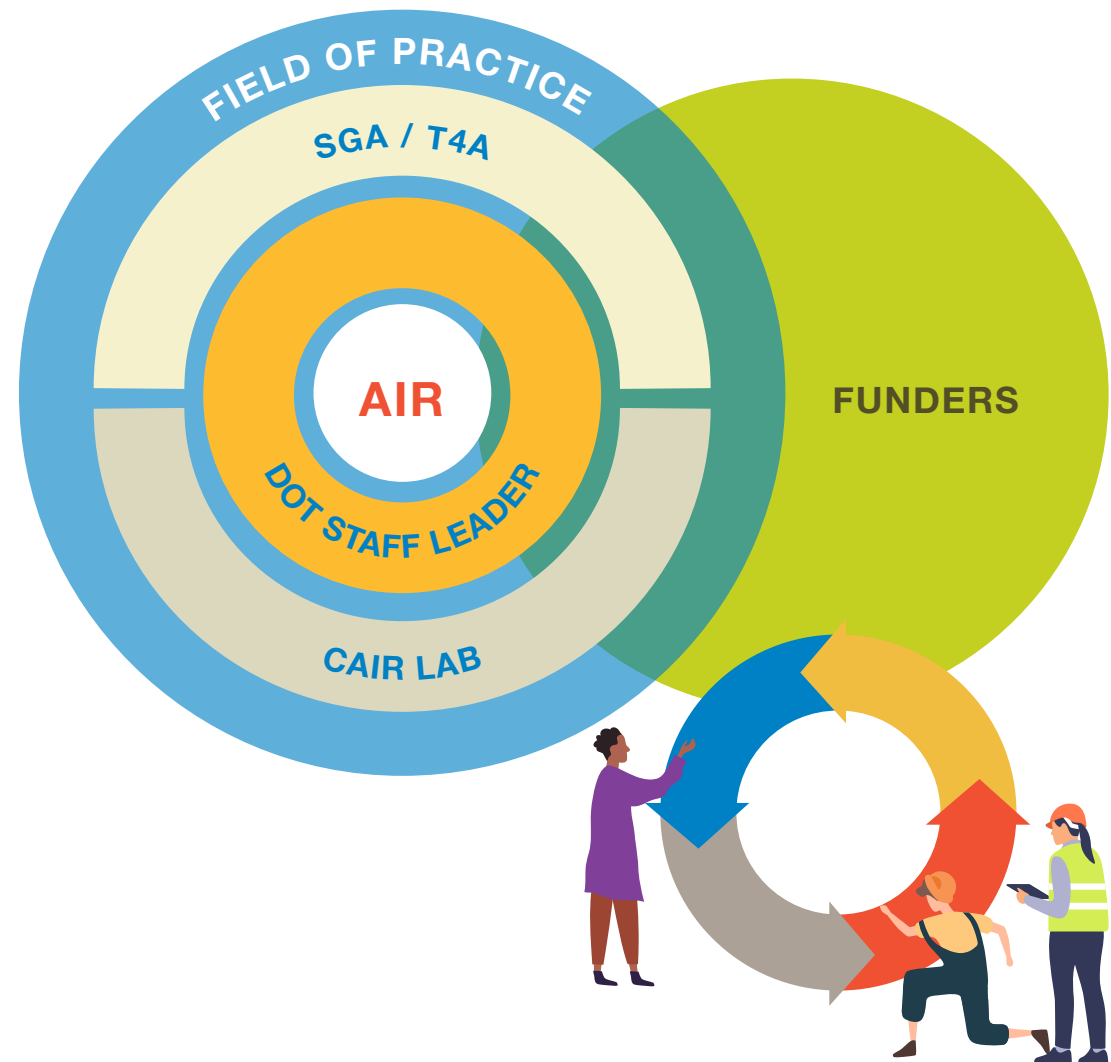
Courtesy of Marcus Young

Larger TAIR Ecosystem

This is CAIR Lab's first visual interpretation of the TAIR ecosystem. We thought about the artists in residence, DOTs, SGA, CAIR Lab, funders, and the larger cross-sector arts field of practice.

Key themes we heard in reflections of the ecosystem include:

- Community is an essential part of the ecosystem.
- The ecosystem is like a three-legged stool with artists, DOT staff, and third-party partners as the legs. All legs are essential. Others suggested that communities should also be included in the stool.
- TAIR work is lonely for both the artist and DOT staff. While they know that peer practitioners are out there, they do not have connections to people doing similar work across the country.



One interpretation of AIR ecosystem

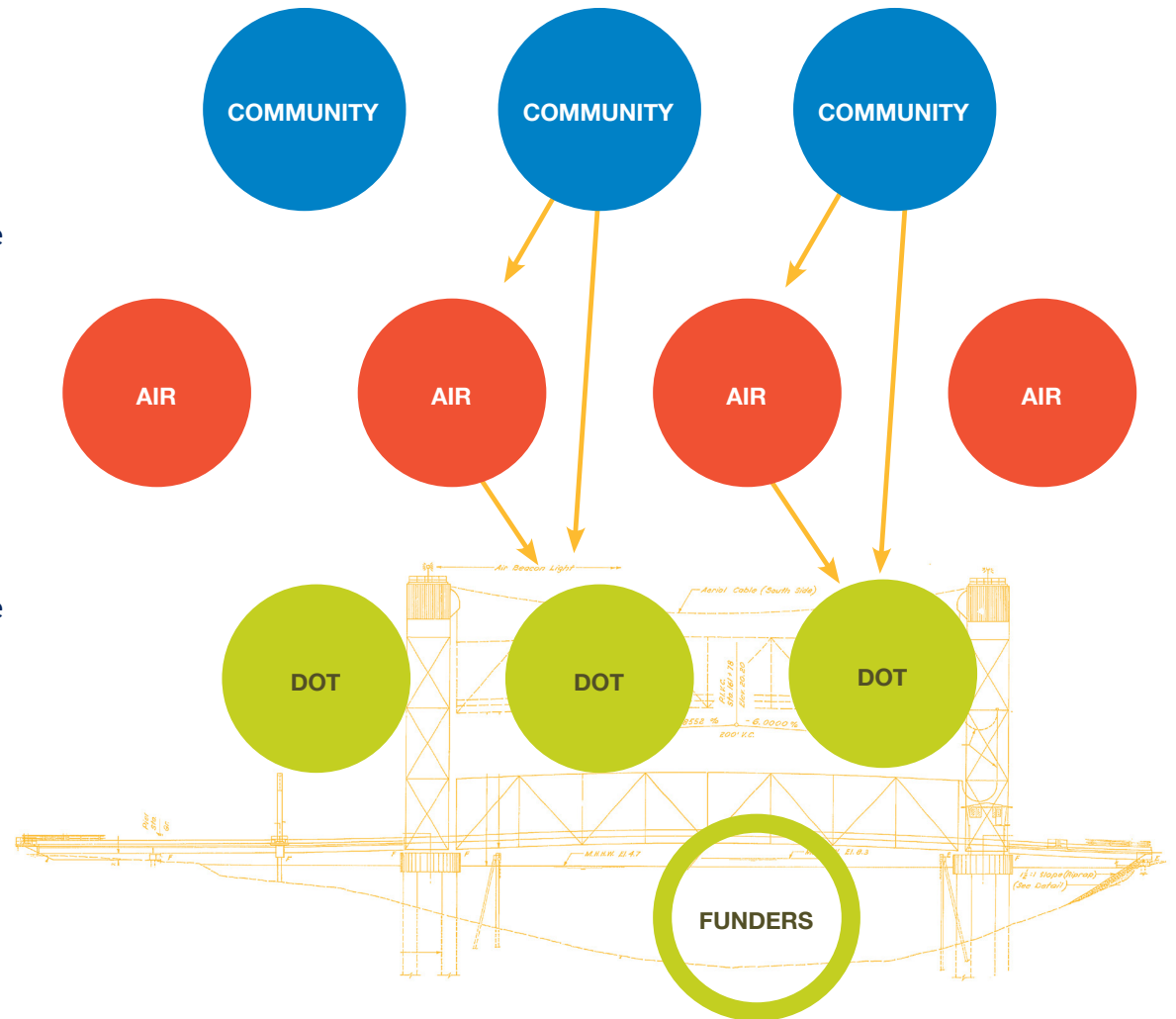
Smaller TAIR Ecosystems

TAIR practitioners then created their own ecosystems specific to their practices. Amongst these ecosystems was a wide variety of stakeholders and relationships.

For example, in this ecosystem, we see multiple artists in residence (similar to a cohort model), DOT hosts, and community groups, yet most parties remain disconnected.

Another participant envisioned community as a common relationship amongst the third-party arts partner, the AIR, and the DOT, as well as calling out the role of higher government bodies who hold a lot of power and decision-making that impacts TAIRs. These government bodies are bound by external and internal constraints that they navigate in their own work and in turn, impose on participating artists.

The isolation of trying to do something different within systems that are used to working in one way is hard on all parties. To strengthen the TAIR field, practitioners should consider which structures are needed to keep this work supported and growing.



One interpretation of AIR ecosystem

Program Models

Washington & Minnesota TAIR Programs



Field Success

As artists are increasingly embedded in transportation agencies, impactful collaborative processes and discrete outcomes are emerging. Artists and DOT staff recognize the value in their collaboration and are straining their limited resources to tell stories of the work. Yet they are still determining how to measure and contextualize the impacts, lacking adequate resources and appropriate evaluation models.

Evidence of Success

Artists and DOT staff are passionate about the work, sharing evidence of productive outcomes internally within DOT operations and externally through public engagement. All parties are working to more comprehensively share collaboration processes and outcomes, particularly through stories and case studies that demonstrate successes and build support for future projects. The TAIR Network has identified the following successes across the country:

- Building foundations for more trusting relationships between community members and transportation agencies that open pathways for communication, inspiring the DOT to respond to changes that the community wants to see.
- Demonstrating a different way to do things by shifting daily operations with DOTs by changing the physical infrastructure of conference room spaces to become spaces of creativity and spaces of constant reflection of transportation work as foundational to the daily mobility of all people and as continuing the traditions of indigenous caretaking of the land and people.
- Projects are documented in printed books and newspapers as well as in digital media that make DOT work transparent and accessible. This builds communication across DOT staff which are often siloed within their departments, as well as between DOTs and communities. Importantly, this also calls positive attention to largely unseen departments such as maintenance whose work is essential to the agency's ability to function daily.
- Through artist-created games, communities share their transportation stories with one another and the DOT staff, building them into reflections of the necessary utility of all DOT work and elevating opportunities for public engagement in shaping DOT priorities.
- TAIR programs can bridge internal divides within DOT systems by breaking down bureaucratic walls through artist processes and tools such as printed materials or games. They bring together agency staff who may not otherwise connect whether due to their personal relationships or different job roles.



Current Limitations

Personal passion and a sense of possibility through creative collaboration bring both artists and DOT staff to this work. The DOT staff are tasked with being the artist liaison without additional compensation or a reduction in other projects. In some cases, the artist is an employee of the DOT or in other cases, they are contractors who are not in the office full time. Having a DOT email address provides strategic access to the agency. Additionally, the roles for the artist or the DOT staff working together are not well defined and rarely is tracking or contextualizing the impact of the work a part of anyone's work.

What If You Could poster campaign by Transportation Artist-in-Residence Sarah Petersen and Noah Lawrence-Holder for MnDOT



Barriers, Challenges, & Impacts for Artists, Staff, and Program Practitioners



Barriers & Challenges

Artists, government staff, and other TAIR program practitioners face challenges in finding adequate time, resources, and buy-in for the work. Because programs are often boundary-pushing they can be treated as non-essential within the larger DOT system. Despite the potential for impact and ambitious goals, these challenges may cause programs to be under-equipped and under-resourced, limiting their potential. In response, program managers, collaborators, and artists often take a lot of the foundational tasks on themselves in order to be as resourceful as possible, and spend significant time navigating bureaucracy which pulls them away from the creative and innovative work at the heart of the TAIR collaboration. A lot is expected from the artist in particular to ensure program functionality, without giving the artist what they often need to thrive.

State agencies bring a unique set of bureaucratic complexities for embedded artists and internal

government collaborators to navigate. They liaise between central and district offices which each have their own cultures, they are geographically diffuse which requires more time to travel to meet with people in person, and they must gain buy-in from elected legislators.

Beyond these broader program challenges, the following are the most prevalent challenges TAIR collaborators face:

- **Program goals can be unclear or understood differently by everyone involved.** TAIR program leaders don't always articulate clear goals from the outset, and sometimes participants have differing perceptions of the program goals. The lack of clear goals in turn makes it difficult to measure the impacts of the work.
- **Navigating bureaucracy without support, capacity, budget, or authority.** TAIR programs are unique in that they place an artist within a non-arts space. Alongside the creative potential of these residencies, collaborators must

navigate a bureaucratic system that can feel cumbersome and unfriendly to creative ideas and processes.

- **Finding the right partners.** For many artists, finding the right partner takes time, and without one, their residencies are unable to take shape. Many DOT staff are strapped for time and have their own priorities making them unable to support the TAIR. Programs with internal advocates, who possess sufficient resources, social capital, budgetary power, and autonomy, allow the artist to focus on their role as creative innovator and less on project management, which is not the best use of the artist's time and skills.
- **Finding the right resources.** Navigating the bureaucracy of a transportation agency to find the resources needed to realize an artist's idea takes time and energy. Figuring out how to access the right resources can be challenging for the artist in a new environment, and agency staff partners may also be unsure of where to go to find the right support to advance these ideas.

- **Programs are too short.** Because TAIR work is focused on building relationships, programs that are a year or less often do not afford enough time to connect staff across agency departments, build trust, gain buy-in, and advance ideas that push the envelope within agency work.
- **“The unicorn effect.”** Being the only artist working in a non-arts context, or the only transportation staffer working in a TAIR program, can be lonely and bring its own challenges in bridging field divides.
- **DOTs have not allocated internal funding to maintain the pilot programs.** TAIR pilot programs launch with the support of philanthropic funding, yet many struggle to sustain recurring funding to continue the programs and grow commitment from the DOT or outside sources.
- **Lack of a clear, specific, and measurable commitment to equity.** While many artists and DOT hosts advance personal commitments to equity in their work, TAIR programs often lack clear, specific, and

measurable commitments to equity that guide collaborations, making impacts uncertain.

- **Successful artistic risks require belief in and support of artist(s).** The artist can not be successful in their role if they are not given complete trust from the host agency and its staff to do new things.
- **Challenge of the artist-as-consultant model.** Artists are often perceived and financially supported within a DOT similarly to a consultant, creating the expectation that they are in the agency to address a specific issue as outlined by the agency, complete the work, and then leave all intellectual property produced with the agency. Artists should be embedded. Artists want the structures of their tenure to be reflective of their unique roles as embedded artists. Artists seek to be given the space to innovate and create the process of the residency, with all resulting ideas, products, and models considered as shared work to advance both the artists and the DOT into the future.

- **Challenges and opportunities of the research and development phase.** The R&D phase, essential for many TAIR programs, needs to be a valued part of a residency. This requires that the DOT place trust in the artist during this grounding phase. TAIR collaborators want this time to be understood as essential to both artists and program managers alike, as all parties set the foundations of their new relationship and new processes.

These challenges need to be addressed to enable TAIR programs to be as transformative as they have the ability to be. One overarching idea is the desire for TAIR funding that recognizes the programs as “mindset work” (focusing on processes of collaboration), as opposed to art projects (focusing on resulting, tangible products). This is grounded in the expectation that artists will challenge agency norms and ask DOT staff to think and operate in new ways.

Impact Measurement

Where artists-in-residence are working in transportation, DOT staff and artists are implementing strategies to better contextualize and share stories of their work. Artists bring vast skills to collaborations that set up projects with concrete strategies for gathering data. Artists want to collaborate with communities, transportation planners, civic leaders across government agencies, and other creatives. Artists are storytellers who can aggregate deep knowledge about experiences and distill it to be accessible and meaningful. Artists often go beyond the specific deliverables originally envisioned by the scope of work to track logistics such as costs and creative inputs, but also observational outcomes.

DOTs are building internal capacity to gather community data and stories, using tactics such as surveys. DOT staff are also looking to what is already happening across the agency to support art-based collaborations.

Yet most TAIR programs do not have distinct budgets for impact measurement or evaluation. Instead, it is often a marginal part of the work that is taken up by the artist or a DOT staff member in addition to their primary roles. This means that current work is not rigorously documented or evaluated, and is often captured in case studies that emphasize the positive outcomes rather than also being spaces for productive reflection to further the field. In order for impact measurement and evaluation to be productive, it should either be dedicated to a predetermined contractor who is working on an impartial review, or it should be clearly articulated and divided among DOT staff and/or the artist(s). Making this a focus of all TAIR programs can not only strengthen that individual program in a future iteration, but it can also in turn become an opportunity to support other programs in launching for the first time or refining their work.

The desire to document the work and translate it in order to build more sustained and sustainable partnerships continues.



Photo courtesy of WSDOT Artists-in-Residence
Kelly Gregory and Mary Welcome

Building Capacity for Impact Measurement

While most TAIR programs currently lack time or resources for impact measurement, there is a desire among DOT staff and artists to build capacity to understand their work better. The field can draw on deep work happening globally in both transportation and art in order to build a framework of impact measurement specific to art and transportation collaboration.

Future research can support building an impact measurement framework in collaboration with artists, DOT partners, and other stakeholders. This model can analyze qualitative data through discourse analysis as well as express it quantitatively through nonparametric statistics.

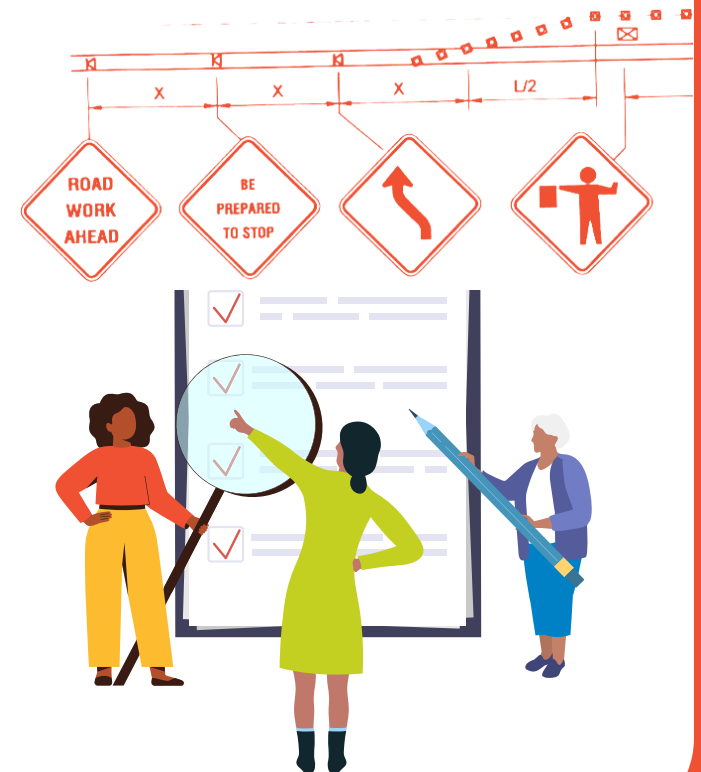
There are opportunities for connecting art into public engagement work recommended by DOT leaders nationally, including: 1) [US DOT](#)

recommends that agencies follow [International Association of Public Participation's spectrum](#) and the [EPA's Public Investment Spectrum](#) to guide public engagement and measurement impact of the work; and 2) [NEPA requires transportation agencies to do public engagement](#) by focusing on transportation equity, working with communities, as well as to work across sectors. Together this is supporting agencies in moving beyond transportation as a transaction to transportation as a central community asset.

Additionally, there is work underway in developing impact measurements for art in cross-sector spaces that leverage the [UN's Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs) which have become a global standard for measuring impact, particularly among social impact investors. This includes 1) a framework developed by the UN and the Center for Music Ecosystem that connects [music to the SDGs](#); and 2) [Mass Culture's Civic Art Impact Frameworks](#) are in development for

specific civic art projects and currently include models for dance and mobility, art and environmental sustainability, and equity in organizations.

Next steps would be for a foundation or government agency to support a collaborative working group to review these existing impact measurement frameworks and develop a version for TAIR programs.



Future Dreams for the TAIR Ecosystem



When asking artists who have held a TAIR position and DOT staff who have managed a TAIR program what their wildest dream for the field is, we heard both overlapping and not aligning dreams. All big dreams included that these programs have a positive impact on the transportation field in some way.

Residency hosts' dream:

- TAIRs to help solve complex issues.
- TAIRs to help change internal DOT culture.
- More time organized into TAIR planning for reporting and reflection as well as promotion of the work both internally and externally.
- Greater support for TAIR programs, both from foundations and from the government.
- A national community of TAIR practitioners to connect with in order to navigate challenges in serving as an advocate and translator of arts work across the agency.



Turn The Highways To Rivers, An Art Appendix to the MnDOT Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan by Marcus Young and Or (Laura) Levinson. Design and Illustration by Bayou Bay.

Artists' dream:

- More support (both financially and in terms of increased resources) that enables them to focus only on art making.
- Longer residencies that last longer than the typical nine to twelve months. This would allow for deeper collaborations with DOT staff, community stakeholders, and others to create more impactful programs.
- A cohort model that unites different artists together across the DOT. This model creates opportunities for artists to navigate their challenges and opportunities together, creating a community of artists rather than reinforcing their 'unicorn' status within the agency.
- More TAIR programs nationally at state, local, and federal levels so that both artists and DOT staff have networks to connect with to make large-scale change.

The hosts' dreams boiled down to artists as problem solvers for the sticky issues facing DOTs both internally and externally. The artists want to be the creative risk taker that staff also want but sometimes face barriers within the agency that prevent them from achieving that shared goal. Some noticed a longing or even frustration from staff who want to be able to be more creative and take risks similar to those of the artist but are not allowed to or rewarded within the current contexts of their role. Yet their vulnerability and courage in experimenting with creative methods, often on top of their regular workloads, opened the door to other staff trying new things.

Overall, artists are seeking more support, including structural support from DOTs so they can focus on making art, creative support from cohorts of other artists so they can be less lonely, and the professional stability of longer-length residencies or staff position benefits.

These same conclusions have been found across other research and interviews of artists in residence in programs across all government agencies and governmental hosts. The hosts want artists to solve the sticky problems and the artists need more structural support to do this work. Although this is not a revelation, these persistent dreams continue.

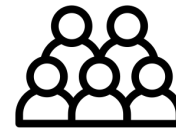


Recommendations & Actions

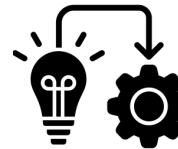


Next Steps

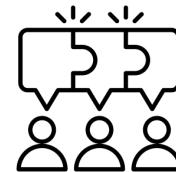
Out of the convening, policy and programmatic recommendations emerged to guide the future of the field. These recommendations are for DOT staff and artists alike.



Gather all practitioners in the TAIR field for an in-person convening (artists, transportation planners, arts administrators, other collaborating DOT staff, community leaders).



Create a peer-to-peer mentorship network that enables dialogue and strategy to collectively navigate the opportunities and challenges that arise in TAIR programs.



To make TAIR program development more accessible, develop a program readiness assessment and initial implementation strategies. Institutionalize a clear, specific, and measurable commitment to equity in each TAIR program.



Organize professional development programs to a.) support artists working in civic contexts and b.) train new DOT field leaders.



Set clear expectations between DOT staff and artists in a contract that breaks down each partner's role, program structures, program outcome(s), timeline, and budget.



Solidify support for artists from staff across DOTs, outside funders, and field experts. These take different forms:

- a. Outside (non-transportation) support intermediaries (such as an arts nonprofit or community organization as well as city arts department) can facilitate funding for programs, connect external partners, and serve as a translator between artists and DOTs.
- b. Funder intermediaries, regranting partners, and technical assistance providers can measure and document impacts, and tell TAIR stories nationally. This can happen internally or by bringing in external experts.
- c. Give DOT staff partners the resources they need to take on daily facilitation of the program and support of the artist in accessing relationships, building connections, and facilitating buy-in across DOT through advocacy and translation.
- d. Internal DOT leadership support is essential. This should be a person with leadership power who is dedicated to the program and can advocate for the artists to the highest level of the department.

Acknowledgements

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