Why Transit Inequality Persists in Brazil

Access to transportation and mobility is not equal for all people in Brazil. Structural racism affects the access and provision of public transport services. Even though 56% of Brazil's population identifies as Black or Brown, white people are often the main residents of city centers, with connections to opportunities, services, and transit stations. Black and low-income people often live farther from transit systems, pay more for fares, face overcrowding, and lack transit options. Since Brazil's data collection tools do not include race, there are no easy policy options in place to improve transportation across racial lines.

Last year, ITDP Brazil launched *The Color of Mobility (A Cor da Mobilidade)*, a series of articles published on ITDP Brazil's blog, addressing structural racism in Brazil's public spaces, particularly public transportation. These interviews explained just how much Brazil does not adequately meet the needs of Black people in urban mobility. This is due to a lack of representation at the decision-making levels of public transportation planning and management, which leads to a lack of forethought and appropriate planning for the unique needs of non-white Brazilians.

To understand structural racism, it's important to explore Brazil's history. In 1888, Brazil was the last country in the...
Western Hemisphere to abolish slavery. Upon liberation, less than 135 years ago, former slaves did not receive any type of financial support despite their extreme and oppressive living and working conditions. This lack of compensation, or acknowledgment, bore a system of inequality between Black former slaves and the white slave owners that still exists in other forms today. Even though not all white Brazilians owned slaves, they have still benefited from this form of racial hierarchy. Socio-territorial exclusion has forced these minorities to concentrate in regions far from urban centers and without adequate infrastructure.

Throughout Brazil, regions with large Black populations suffer from a lack of buses and stations. This is the case of Salvador, found on the northwest coast of Brazil, and the country’s fourth-largest city, with 2.8 million people. While over 80% of the population identifies as Black, neighborhoods with the largest Black and Brown populations have fewer bus lines than neighborhoods with the highest white populations. Similarly, in Rio de Janeiro, most of the non-white people live in the metropolitan area but study and work in the central region without robust infrastructure: they spend 67 minutes, on average, traveling in each direction. This is the longest commute time in the whole country.

Cycling is also a challenge for Black and low-income people because there is such poor infrastructure on city peripheries. A study of Brazilian cyclists undertaken this year by a Brazilian organization, Observatório da bicicleta, shows that 57% of cyclists are Black. The survey, “Sensitivity of Sociodemographic Variables in Urban Mobility,” launched by ITDP Brazil this year, analyzes the profile of residents living near cycling infrastructure and highlights that fewer Black people and low-income people are living near bike infrastructure compared to the number of these people in Brazilian city centers. What is clear from this study is that building cycling infrastructure near those who use it most will greatly impact the quality of life and opportunities for these residents.

Black women in Brazil suffer from double inequality: racism and sexism. This structural discrimination affects their
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In Brazil, Origin-Destination surveys are the main instrument for transportation planning. These surveys investigate the commuting patterns people make in a region, including the reason and mode of transport for trips. Despite being used since the 1960s, these surveys have never collected data related to race, even though non-white people comprise most of the population.

Amanda Corradi, an architect and urban planner, states, “The Origin-Destination Survey focuses on the analysis of commuting and does not take into account the issue of care, which is generally in the women’s realm. Black women have, on average, lower incomes than Black men and white women and men. This means that the cost of commuting is even more crucial and detrimental for Black women.”

The lack of racial data means that racism is not considered in urban planning. Today, the census, a survey that defines Brazilian demographic, economic, and social information, also provides data about where Black people live. But there is no information about the quality or frequency of their public transport, mobility options, or even the most common commuting modes. This allows existing problems to perpetuate. We must demand that public authorities produce qualified and intersectional data which can influence important policy decisions. Additionally, representation matters, and transportation staff need to reflect the demographics of Brazil, not a minority ruling class.

By bringing attention to this issue and making more data available to policymakers, ITDP Brazil is working hard to promote transportation and mobility equity in Brazil.

Check out all the reports and interviews: https://itdpbrasil.org/a-cor-da-mobilidade/