



SOPHIA | *HIA & Equity Case Study*

Health and Equity Impacts of a Local Transport Facility

The National Center for Healthy Housing (NCHH) conducted an HIA to examine the health and equity impacts of locating an intermodal transportation facility in Morrell Park, a residential neighborhood in Southwest Baltimore. The facility would have allowed goods coming into the Port of Baltimore to be transferred between trucks and trains for transport to local and national businesses. The proposed site was located at an underused railyard, and building the facility would have added up to 350 truck trips daily.

The communities surrounding the proposed site are largely white and working class, and have high poverty and unemployment rates. Poverty and unemployment are disproportionately high among African American residents. Relative to rates for the city and state on the average, these communities have higher rates of heart disease, some cancers, and deaths due to respiratory illnesses. Residents also have concerns about youth truancy, drug use, and crime.

The HIA studied the impacts of the proposed project on air quality, noise, neighborhood resources, employment, safety, and light. NCHH found that building and operating the facility could worsen the existing health issues, especially those related to air quality. The HIA advanced equity in several ways.

A Focus On Equity Was Integrated Throughout The HIA Process

When NCHH heard that residents in the communities surrounding the proposed sites were concerned, they screened the project for an HIA. They felt they could bring health issues to light that would not have otherwise been considered, but mostly they aimed to bring the community voice into the process and be responsive to local health concerns.

Extensive stakeholder engagement conducted throughout every step of the process was a notable success of this HIA. NCHH worked closely with the communities surrounding the proposed facility and other key stakeholders to select and scope the project, conduct the assessment, prioritize recommendations, and share information from the final report with decision makers. During the scoping process, NCHH collected input from residents through community forums, an HIA training, and various other meetings. An additional five focus groups with residents and structured interviews with partners provided qualitative data for the assessment.

The findings and recommendations were shared with the community through a forum. The recommendations that emerged from the HIA helped the community by giving them a clear sense of how the health consequences could be minimized and by providing guidance on the “asks” for the decision makers and developer.

The HIA was used to build community capacity

The HIA increased the impacted community’s capacity to participate in decision-making in several ways. While the HIA practitioners thought they were viewed primarily as “researchers”, the community perspective showed that the HIA practitioners were key facilitators and connectors, and the initiative gained traction primarily because it provided opportunities to bring people together through community meetings, focus groups, and other activities.

The extensive meetings, focus groups, interviews, and training increased community knowledge of the health impacts of the intermodal project, the general health concerns of the neighborhood, and HIA as a useful tool for decision-making. With an understanding of the HIA findings, the community was better equipped to raise concerns with decision makers.

The process also helped build community capacity for involvement in decision-making beyond this HIA. Both the community members and practitioners felt that the community was likely to continue organizing around neighborhood issues, and were better prepared to engage with decision makers as a result of this HIA.

The HIA helped build power in the communities most impacted

It is unclear whether this HIA will improve transparency or community involvement in future government or developer decision-making processes. However, the HIA did support community organizing that elevated the concerns of residents, which led to the eventual abandonment of plans for the facility. This is evidence that both the community members and the decision makers viewed the HIA as a credible source of information.

The HIA helped achieve policy changes that reduce inequities

Since the proposal for building the intermodal rail facility was withdrawn, the community was not exposed to additional health risks related to air quality, noise, increasing traffic volume, and light at night that could worsen residents’ health outcomes. Potential health benefits to the community were unclear; for example it is uncertain whether the Morrell Park residents would have benefitted from job opportunities at the new facility.

The Baltimore-Washington Rail Intermodal Facility HIA advanced equity by:

- ◆ Engaging local residents in the decision-making process and increasing their capacity to participate in decision-making processes in the future;
- ◆ Providing local residents facing inequities, decision makers, and the developer with new information about the health impacts of the project;
- ◆ Increasing transparency and accountability in the public involvement process for this decision; and
- ◆ Contributing to this project not proceeding as planned, preventing the community from being exposed to a host of health risks in the future.

For more information, please contact Jill Breyse at the National Center for Healthy Housing (jbreyse@nchh.org).

To read the full case studies and report, please visit the SOPHIA website:

<https://sophia.wildapricot.org/resources/Documents/EquityMetricsWhitePaper.pdf>