What's wrong with conventional curbside management strategies?

Enforcement is a critical component of what we do in curbside management. It is necessary to deter illegal parking, which is largely responsible for things like congestion and dangerous driving conditions. But one mistake we commonly make as transportation professionals is thinking every ticket is the same. Sometimes the dollar value of that fine outweighs the harm that is being caused. A good example of this is expired license plates: Once someone renews their license plate, the social harm that existed ceases to be.

Unfortunately, licensing violations are often disproportionately issued in lower-income communities, and they can be issued every single day. This creates a downward spiral of debt and leads to additional punishments, like vehicle seizures.

How can cities address inequities?

Every city should measure how its current enforcement practices impact disadvantaged communities. Does enforcement align with the objective of deterring the worst types of parking violations? Traffic enforcement agencies can answer this question by examining the distribution of different types of citations across neighborhoods, including fine amounts, and then determining whether current practices correlate with the probability of infractions.

Agencies can use data to rethink how they deploy enforcement resources and distribute staff. Some areas, like a downtown zone, will require enforcement every day. Others may require only occasional enforcement.

What role can improving compliance play in enhancing social equity?

Compliance includes collections, but it is broader than just people making payments. Compliance can include strategies that help people pay fines, including extended payment plans. It even refers to strategies that allow people to easily contest a parking ticket, such as virtual hearings.

Fine waiver and forgiveness programs are another form of compliance. Cities like Chicago, for instance, have recognized that certain violations carry less social harm, so they have created waiver programs. If you get a ticket for an expired plate and show proof that you have renewed your plate within 30 days, your most recent ticket and any earlier ones will be withdrawn.

The notion of compliance is also inclusive of strategies like day fines, in which transportation agencies align fines with a percentage of a person’s daily median household income.

What best practices should cities adopt when procuring or implementing intelligent transportation tools?

Cities have unparalleled amounts of data available today as they look to improve fairness, but what city planners lack is the time to sort through all that data. Cities need to embrace business intelligence and data science to sort through these massive amounts of data from varying sources and really understand what they mean.

Transportation in the United States has a history of being weaponized, as seen by the use of freeways and train lines to redline black and brown communities. Today, we have a real opportunity to change that narrative and promote transportation as a tool for achieving fairness instead of denying it.