The Impact of Light Rail on Low Income Residents

Charlotte is going through a number of developments currently in housing and the transportation sectors. As the population continues to grow rapidly in North Carolina and Charlotte, local municipalities are continuing to look at projects that can accommodate these changes. When it comes to transportation, a lot of the focus has been on the light rail and later its extension. However, do the results of the project actually match with the anticipated outcome during the opinions discussed prior to the project?

A closer look at the developments and their impact on the low-income community may not be representative of the discussion that was happening before the vote to invest in the project. Some initial literature review on previous projects and comparative analysis has shown a mixed review of the success on the impact to help and connect low-income communities to the benefits gained by the city in building the light rail that is supposed to develop commercial infrastructure along the line. Typically, the main line of thought is that the new transportation line and access should connect communities to new job opportunities to lower unemployment and increase income.

To test for this, I plan to create a three-phase plan that begins with the literature review. I will look up literature review on studies previously done on investment in light rail and see how the impact of those investments was seen on the low-income community and if it reflected the many arguments made during the initial phase of the projects. Following this, the second step would include me creating and coding a dataset of media articles that compiles the different arguments during the debates leading up to investments in light rail in Charlotte and to see what the biggest concern of the light rail
investment was. The final part of the thesis would be to look into reports done on the effect of the light rail in Charlotte and view the possible impacts it has had on the low-income community and if it follows the effects outlined in the various literature reviews. This project holistically will be able to gather some initial idea about whether the light rail transportation has had an impact on Charlotte that reflects light rail systems in other cities and whether we can get an idea about how the low-income community may benefit from it.