AN AGENDA FOR EQUITY:
A FRAMEWORK FOR BUILDING A JUST TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM IN LOS ANGELES COUNTY

Full Report

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An Agenda for Equity:
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Introduction

Los Angeles has been a place for innovation around matters of equity for some time, particularly in the field of transportation equity. In 1997, the Bus Riders’ Union won a civil rights consent decree—the first of its kind in the entire U.S.—that led to dramatic improvements in bus service; in 2008, the Coalition of Clean & Safe Ports won the first Clean Trucks Program in the U.S.; and in that same year, MoveLA convinced a super-majority of Angelenos to tax themselves for more transit investment, through Measure R. While Los Angeles has notoriously—and now somewhat wrongly—been associated with car culture, the region has been knitting together a constituency for transportation development and transit equity.

These and so many other efforts are adding up to something bigger in Los Angeles—a sort of groundswell for transportation equity. This can be seen in the growing number of transportation advocates, the many different sectors engaging around the issues (from housing to public health to developers), and the flurry of government policies leading Angelenos to actively vision what transportation should do for the region. The City of Los Angeles is an integral member of the America Fast Forward coalition working with the federal government on transit financing, the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) is working on the state-mandated Sustainable Communities Strategy, and Metro is pursuing a regional build out of rail over the next 30 years.

Amidst all of this, there is a sense that getting our transportation system right for those who need it most—investing with equity and inclusion in mind—will actually generate stronger and more sustainable regional growth. A recent national poll highlights this: 71 percent of Americans support efforts to improve racial and ethnic equality through new investments in areas like transportation (Teixeira et al. 2013). It is not just a matter of what is right—i.e. ensuring that diesel particulates do not take out their worst excesses on young, low-income families—but building with equity is actually better for everybody. It is more than a sense, though—research is showing that equitable investment leads to sustained growth. One of many, the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland—not an institution typically associated with equity—found this to be true.

We call this phenomenon “just growth” and one of the best examples of it is transportation equity. Along with efforts at environmental sustainability, workforce development, and job creation, the wide-ranging transportation interests being put forward by a diverse constellation of community groups to a highly-fragmented government could, if coordinated, add up to something substantial. But coordination is key: What “just growth” regions in America have in common are communities that have developed a shared understanding of their region and work together for a better future.

In An Agenda for Equity: A Framework for Just Growth and Transportation Equity in Los Angeles County, we offer a landscape analysis wrapped up in a just growth frame that tries to tie together the many transportation equity-related efforts in the region. We acknowledge that translation documents are of limited use—but they have their place: They focus the work and its goals, help find common ground for
coalition building and—ever important to non-profits—may help to attract funding by articulating a compelling narrative carried by a movement. Our basic purpose is not just to translate these efforts to the field and its supporters, but also to expand the circle of those who see why equity matters at every stage of transportation planning.

We begin with an explanation of the “just growth” frame and how transportation equity fits—particularly in this moment in Los Angeles’ development. We define transportation equity and its six key issue areas, specific to L.A. As any advocate knows, getting the issues right is not enough—so we follow by considering six challenges to change and a brief consideration of tensions raised when pushing a pro-equity agenda. We close with recommendations to the field that may help L.A. move forward—and may point the way for other regions as well.

While that is what this paper is, we should be clear about what it is not. First, this document is not one of our usual efforts in which analysts at USC Program for Environmental and Regional Equity (PERE) offer tons of nerdy, detailed data. We are big fans of that approach and remain completely enthralled by maps, charts, and multivariate regressions. But we are not trying to remake the statistical wheel. We are lucky in this instance that allies like Reconnecting America have developed the Los Angeles Equity Atlas, which is a compendium of maps that include equity-oriented neighborhood data overlaid with planning corridors and existing and planned transportation—and we encourage you to take a look.¹

Second, this paper is not providing specific recommendations on the Sustainable Communities Strategies or any other current planning opportunities. PolicyLink will soon release guidelines for transportation equity that will offer more specific strategies. Equally important, we are not suggesting nor convening any new organizing tables (we understand that LA THRIVES, ACT-LA, and others are already filling that niche!); in our interview process we heard about many of these tables already in process, and we see this paper as one way to provide a general framework to integrate many of those efforts to affect ongoing policy decisions. Third, we do not pretend to resolve any longstanding conflicts between transportation equity advocates—such as that between aficionados of rail and devotees of bus—but rather we seek to offer an encompassing framework where many different efforts can co-exist and find new common ground.

By doing that, we hope that Agenda for Equity contributes towards efforts to build the Next Los Angeles. Indeed, the changes happening now signal a new orientation around how we move through the region. As we move forward with the Sustainable Communities Strategy process, as the City of Los Angeles digs in with a new Mayoral administration, and as Metro continues its transportation build out—among other things—there will be many opportunities to invest in equity to generate sustainable growth. Even as we know it will take much more than a framing paper, we aim to articulate a sort of common understanding that will help knit this work together for a stronger region.

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¹ For Reconnecting America’s OpportunityMapped: The Los Angeles Equity Atlas, see here: [www.losangelesequityatlas.org](http://www.losangelesequityatlas.org)

² Sources: 1980-2010 Decennial Census, U.S. Census Bureau; 2020-2040 demographic projections, Woods & Poole Economics
There have been considerable speculations about if L.A. is the new promised land for transportation in the U.S. But there also seems to be a “wait and see” attitude underlying these sentiments. If L.A. can pull together a common narrative that roots transportation equity not just in fairness but in the imperatives of economic growth, if we can promote strong collaborations for transportation equity, and if we can point to partnership opportunities with governments in implementation, then we can lead the nation. And while that aspiration is inspiration, we think you would agree that living in a region where equity is the norm is something worth working towards daily.

**Framing it Up: Just Growth and Transportation Equity**

**Why Framing Matters**

In the summer of 2013, President Obama began speaking publically about the relationship between growth and equity—that equity will ensure long-term growth and sustainability for the country. His message was aligned with what PolicyLink and our office (not to mention so many other researchers) had been writing about for years now. While the Right’s frame on the economy has been trickle-down economics since the days of President Reagan, in the aftermath of the recent Great Recession, a new understanding and envisioning of the economy was needed. And over the past few years, organizations like PolicyLink and its associated researchers have been putting together an alternative frame (with its own tagline): equity is the superior growth model.

PolicyLink created an effective frame for the economy—effective because it was able to be understood and adopted by another institution. “A frame is a set of assumptions that structures discourse, one that sits in the interregnum between a vision and a policy package. Frames change the way we talk—they accommodate debate but they set new terms” (Pastor and Ortiz 2009). The flexibility is particularly important, as frames allow for internal debate without jeopardizing alliances. Importantly, they focus attention, establish common ground, and help funders know where to engage.

After speaking with advocates for transportation equity in Los Angeles, we saw the utility of providing a frame. One organizer commented that he knew where his organization fit within the immigrant rights movement in L.A.—that everyone knew that story—but that there was no clear story around transportation. He was pointing to the lack of connective tissue. What strings together the so many successful (and occasionally unsuccessful) efforts? How do the organizations relate to each other? What is the broader goal of the work?

Such is the task of this paper: to identify a useful frame and fill it out. The primary audience is the advocates in the midst of this work, of which there are many and we make mentions of many of these organizations below. But this brief is also intended to be used by government staff and funders to come to an understanding of the advocates, where they are at and why. Moreover, this framing paper is intended to convey why transportation equity is good for L.A.—a point that we especially intend to make to government and business sectors.
And without further ado, the frame.

**The Just Growth Frame**

Long-standing economic theory in the U.S. has pitted equity against efficiency. But just because it is repeated does not mean that it is true. New evidence shows that regions that invest in equity have stronger and more resilient economic growth—for everyone. And we suggest that this frame fits both the work that transportation equity advocates have been doing, that it is a frame that others can latch onto, and that it is the right frame for the Next Los Angeles.

If you are interested in the literature in this field, our recent book, *Just Growth: Inclusion and Prosperity in America’s Metropolitan Regions* (2012a), has it (a shameless plug, we know!). In that research, we review a wide range of studies that find a relationship between equity and growth, including our own contributions to this field (Pastor 2006; Pastor and Benner 2008; Pastor 2000). But perhaps the most surprising contribution is work by the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland—not a typical ally of equity. In its “Dashboard Indicators for the Northeast Ohio Economy” for Fund for our Economic Future, the authors found that across nearly 120 U.S. metropolitan areas, using a factor analysis, that a skilled workforce, high levels of racial inclusion, and progress on income equality actually were strongly correlated with economic growth (Eberts, Erickcek, and Kleinhenz 2006).

That positive effect of equity on growth emerges for many reasons, including the fact that more equitable regions might be more prone to invest in widespread human capital development (in simpler terms, mass education) and less likely to engage in destructive conflicts about growth strategies (since a wider swath of the public feels like they will benefit). When mimicking an International Monetary Fund study on equity and growth at an international level (see Berg and Ostry 2011) we have found the following result: income inequality, residential segregation, and jurisdictional fragmentation are major drags on a region’s ability to achieve sustained growth (Benner and Pastor 2013).

To find out why the equity-growth relationship might exist, we went to regions across the nation and asked civic leaders what was up. We visited regions that were getting it right—growing with equity over the period of our study: Kansas City, Nashville, Jacksonville, and Columbus. We also went to places that were not getting it quite so right: Sacramento, which did well but then slipped back, Denver, which bounced back, and Cleveland, which was stuck back. Generally, we found that political consolidations, economic diversity, public sector employment, and a Black and Latino middle class tend to predict just growth regions. And the thread across all of that: “epistemic communities” make it all come together. In other words, places where people can establish a shared understanding of the region and move forward, together.

Governments and business (and the American public at-large) have been stuck in an understanding of economics and growth that did not make room for equity. And so advocates have been fighting an overwhelmingly uphill battle. But with this new body of research, new coalitions are possible. And when
you think about it, it just makes sense: Businesses have long known that a happy workforce is a more sustainable one – and that it makes sense to treat your customers, suppliers, and workers fairly if you want long-term growth. What we are suggesting here is that it is entirely reasonable for government to put equity at the heart of planning, because by doing so, the entire region will profit. Equity is not a special interest, it is a common interest.

The Demographic and Policy Context

Los Angeles has long been on the leading edge of inequality in California—never having quite recovered from the exodus of major manufacturing from the region. Community organizers have been working for two decades now to improve the quality of jobs here—to make them equitable. And with the Great Recession, statewide and national attention was brought to inequality and, now, on improving our economy. Efforts to recover like building out infrastructure coupled with the climate crisis (and associated statewide policy) are converging to create an opportune moment for transportation equity in L.A.

Here, we explain the demographic and policy context of this work. Before diving into the demographic section where we have crunched a few numbers, we want to mention that Reconnecting America recently completed a massive data compilation effort. The Los Angeles Equity Atlas offers baseline data in four areas: increasing mobility, access, and connectivity; preserving and creating affordable housing, and managing neighborhoods; supporting workforce and economic development; and investing in healthy communities. The impressive compendium of maps overlay a variety of equity-oriented neighborhood data with planning corridors and existing and planned transportation—particularly frequent bus lines, bus rapid transit, light rail, heavy rail, major roads, and highways. It is an excellent resource for regional planning. Our data takes a slightly different focus: examining the demographic realities of our region and areas where transportation equity could improve some outcomes.

Demographics

Planning for today needs to reflect the demographic realities of the Next Los Angeles. Over half of L.A. County will be Latino by 2040. From now until then, the white population will dramatically decline, the Black population will slightly decline, and the Asian/Pacific Islander population will hold constant at about 14 percent (see Figure 1).
But what does that have to do with transportation equity? Non-white communities use public transportation the most—no matter their income level. Figure 2 shows while ridership does decline with income, even at the highest income bands, Blacks and Latino immigrants have some of the highest rates. To get a sense of the income distribution in the region, half of the region’s full-time workers make less than $40,000 annually.\(^2\) It is concerning for environmentalists, health and transit advocates that U.S.-born Latinos in higher income bands have very low rates of ridership – but it also suggests that generating sustained ridership means paying attention to the immigrant users currently supporting mass transit so we keep them supporting (and using) mass transit.

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\(^2\) Sources: 1980-2010 Decennial Census, U.S. Census Bureau; 2020-2040 demographic projections, Woods & Poole Economics

\(^3\) PERE analysis of 2009-2011 IPUMS ACS (Ruggles et al. 2011) for the Los Angeles metro area (L.A. and Orange counties), full-time workers, age 16+, not in group quarters.
Transportation is and will continue to be especially important for those with higher rates of poverty. In the L.A. metropolitan region, the working poverty rates are as such: 12 percent of Latinos, 4 percent of Blacks, 3 percent of Asian/Pacific Islanders, and 2 percent of Non-Hispanic whites—in aggregate, 6 percent. In addition, 19 percent of Black households, 17 percent of Latino households, 9 percent of Asian/Pacific Islander households, and 8 percent of non-Hispanic white households do not have cars. Certain segments of the growing Asian population are also transit dependent, particularly lower-income Filipino immigrants and the Chinese and Vietnamese populations near downtown L.A. The resulting picture is one wherein racial/ethnic minorities are more transit dependent.

Figure 3 below shows the spatial relationship between households without cars and where people of color live: There are concentrations of carlessness particularly near downtown L.A., in East L.A., and near economic engines like Pasadena, Glendale, Santa Monica, and Long Beach. The crosshatch on the map shows areas that fall in the top 5th quintile of people of color—in L.A., this means that 96 percent or more of residents in these areas are people of color, and so carless communities are overwhelmingly communities of color. Figure 4 also shows a correlation between where people of color live and average travel time to work. Figure 5 is unsurprising, then: it shows the spatial mismatch between affordable housing and low-wage jobs.

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4 Source: 2006-2010 Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, American Community Survey (IPUMS ACS). L.A. Metro includes Los Angeles and Orange counties
5 PERE analysis of 2006-2010 IPUMS ACS (Ruggles et al. 2011) for the Los Angeles metro area, which includes L.A. and Orange counties. Working poverty is defined as working full-time with an income below 150 percent of the poverty level.
6 The data on lower-income Filipinos comes from PERE analysis of 2006-2010 IPUMS ACS for the Los Angeles metro area (L.A. and Orange counties) based on persons 16+ who worked last week. Data limitations prevented us from measuring transit dependency in Chinatown, Solano Canyon, and Lincoln Heights, but community partners report high transit usage.
Figure 3 - Share of Households without Cars, Los Angeles County, 2006-2010

Figure 4 - Average Travel Time to Work, Los Angeles County, 2006-2010

7 Source: 2006-2010 IPUMS ACS. Note: Areas in gray are missing data. High people-of-color (POC) tracts are tracts with 96 percent or more POC - which represent the top fifth of Census tracts by percent POC.
So, transportation is both mostly used by and needed by people of color. The literature on transportation justice has been built around the primary importance of race when it comes to transportation outcomes (R. D. Bullard, Johnson, and Torres 2004; R. D. Bullard and Johnson 1997). The implication, then, is that transportation equity for just growth will need to consider outcomes by race, not just income—not to mention jobs and housing.

Policy Landscape

The opportunities to invest with equity in transportation are many. The current transit build out made possible by Measure R is being equated to the highway build up in the post-WWII period; this build out will fundamentally reorient how we get around the region. By 2014, five new light rail and subway lines will be under construction with a strong focus by government, community actors, and developers on transit-oriented development and transit-oriented corridors (Reconnecting America 2013). The region is ripe for an infusion of equity in our transportation planning—and it is just for this reason that one organization, LA THRIVES, actually formed.

Some the major policies and regulations that are currently impacting the transportation equity landscape in the region (with the geography of the “region” sometimes the six county area, sometimes L.A. County, and sometimes the City, depending on the opportunity) include:

8 Source: 2006-2010 IPUMS ACS. Note: Areas in gray are missing data. High people-of-color (POC) tracts are tracts with 96 percent or more POC - which represent the top fifth of Census tracts by percent POC.
• **Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) 2016 update**

SB375 mandates that each regional metropolitan planning organization (MPOs) in California creates a “Sustainable Community Strategy” (SCS) plan to integrate transportation, land use, and housing policies as a means of achieving emission reductions. The first round of SCS planning did not receive rave reviews (for example, see Eaken, Horner, and Ohland 2012) anywhere in the state, but the 2016 process is a chance to improve.\(^9\) SCAG runs this process for our six-county region but has limited power—which we discuss in the “Los Angeles Matters” section.

• **Measure R**

Since 2008, sales tax from L.A. County Measure R has been providing funds for transportation project build outs—a projected $40 billion over the next 30 years. They are a mix of road, rail, bicycle, and other projects—and there are many opportunities to put forward a transportation equity framework as these projects are planned and built. Some of the more major rail projects include the Exposition and Crenshaw/LAX Metro rail lines. If the America Fast Forward Coalition is successful, it will help speed up this rail build out.

• **New Mayor, New Priorities**

Filling the big shoes of “the transportation mayor,” newly-elected City of L.A. Mayor Eric Garcetti has not made clear his transportation priorities, beyond the first Executive Directive establishing the ‘Great Streets’ program and his campaign promises. His predecessor created the Transportation Corridors Cabinet to coordinate the transit project underway and develop transportation corridors, not just transit-oriented districts (TODs), along with being a champion for the 30/10 initiative which later rolled into the America Fast Forward effort. Will Mayor Garcetti carry the transportation torch?

• **Health & Wellness Chapter of L.A. City General Plan**

The City of L.A. is developing a Health & Wellness Chapter for the City’s General Plan—an entirely new chapter. A Health Atlas has already been developed—with the L.A. City Planning Department is in the middle of extensive community outreach efforts—wherein equity concerns can be voiced.\(^10\) The goal is to set a long-term vision for health in L.A. and highlight the relationship between health and planning.

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An Equity Framework for Regional Transportation Planning

Research shows that equity is a key element to regional growth and resilience. In the social movement crucible that is Los Angeles, the transportation equity strand has been an important part of that and a focal point of success—from the 1996 Civil Rights Consent Decree to the 2008 Clean Trucks Program. We found six cross-cutting elements that comprise transportation equity and a further six elements needed to “get equity done.” But, to kick off we begin with a definition that guides the entire framework.

Defining Transportation Equity

Transportation equity, in Los Angeles, can be defined as:

1. **Equitable access** to quality, affordable transportation options and so employment, services, amenities, and cultural destinations;
2. **Shared distribution** of the benefits and burdens of transportation systems and investments, such as jobs and pollution, respectively; and
3. **Partnership in the planning** process that results in shared decision-making and more equitable outcomes for disadvantaged communities while strengthening the entire region.

This report seeks to reconcile definitions of equity stemming from the broad range of issue areas within transportation planning and policy, including issues as broad as transit-oriented development, active transportation, goods movement, and beyond. The elements are wide-ranging, as can be the definitions—for a sample, see the “Definitions Matter” box below. The definition we offer above is a synthesis of what we have seen in the literature and heard from advocates in L.A. It incorporates the importance of outcomes—both benefits and burdens—as well as participation, which we detail further, below.

However, if we were to make the definition even more concise, we would make it: People Matter (and, yes, it is partly because it goes along nicely with the other elements that “matter” below). Mark Brenman and Thomas Sanchez (2012) make this point: The entire purpose of planning and government is really people,

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**Definitions Matter: Sample Definitions**

- **Transportation equity:** access to transportation options that meet their needs and allow full access to quality jobs, services, parks, schools, and healthy foods. - Coalition on Regional Equity

- **Transportation justice:** Equitable distribution of transportation benefits throughout the region; Accountable decision-makers; and Effective leadership from low-income communities and communities of color in transportation decision-making processes. – Urban Habitat

- **Equitable Transportation-Oriented Development:** An intentional approach to TOD planning development that ensures that the coordinated transportation, urban design, land use, development and investments made near light rail and bus rapid transit, and the existing bus network, are directly benefiting low- and moderate-income households and connecting them to opportunities to improve the quality of their life. – Pollack (2012)
and infusing planning with social equity makes that real. It is easy to get caught up in the mechanics of rail systems, bus lines, bike lanes and so on—but at the end of the day the bottom line is whether or not peoples’ lives are improved by our transportation investments and systems.

It’s also clear that we need to lift up the concerns of people of color. The just growth frame makes this clear; in fact, in the book that one of us co-authored (Benner and Pastor 2012), the presence of a minority middle-class was a condition that went along with growth and a sustainable economy. But it’s also the case that our demographic future will be more diverse and so the future for all of us is threatened by the fact that economic and social outcomes for people (children) of color typically fall below those of non-Hispanic whites. Preparing for the future means addressing equity, including racial equity. The complexities of transportation can often put people behind budgetary restraints or planning codes, but people should be front and center.

**What to Include When Considering Equity?**

In this section, we provide a brief overview of the issue areas that fall under the umbrella of transportation equity in Los Angeles. Traditionally, planning processes have siloed issues and projects—one agency tackles land use while another takes on transportation—but this approach misses the interconnectedness of the different systems that together make regions work. To ensure equitable access and a fair distribution of both the benefits and burdens of transportation projects, those participating in regional planning would do well to take a holistic approach—both in terms of connecting the issues and also the often-disconnected projects (Sanchez, Stolz, and Ma 2003). While a new freeway may connect suburbs to the urban core, how will it affect the environment and health of local residents? While downtown development may help create job centers, how will people without cars access those jobs without adequate transit options?

Why then have we separated the issues into money, mobility, housing and development, health and environment, jobs, and goods movement? We do so for purposes of clarity and to make sure we capture the important threads of this work highlighted in the literature and in interviews with agency staff, policy advocates, and community organizers. For each issue area, we explain why it matters for equity, how it has played out in Los Angeles, and provide examples of related efforts and campaigns in that area of work. (One disclaimer: There are so many excellent examples that we could not possibly include them all. So we ask for your grace and understanding of our omissions.)

We think it is also useful and brings further analytical clarity to categorize these issues areas by the three parts of our definition of transportation equity. Money, mobility, and development focus on the first part: equitable access to quality, affordable transportation options and opportunities. Development, health / environment, jobs, and goods movement focus on the second part: shared distribution of the burdens and burdens of transportation investments. The next section of this framework, which talks about “getting it done,” speaks to the third and final part: authentic participation in planning processes.
1. Money Matters

Disproportionately financing highways, failing to increase the gas tax, and continuing to subsidize cars leaves alternative transportation modes, and those who depend on them, with few resources. But amidst dwindling funding from the federal and state governments, Los Angeles has actually increased opportunities for those without cars—predominantly low-income people of color—by becoming a “self-help region.” That is, due to voter-approved propositions like Measure R, which organizations like MoveLA campaigned for, 67 percent of the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority’s resources come from local sources, like taxes.

Transportation financing is made up of a complex web of local, state, and federal dollars. Not only do government agencies have to jump through hoops to obtain funding—either from higher levels of government, from taxes, or through other revenue sources—they then have the difficult task of allocating their limited transportation resources among the different infrastructure types and modes that are necessary for providing residents with equal access to necessary transportation options. But when we follow the money, inequities emerge.

Federal funding favors automobiles and highways over alternative modes like public transit, biking, and walking. Specifically, the federal surface transportation program earmarks 80 cents of every federal transportation dollar for highways, leaving only 20 cents for public transportation (R. Bullard 2003; Sanchez, Stolz, and Ma 2003). Since the costs of owning an automobile are high (about $5,000 annually), low-income people are more likely to depend on alternative modes like public transit (R. D. Bullard, Johnson, and Torres 2004; Cambridge Systematics, Inc 2009). Those who use the L.A. County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro) bus and rail services to commute are largely concentrated in the lowest-income quartile. Moreover, 89 percent of these transit riders are people of color, a majority (67 percent) of whom are Latino (Ong and Jimenez 2011). This auto-centric funding leaves those who are transit dependent—predominantly low-income communities of color—without adequate services and infrastructure.

Car users also receive less obvious subsidies that take away resources for alternative modes. First, free parking for cars drives up the costs of urban development and encourages urban sprawl (for more on this topic, see Shoup 2011). Additionally, states like California have historically used the gasoline tax to supplement the cost of public transit. But as cars become more fuel efficient, and revenue generated by the gasoline tax dwindles (since the federal government has not raised the gas tax since 1993—not even to match inflation), county and state governments are turning to sales taxes which is a more regressive tax, meaning they hit low-income people the hardest (Elgart 2013; Sanchez, Stolz, and Ma 2003; Sciara and Wachs 2007). By failing to increase gasoline taxes, disproportionately financing the expansion of highways, and continuing local planning practices that require free parking, federal, state, and local governments are subsidizing automobile drivers at the expense of largely low-income transit riders, cyclists, and pedestrians.

In response to the disparity in financing and dwindling federal dollars, Angelenos have transformed Los Angeles into the poster child of a “self-help” region. In 2008, transit advocacy organization MoveLA led an effort to identify new sources of funding to meet L.A.’s transit needs. Ultimately, partly through
an effective communications strategy with voters making clear that local taxes would go to tangible transit projects in their neighborhoods, a coalition of business, labor, and health advocates pushed for and won the passage of Measure R, a ballot measure that raised the L.A. County sales tax ½ a cent for 30 years. Seventy percent of the revenue generated from Measure R will be invested in transit improvements. Today, federal and state monies only make up 12 and 21 percent of Metro’s operating budget, respectively, whereas the last 67 percent is made up of local sources, including Measure R revenue (Elgart 2013).

2. Mobility Matters

Disparities not only exist between motorists and non-motorists, but also between train users and bus riders, bus riders and cyclists, cyclists and pedestrians. Ensuring mobility for all Angelenos is essential to providing equal access to opportunities. In Los Angeles, organizations like the Bus Riders’ Union, the L.A. County Bicycle Coalition, and Safe Routes to School are working to level the playing field by holding Metro and other public agencies accountable to devoting resources to support bus line development, bike lanes, and better sidewalks—particularly in low-income communities with less access to cars.

Increasing mobility, or enhancing the range of adequate transportation options to get from points A to B, is key to increasing access—a key piece of achieving transportation equity. Here, we dig into four aspects of mobility in which inequities exist—transit, active transportation, age, and culture—and some ways to address them.

In Los Angeles, public transit includes an expansive and diverse range of options that provides an alternative to those without access to a car—including local bus lines, bus rapid transit, light rails, subways, and long-distance commuter rail lines—but not all modes are created equal. In addition to the funding tug-of-war between cars and transit, there are disparities between bus and rail spending. This disparity stems from the mandate that federal transit funding must be used for capital spending—that is, new projects—rather than operational spending. And because rail requires more capital investment—primarily in the form of infrastructure—and buses require more operational support—primarily in the form of labor—this funding mandate favors rail construction over bus service (Taylor and Samples 2002). Indeed, local governments have increasingly tried to woo suburban commuters out of their cars and on to transit through capital spending on attractive new rail lines in the interest of reducing congestion and air pollution but at the expense of bus service. In fact, over the last decade, rail transit capital and operating subsidies per urban resident have risen 16 percent, and equivalent bus subsidies per resident have fallen 4 percent (Iseki et al. 2012).

This bias toward spending on rail has serious implications for equity. First, while transit riders in general are more likely to be minority and low-income, bus riders are even more so. In Los Angeles, over 90 percent of bus riders are people of color and the median income of bus riders is $14,423 annually. By contrast, 82 percent of rail users are people of color and the median household income of those who use rail is $26,250 annually (Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transit Authority 2012). Second, by devoting transportation resources to high-cost rail projects in the suburbs rather than to more cost-effective bus service in the urban areas, we are favoring low-density, high-income neighborhoods over
high-density, low-income ones. Moreover, this limits transit-dependent communities’ access to employment and educational opportunities (Garrett and Taylor 1999). Ultimately, increased investments in rail and subsequent cuts in bus service disproportionately benefit higher-income, white transit riders.

Biking and walking also play a critical role in the mobility of low-income Angelenos without access to cars, but, like bus riders, cyclists and pedestrians receive disproportionately less transportation resources and policy attention than rail and highways. Contrary to popular opinion, nearly one fifth of all trips made in L.A. County are on foot or by bicycle (Elgart 2013). But in many of Los Angeles’ low-income neighborhoods, where much of this biking and walking takes place, the physical environment poses safety risks. Specifically, while low-income people, minorities, and recent immigrants are more likely to bicycle or walk to work (Day 2006; Mannos 2012; Chatman and Klein 2009), these populations are at higher risk of collisions in their communities due to higher traffic volume, lower levels of car ownership, and higher density. Uninsured status and race are also “linked to increased risk of mortality” from pedestrian crashes in our region (Southern California Association of Governments 2012). The map in Figure 6, produced by the L.A. County Bicycle Coalition, shows the correlation between lower-income areas, fatalities, and a relative lack of bicycle infrastructure in locations where collisions are prone to occur in the City of Los Angeles.

A third sub-area of mobility is sensitivity to the needs of particularly vulnerable populations who face extra barriers: youth, seniors, and people with disabilities. Youth in our region face particular challenges: Since children in L.A. County are much more likely to walk to school than ride the school bus—which is the opposite of national trends—it is critical to ensure adequate walking infrastructure to minimize accidents. L.A. County children walk and take transit to school at much higher rates (32.3% and 3.8%, respectively) than at the state level (24.3% and 2.7%) and national level (10.7% and 2.1%). Conversely, L.A. County children ride the school bus at a much lower rate (7.7%) than children at the
state level (13.1%) or the national level (37.1%) (McGuckin). So, providing adequate infrastructure for walking and sufficient transit options is of particular importance for our region’s youth.

**In the face of these equity concerns, Angelenos are fighting for and winning campaigns to better serve bus riders, cyclists, and pedestrians.** First, Los Angeles has been at the epicenter of the conflict between bus and rail—and has consequently blazed the trail to addressing transit inequities. Like many transportation authorities, Metro has a history of investing more in rail projects at the expense of the bus system—which has obviously led to tension with predominantly low-income bus users. Out of this emerged the Bus Riders Union (BRU), which has been a major player in efforts to ensure that public transit in L.A. continues to serve low-income communities. The most seminal example of this is when the BRU took Metro to court in 1994 in response to excessive fare hikes. After proving that Metro had created a two-tiered transit system in which suburban, largely rail riders were being subsidized $21 per ride versus $1.17 per ride for bus passengers, the BRU won a civil rights consent decree (Klesh 2000). The BRU’s use of legal action is one of the key strategies that other groups across the country have used, mostly because that is the main avenue for community groups to address inequity in transportation.

There are also organizations in our region, such as the L.A. County Bicycle Coalition (LACBC), L.A. Walks, and ACCION Westlake, working to address safety for low-income and minority pedestrians and bikers. For example, the LACBC seeded City of Lights, now known as the Multicultural Communities for Mobility (MCM), which advocates with immigrant—typically day laborer—cyclists. This subgroup often cycles because of their very low income and lack of licenses (Mannos 2012). MCM has distributed free lights, helmets, and gear; provided maintenance and legal workshops; worked with jornaleros (day laborers) to get bike racks installed in key locations; supported the establishment of a jornalero-led repair shop; and successfully advocated for the addition of equity metrics in the 2010 City of Los Angeles Bike Plan (Ciudad De Luces / City of Lights 2010).

Safe Routes to School (SRTS) is also working to address active transportation needs, particularly of L.A.’s youth. Partnering with the Advancement Project’s Urban Peace program, SRTS is adapting its work to the unique concerns in Watts, where kids have to cross through gang territories to get to school (Advancement Project 2013). The L.A. Department of Health Policies for Livable, Active Communities and Environments (PLACE) program funds and supports policy with the goal of developing healthy, safe and active environments for all L.A. County residents. For example, it has funded the City of Glendale and the LACBC to further a Bicycle Master Plan.

3. **Housing and Development Matter**

Transit-oriented development (TOD) can get people out of their cars and onto transit by locating housing and jobs closer to bus stops and train stations. It can also increase real estate values which displaces low-income residents and small business owners. In response, organizations like Strategic Actions for a Just Economy (SAJE), Trust South L.A., Koreatown Immigrant Workers Alliance (KIWA), and Southeast Asian Community Alliance (SEACA) are working to implement anti-displacement policies and leverage TOD investments in order to benefit existing residents through the construction and preservation of affordable housing.
Providing equal access to opportunities is not just about increasing peoples’ mobility; it is also about increasing peoples’ proximity to jobs, schools, parks, grocery stores, and so on. Since transportation infrastructure connects people to employment and educational opportunities, it can both determine and limit where people live and work; in this respect, it is as if “transportation policy is housing policy” (Menendian 2013). If nothing else, when it comes to achieving transportation equity in Los Angeles, housing and development matter.

In response to the negative effects of sprawl over the last half century—predominantly, racial segregation, concentrated poverty, and the jobs-housing imbalance—some jurisdictions have adopted policies to encourage “smart growth” in the form of dense development close to transit services in urban centers. The goal of this type of development—often referred to as Transit-Oriented Development (or TOD)—is to shift development toward urban areas to provide people with greater access to housing, amenities, and alternatives to driving. This can help to reduce the number of car trips and allow residents to reduce their transportation costs and greenhouse gas emissions, while simultaneously locating them closer to jobs and other amenities (Kirkeby and Pappas 2013; Pendall 2012; Pollack, Bluestone, and Billingham 2010).

While this type of development has the potential to benefit traditionally underserved communities in urban centers, TOD also has the potential to displace existing low-income residents. Increasing the desirability of real estate in a neighborhood can increase housing prices, which can push low-income residents out (Kahn 2007; Pollack, Bluestone, and Billingham 2010). While housing and transit improvements are necessary in these urban communities, which have experienced systemic disinvestment for decades, measures must be put in place that ensure existing residents benefit from, or capture the value of, investments in their neighborhoods. This is not only necessary to achieve equity, but research has shown that TOD may not necessarily result in greater transit use because new residents are likely to be wealthy and travel by car—which is troubling not only for those concerned about social justice but also for those focused on getting people out of their cars and onto alternative modes (Duncan 2011; Pollack, Bluestone, and Billingham 2010).

And the same goes for local businesses, too. Not only is there concern about the displacement of residents as a result of TOD, but there is concern that small businesses are also at risk. For instance, in June 2013, the new owners of buildings near the planned Leimert Park station on the Crenshaw Line (Metro’s light-rail extension into South L.A.) did not renew leases for the long-tenured Black-owned businesses, many of which contributed to making the area L.A.’s Black cultural hub (Williford 2013).

In neighborhoods across Los Angeles, however, community-based groups are organizing residents to address the risk of displacement near new rail stations. One recent example is the work that TRUST South L.A. has spearheaded around the Vermont Expo Line station in South L.A. In 2012, TRUST acquired Rolland Curtis Gardens, an apartment building that had been designated as affordable housing since 1981 but was in danger of being sold by its private owner to be converted to market-rate housing. TRUST helped to organize residents and coordinated with foundations and the affordable housing
developer Abode Communities to acquire the property and facilitate a participatory design process with residents of Rolland Curtis Gardens and the surrounding neighborhood.

Another example is the work of Strategic Actions for a Just Economy (SAJE) and the UNIDAD Coalition to hold the University of Southern California (USC) accountable to the potential displacement of residents as part of the institution’s 20-year development plan (while not strictly related to transportation, this is a development that was deeply impacted and facilitated by the light rail extension—with three stops—near USC). Working—well, struggling but in a way that eventually worked out—with USC, organizers and community members were able to negotiate a community benefits agreement, complete with $15-20 million in affordable housing for the neighborhoods surrounding USC and a legal clinic for tenants (Strategic Actions for a Just Economy 2013).

A third example comes from the recent work of the Southeast Asian Community Alliance (SEACA) and Public Counsel around the Cornfield Arroyo Seco Specific Plan (CASP). CASP - a plan to create the City’s first comprehensive Transit Oriented District - designated new zoning standards to encourage high-density, mixed-use development in an already transit-rich neighborhood. However, CASP did not adequately plan for affordable housing despite being located in one of the poorest neighborhoods in the City. In short, CASP would make the community ripe for gentrification. Through extensive organizing, policy advocacy, and research, SEACA and Public Counsel crafted an alternative proposal that set a new precedence for affordable housing policy in Los Angeles through the creation of a super density bonus program and a Floor Area Ratio (FAR) bank. Working with land use consultants, they were able to show that their proposal best met the City's goals and ensure that Chinatown and Lincoln Heights residents will now share in the value added from transit investment in the area.

Finally, in light of the recent demise of California’s Community Redevelopment Agencies (CRAs), it is more important than ever before that agencies like Metro, which invests in development around transit stations, include affordable housing in plans. Currently, organizations including the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy (LAANE) are working with union partners to pass California Senate Bill 1, which does just this: it would help incentivize development around transit while protecting jobs and housing for low-income residents and avoid raising taxes or diverting money from schools or firefighter services. SB1 would shift redevelopment from blight clean-up—the purpose when CRAs were created in the 1940s—to capturing the value of investments for local residents.¹¹

4. Health and Environment Matter

AUTO-CENTRIC DEVELOPMENT HAS LED TO DANGEROUS LEVELS OF POLLUTION AND SEDENTARY LIFESTYLES THREATENING OUR ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC HEALTH. LOW-INCOME COMMUNITIES SUFFER THE MOST. IN RESPONSE, GROUPS LIKE THE L.A. COLLABORATIVE FOR ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH AND JUSTICE ARE WORKING TO LIFT UP THE ISSUE AND REDUCE THE POLLUTION ASSOCIATED WITH HIGHWAYS IN OUR MOST VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES. OTHER GROUPS LIKE THE COMMUNITY HEALTH COUNCILS, INC. ARE WORKING TO ADDRESS PROBLEMS LIKE OBESITY THROUGH INFRASTRUCTURE AND PROGRAMS THAT ENCOURAGE ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION, LIKE WALKING AND BIKING.

¹¹ For more, see LAANE’s webpage on SB 1, here: [http://www.laane.org/projects/sb1/](http://www.laane.org/projects/sb1/)
Some of the greatest transportation concerns are the adverse environmental and health burdens that the infrastructure and vehicles—particularly, highways, automobiles, and trucks—place on our communities. Much evidence shows that emissions from vehicles cause air and water pollution and, consequently, health conditions, such as respiratory problems, cardiovascular difficulties, certain cancers, reduced lung function, and even premature death (Human Impact Partners 2011). For example, adults living in neighborhoods with high volumes of traffic have between 20-34 percent greater risk of getting lung cancer than those who do not (Physicians for Social Responsibility-Los Angeles 2013). And in the Los Angeles region—as in most places across the country—low-income people of color are more likely than affluent white people to live near freeways (Ash and Fetter 2004; Gunier et al. 2003; Morello-Frosch, Pastor, and Sadd 2001; Pastor, Sadd, and Morello-Frosch 2007). In California, children of color, particularly those in low-income families, are particularly vulnerable to health risks associated with traffic-related emissions because they are three times more likely to live in high-traffic areas than white children (Gunier et al. 2003). Moreover, African-American and Latino children in the Los Angeles Unified School District are burdened with a higher lifetime cancer risk from air toxics than children in other communities (Pastor, Jr., Sadd, and Morello-Frosch 2002), and research has found that children living in congested urban communities are exposed to more pollution from school buses on the ride to and from school than their more rural counterparts (Fitz et al. 2003).

Another major health equity concern in low-income communities of color is obesity and medical conditions like diabetes. Planners and health advocates are increasingly encouraging the expanded use of active transportation modes—like biking and walking—to get people out of their cars and moving toward healthier lifestyles (Day 2006; Human Impact Partners 2011; Southern California Association of Governments 2012). Many researchers agree that physical activity and reducing the time spent driving in cars has a positive effect on health (Transportation Research Board 2005; Lopez-Zetina, Lee, and Friis 2006; Flournoy 2002; Task Force on Community Preventive Services 2002). These safety concerns and perceptions of unsafe neighborhood conditions—as well as a lack of nearby parks, employment, and amenities in low-income areas—may be contributing to higher rates of exercise-related illnesses among low-income communities and communities of color (Day 2006; Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies / PolicyLink 2004). Research shows that levels of obesity and overweight continue to be higher among low-income, Black and Latino communities, in part due to physical inactivity (Day 2006 citing; Crawford et al. 2001; Drewnowski and Specter 2004; Kumanyika 1993). Researchers and advocates argue that removing barriers, like unsafe traffic conditions, is key to encouraging physical activity among low-income and minority communities (Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies / PolicyLink 2004). A recent L.A. Times article reported, “More than one-third of motor vehicle deaths in this city involve pedestrians. That's one of the highest rates in the country, and it just keeps growing” (Banks 2013).

The good news for L.A. is that we have environmental justice organizations (such as Communities for a Better Environment, East Yard Communities for a Better Environment, the Coalition for Clean Air, and the Green L.A. Coalition) as well as health-focused groups (such as the Community Health Councils and the Prevention Institute) taking on these issues. As an example, to address these environmental and
health equity concerns, groups like the Los Angeles Collaborative for Environmental Health and Justice—a coalition of academics and community organizations—has been employing community-based participatory research and scientific evidence to advocate for environmental, health, and economic justice in low-income L.A. communities since 1996. Their strategy of “ground truthing”—or the direct engagement of residents in measuring the community’s exposure to toxins “on the ground”—revealed that governmental databases failed to include all of the types of sensitive land uses and sources of pollution that community members identified. Ultimately, the collaborative has found that when accounting for the cumulative impacts of emissions created by transportation and other pollution emitting facilities, low-income and minority communities in Los Angeles are far more overburdened than publicly-available data would suggest.

5. Jobs Matter

As one of the leading regions in making transportation investments, Los Angeles has the potential to bring good, green jobs to the region, with employment possibilities ranging from manufacturing to construction to operations. An example of this type of effort is that of the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy, which has figured out a way to leverage transit dollars to create jobs in the neighborhoods that need them the most by inserting incentives for domestic hiring and building domestic manufacturing facilities into Metro’s procurement policy.

In this section, we raise the importance of leveraging transportation investments to benefit Angelenos through the creation of quality jobs—ones that pay living wages to meet the needs of families and lift people out of poverty. (For discussion of creating access to jobs, another critical part of achieving transportation equity, see the “Development Matters” and “Mobility Matters” sections above.) There are three main challenges: First, good jobs associated with transportation investments—like those in vehicle manufacturing or infrastructure construction—are either going overseas or being outsourced to contractors who often pay insufficient wages with no basic benefits for workers or families. Second, it is not just about creating the jobs; it is about creating space for the jobs. In urban areas like Los Angeles, residential and commercial land uses are swallowing up much-needed industrial land for manufacturing. Finally, even if we create jobs, and make room for the jobs, many of the jobs associated with transportation-related manufacturing require specialized skills, which workers often lack without adequate training resources (USC Program for Environmental & Regional Equity et al. 2012).

Recently, however, advocates in Los Angeles have taken on the issues that hinder the creation of good, green jobs. For example, the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy (LAANE) and others have helped to create a groundswell of support for Metro to change procurement process and require companies bidding on Metro projects to describe the number and quality of American jobs they would create, and how they would do it. As a result of this new procurement requirement, in January 2013, Metro awarded a $305-million contract for 550 clean-fuel buses to a Canadian company with manufacturing plants in the U.S. (Nguyen-Perez and Knapik 2013). LAANE is now seeking to take the lessons learned here and go national with an approach that will develop and offer a tool called the “U.S. Employment Plan.”
Meanwhile, efforts in Los Angeles have gone beyond the manufacturing side of things. In January 2012, unions and advocacy groups including LAANE pushed Metro to adopt its Construction Careers Policy with a Project Labor Agreement with a Target Hire Program. This policy ensures that as part of Metro’s ambitious rollout of a 30-year, multi-billion dollar transit plan, it will generate 23,400 construction jobs with 40 percent of these set aside for those living in poverty. The policy is the first of its kind and affects many current projects under construction or in the pipeline, such as the Westside Subway Extension, the Regional Connector, and the Crenshaw/LAX line in South L.A. (Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy 2011).

6. Goods Movement Matters

Toxic diesel emissions from trucks, railcars, and ships moving goods cause particularly harmful pollution. Low-income communities of color disproportionately live adjacent to freight facilities, and innovative environmental-labor coalitions are working to lessen health, environmental, and other burdens while improving workforce conditions. Alliances such as the Coalition for Clean and Safe Ports are paving the way to address these inequities through innovative programs like the Clean Trucks Program at the Ports of L.A. and Long Beach.

So far, we have talked about transportation as a means to move people, but it is a means to move goods, too. While on the surface “goods movement” may not seem at the same level as say, “mobility” or “development,” it plays such a large role in Los Angeles that we give it its own section.

Southern California is home to the largest goods movement industry in the country, which includes seaports, airports, highways and interstates, railroads, warehouses and distribution centers. Our region is home to the San Pedro Bay Ports (the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach), which, combined, make up the largest container port complex in the United States and the eighth largest in the world (Southern California Association of Governments 2012; World Shipping Council 2012). Goods movement, therefore, plays a key role in our region’s economy; in 2010, goods movement-related industries employed 2.9 million L.A. region residents and contributed $253 billion to the regional GDP (Southern California Association of Governments 2012).

While freight transportation infrastructure is necessary to move goods and keep our regional economic engine running, there is much evidence showing that freight transport between ports, warehouses, distribution centers, and retail stores poses real environmental and health threats to communities adjacent to freight corridors and facilities. The San Pedro Bay Ports are actually the single largest source of pollution in Southern California. And because goods movement industries rely heavily on diesel-run vehicles—namely ships, trucks, and trains, which release hazardous particulate matter into surrounding areas—residents living by trade hubs and along freight transportation corridors disproportionately suffer from health problems (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency 2009). For example, according to the Natural Resources Defense Council, the cancer risk from diesel pollution is 60 percent higher for those living adjacent to the San Pedro Bay Ports than anywhere else in the region (Natural Resources Defense Council 2013).
But herein lies the inequity: study after study shows that the burdens of this infrastructure—the pollution, the health problems, and the disruption of community cohesion—disproportionately fall on low-income communities of color, who, as we explain above, are more likely to live and go to school adjacent to transportation infrastructure (Ash and Fetter 2004; Morello-Frosch, Pastor, and Sadd 2001; Pastor, Sadd, and Morello-Frosch 2007). And with the projected 24 percent increase in regional population by 2035, the tripling of cargo intake at the San Pedro Bay Ports by 2035, and the rapid expansion of warehouses and other logistics-related facilities in the Inland Empire, freight transportation is only expected to grow—and with it, greater health and environmental risks for the majority low-income communities of color adjacent to our region’s freight facilities (Southern California Association of Governments 2012).

But there is good news for those concerned about equity in this area: While the Los Angeles region leads the country in goods movement activity, it is also paving the way towards solutions to the health and environmental inequities associated with the freight transport industry. There are at least 15 organizations—ranging from community-based to legal to academic—working in the Los Angeles region to address these issues, and many have formed powerful coalitions that have achieved unprecedented victories (Matsuoka et al. 2011). One of these is the Coalition for Clean and Safe Ports, which brings together workers, residents, public health advocates, environmental and legal organizations in response to the negative impacts of the diesel-fueled ships and trucks that travel through local neighborhoods, as well as the unfair working conditions for truck drivers. In 2008, the Coalition successfully pushed the Port of Los Angeles to adopt the country’s first Clean Trucks Program, which bans older trucks and requires new, fuel-efficient trucks to reduce diesel emissions—and the Port of Long Beach eventually followed suit.12

Another example is THE Impact Project, a community-academic collaboration that functions as a clearinghouse for resources and information, connecting researchers with community organizers to help push for policies and programs to address the disparities and health problems facing our region’s low-income communities of color adjacent to freight facilities. In addition to helping train residents to measure pollution in their neighborhoods, THE Impact Project has held three international convenings to connect people and organizations across the world concerned about the adverse health, environmental, and community impacts of goods movement.

12 For more information about the Coalition’s accomplishments, see http://cleanandsafeports.org/. For more information on programs to mitigate diesel emissions in the neighborhoods surrounding the San Pedro Bay Ports, as well as the region, see http://www.portoflosangeles.org/idx_environment.asp and http://www.polb.com/environment/default.asp.
Challenges to Change

Nothing indicates commitment to equity as much as seeing the implementation of transportation projects actually result in fewer disparities. Too often, the equity issues highlighted above are discussed in the participation process but may not be reflected in the final project. There are many reasons for this—limited budgets, limited mandates, limited listening, limited participation—and we are not here to claim causality (although we think an imbalance of power is the thread through it all); we are here to simply state that intentions are not enough. In this section, we lift up what it takes to get it done.

1. Follow the Money through the Maze

Los Angeles is being touted as the comeback region for transportation, largely because our innovation and self-generated funding. But Los Angeles is complicated—from multiple levels of zoning in one neighborhood, to agency overlap, to power imbalances. For example, we have to navigate the Los Angeles Department of Transportation at the city level, Metro at the county level, and SCAG at the regional level. Getting transportation equity done right will mean knowing Los Angeles, being able to follow the money, and understanding how decisions in our region are made.

Despite having a reputation for poor transportation and lots of pollution, Los Angeles is actually quite the success story—especially given the jurisdictional complexity of this region. The L.A. Times, New York Post, Atlantic Cities, and Slate have all written about Los Angeles’ future as a potential transportation promised land—and one with a particular bent toward equity (Ohland 2013). In addition to generating a majority of the transit funding ourselves (see below), according to an interviewee, we have the lowest fares of any major U.S. city as well a fully integrated bus and rail system—meaning, unlike the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) District, the same L.A. Metro pass works on both bus and rail so riders can use what is most convenient rather than what is most affordable.

Los Angeles is what transportation planners are calling a “self-help region.” While most transportation money comes down from the U.S. Department of Transportation, we actually taxed ourselves through Measure R—increasing our sales tax by a half cent for the next 30 years. And if once was not enough, we almost passed Measure J, falling just short of the needed two-thirds majority.13 As a result, when our advocates go to national gatherings, they are asked how we did it—particularly as the federal leadership vacuum is forcing other regions to take funding into their own hands (Katz and Bradley 2013). While controversial, the region’s decision to tax ourselves is opening up new transportation opportunities, particularly for rail.

Our self-taxation is even more impressive given the region’s high degree of jurisdictional fragmentation. The region was built on the “Lakewood System” resulting in a Tieboutian region of 88 cities in the County and little unified leadership. As California planning expert Bill Fulton describes, “The Lakewood system helped to atomize the Los Angeles Basin into a series of small duchies with little interest in one

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13 The State of California requires a two-thirds majority to raise local taxes. As a result, measures like these are only put up for a vote when there are expected high turnouts, i.e., when there is a presidential election. Pushback on Measure J came most vocally (although not solely) from the Bus Riders Union that raised concerns about Measure J being both regressive and having the potential to negatively impact bus riders.
another or the region as a whole” (Fulton 1997, 13). Proposition 13, the 1978 constitutional amendment that significantly cut property taxes, has only deepened this fragmentation, as municipalities now war with each other over retail and commercial siting to increase their tax bases. But by its very nature, transportation planning crosses over all these “duchies.”

Along with several municipalities, many agencies are involved in the region’s transportation planning. The table, below, indicates many of the major players, including: the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG), the County of Los Angeles, the California Coastal Commission, and the City of Los Angeles. But agencies play very different and sometimes unexpected roles. For example, the region’s Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), SCAG covers 18 million people and over 38,000 square miles in Los Angeles, Orange, San Bernardino, Riverside, Ventura, and Imperial Counties. SCAG is primarily a planning agency while the transportation commissions in each of the six counties, including L.A. Metro, plan, build, and operate both the transit and the highway networks.

A word on SCAG and Metro: One of the key reasons Los Angeles cannot be directly compared to the Bay is this fragmentation between SCAG and the county transportation commissions like L.A. Metro. In L.A., each agency has clearly defined roles and responsibilities with little overlap (see Table 1 below). However, in the Bay Area, the multi-county transportation authority, Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC), and the MPO, the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG), work much more closely; in 2003, there was even a legislative motion to merge the two entities. While this motion failed, they formed an ABAG-MTC Task Force to make structural changes to enable a close working relationship. It is also important to note that, with the exception of the Metrolink regional commuter train, there is not a multi-county transportation operator that has program dollars equivalent to MTC in the Bay Area.

We explain all of this by way of highlighting that the politics of this field are complicated and that it is essential to know who does what so as to have actual impact. While SCAG cannot implement plans, it does have incredible research and planning capacities. Metro, on the other hand, is where it all gets implemented. As many transportation advocates say, “Follow the money!”

Table 1: Agency and Departmental Capacities

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<th>Agency</th>
<th>Key Capacities</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>6-County Region: Imperial, Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, and Ventura counties</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG)</td>
<td>Regional research and planning for transportation, growth management, hazardous waste management, and air quality</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>South Coast Air Basin: all of Orange County and the urban portions of Los Angeles, Riverside and San Bernardino counties</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>South Coast Air Quality Management District (AQMD)</td>
<td>Comprehensive program of planning, regulation, compliance assistance, enforcement, monitoring, technology advancement, and public education to controlling emissions so as to protect public health from air pollution¹⁴</td>
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<th><strong>County of Los Angeles</strong></th>
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<td><strong>Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Department of Regional Planning</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Community Development Commission</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Department of Public Health, Policies for Livable, Active Communities and Environments</strong></td>
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<th><strong>City of Los Angeles</strong></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Office of the Mayor and City Council</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Housing and Community Investment Department</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Department of City Planning</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Department of Transportation (L.A. DOT)</strong></td>
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</table>

A few final notes on the interplay of geography and institutions: Within SCAG, influence on decision-making processes is a bit skewed because smaller rural and suburban jurisdictions have similar representation as larger urban jurisdictions, and so smaller areas are overrepresented while larger entities like Los Angeles are underrepresented. Also, according to an interviewee, denser municipalities like Los Angeles and Santa Monica are more apt to advocate around matters like affordable TODs, while municipalities with less density may be advocating for public transit, period. Another interplay is how in a single L.A. neighborhood there may be multiple planning zones on top of each other—like specific plans and overlays.

What would help?

- Recognize L.A. as unique in its high level of fragmentation—as well as its ability to overcome that in order to tax itself for transportation projects.
- Understand agency abilities and follow the money to make sure that any advocacy is usefully targeted.

[^15]: [http://cityplanning.lacity.org/Index.htm](http://cityplanning.lacity.org/Index.htm)
2. Encouraging Authentic Participation

*Participation is sometimes seen as a set of open meetings or charrettes with strict rules and few outcomes. Real partnership in the planning process comes from a shared distribution of power, incorporation of feedback, and affected results. In Los Angeles, community groups have set a precedent for being involved in development, like East L.A. Community Corporation’s involvement in the Gold Line extension. Participation with equity groups will require principled conflict (and planners who have the soft skills to do that) but will move the region more significantly towards just growth and long-term sustainability.*

Nothing says, “We heard you” like results (Freudenberg, Pastor, and Israel 2011, S129). Transportation projects and development have standardized opportunities for public participation, but it is really their efficacy in redistributing power and incorporating feedback that is the concern in Los Angeles. Some of the most forward-thinking work on public participation comes from the environmental health field that, like transportation planning, requires significant technical expertise. The environmental health field has pioneered successful models for community working together with scientific practitioners, although as scholar Jason Corburn writes (2005) it is clear that the partnership needs to be between the community and experts to avoid government entities from absconding from their responsibilities. He and others (i.e. Minkler and Wallerstein 2008) “revalue” community knowledge as complementary to expert planning and show how it is inclusion itself that makes for better planning.

But there are conditions that make for successful public participation. Four key components are information and analysis, continuity, transparency, and integrity; together all help create trust between planners and the community (Brenman and Sanchez 2012). Another point is that communities need the capacity to participate well—and government can help increase community organizations’ capacities to that end (Freudenberg, Pastor, and Israel 2011). This resonates with what we heard from L.A. County Department of Health P.L.A.C.E. and Metro staff, who relayed how working with community organizations with capacity for participation, such as ELACC and LACBC, made the planning process much bolder. This focus on organizations and communities is consistent with the literature: formerly participation was thought of as individual (Arnstein 1969) but affective and authentic participation is now understood as engaging communities (Innes and Booher 2007; Innes and Booher 1999; Rocha 1997).

New forms of participation are also emerging: social media and youth engagement (Brenman and Sanchez 2012). Both are seen as ways to be more effective and to create long-term involvement. The L.A. Planning Department has started an interactive, online presence (http://la2b.org/) to solicit input on the Mobility Element update electronically. With the Cornfield Arroyo Seco Specific Plan (CASP), the Southeast Asian Community Alliance (SEACA) engaged its constituency—the youth of Chinatown, Solano Canyon, and Lincoln Heights.17 There are a variety of ways to involve the community that we do not cover in detail here; in general, they include identifying a broad range of community stakeholders (which goes far beyond transportation-specific groups), including members of low-income communities

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17 For more, see here: [http://www.seaca-la.org/casp-victory-video/]
of color, seeking full and authentic involvement from those communities, and identifying the processes which make sense for the project (For a detailed discussion, see Brenman and Sanchez 2012; Freudenberg, Pastor, and Israel 2011; Innes and Booher 2007; Pastor and Benner 2011, for example).

Perhaps the subconscious question for planners is: Why does participation matter in a world of tight budgets, short timelines, and a thousand special interests? Returning to the frame of this paper, a body of work shows that growing with equity translates into growing more sustainability. In an article comparing regional transportation planning efforts in Sacramento and L.A., Pastor and Benner (Pastor and Benner 2011) show that if planners who care about equity want to see it come to fruition, it requires the authentic and often messy participation of social movement groups. For example, the Los Angeles and Long Beach Ports complex had wanted to expand but was stuck in a logjam—it needed to reduce their environmental footprint. Social-movement organizations provided the community glue that helped to strike a deal that was an economic-environmental-equity win for all and moved the Port complex forward (although the implementation of those victories remains, as always, in question). The point being, though, that everyone moved closer to their goals when there was authentic participation by community organizations.

The flip side of this, of course, is when communities are not given a place at the table and development is stalled. L.A. has come to have this reputation—that is, if you want to develop here, you had better work with the community or end up dealing with the backlash. As a result of this effect, when Farmer’s Field—the proposed downtown L.A. Football Stadium—was proposed, the developer AEG was quick to consider environmental and labor benefits at the out start—and to work to get the community on its side.

Working with the community at this level of participation—which we think should be strived for—requires capacities typically not taught in planning school, but necessary to achieving long-term goals: humility and openness to community ideas, a willingness to have opposing opinions and the ability to work through them (i.e., principled conflict), and the flexibility to deal with “fuzziness” or uncertainty during the planning process to let community have a say (Pastor and Benner 2011).

What would help?

- Community involvement in all stages of the planning process (Innes and Booher 2007).
- Community input reflected in research, policy alternatives, and project outcome indicators (Brenman and Sanchez 2012; Cairns, Greig, and Wachs 2003; Innes and Booher 2007; Pollack, Bluestone, and Billingham 2010).
- Engagement in principled conflict—rather than avoiding it (Pastor and Benner 2011).
- Partnerships that are built over the course of several projects.

3. Measuring what Matters

Measurement matters because it clarifies communities’ expectations, gives government agencies and their staff defined goals, and creates a clear-cut system for tracking and accountability. There is no shortage of
possible metrics that can capture outcomes by race, income, and transit-dependency. We have been working with PolicyLink to develop a wide range of regional equity indicators and Reconnecting America and the Advancement Project offer exactly the sort of local data needed to measure progress. The experience of all these groups suggests that the metrics that secure the most buy-in are those co-created with community actors.

Metrics are a way for the community to identify what matters most, and they provide focus for planners on where improvement is needed. Indicators of equity can do better when developed and utilized at the beginning of the planning process, during the problem identification and community outreach stage, to help define the scope of the problem, and to shape possible policy alternatives. Ultimately, they should be used to track implementation, as well.

Given the technical expertise that typically accompanies transportation planning, metrics are already in place, and they typically flow from definitions and goals. Thus, when trying to identify equity metrics, we can first turn to how the government defines it. Transportation equity is rooted in federal civil rights and environmental legislation and guiding documents, which define equity in terms of both outcomes and process—the equitable distribution of the benefits and burdens stemming from a particular policy and the full involvement and participation of the community in the planning process, respectively (Sanchez, Stolz, and Ma 2003; Brenman and Sanchez 2012). These laws are flexible to allow Metropolitan Planning Organizations to tailor analyses and policies to the unique needs of their constituencies. The flexibility of these laws also means that there are no official standards, and thus there is no uniform way to measure equity.

To use this flexibility to its utmost, planners and community organizations would do well to co-create metrics. Indeed, partnerships in metrics between those with power and those working for equity brings about the best results (Pastor, Ito, and Rosner 2011). Co-creating equity indicators with communities would not only be a good add-on to metrics that already exist, but would clarify for government staff what matters when it comes to equity.

Planners we spoke with for this project were particularly keen to point out that data matters. If there were metrics that could back up why they needed to include equity, their process would be much more doable, and equity would more likely result. There are actually a bevy of possible indicators that can be found in regional planning documents—some of them getting at equity—and Reconnecting America’s Los Angeles Equity Atlas contains useful data, as well. Rather than recapping all of these indicators, we offer a few cross-cutting ones that provide a snapshot of what is out there:

- **Race/ Ethnicity:** Given the disparities by race in the region (see earlier data and any of Robert Bullard’s works on transportation justice) outcomes should reflect decreased disparities by race/ethnicity.
- **Income**: Race/Ethnicity by income matters, too. For example, while Asian Americans on a whole have transit behavior most similar to non-Hispanic whites, poorer Asian-Americans populations, are more are transit dependent.\(^{18}\)

- **Age**: For transportation, the youth and the elderly have unique dependencies and behaviors in Los Angeles; as discussed above, youth have particular needs in L.A. since so many rely on city and county services to get to and from school, unlike other places in the county and state.

- **Trips**: When measuring “trips,” most agencies only look at commutes (i.e., getting to and from work). This skews planning toward long trips, when half of our trips in L.A. are less than three miles, most of which are non-work trips. Metrics need to reflect this reality.

- **Accessibility**: Some argue that access is a better measure than mobility for assessing equity, since enhancing mobility is one piece of achieving access (Handy 2005; Litman 2013).

- **Types of TODs**: Transit-Oriented Developments (TODs) are traditionally thought of as those nearby to rail lines. However, major intersections are replete with bus lines that might be considered another sort of important TOD, particularly for those with more modest incomes.

- **Affordability**: As we explained above, another concern with TODs is the risk of displacing residents due to increased housing costs. Affordability of housing and transit services are important metrics for equity.

The following table shows sample metrics for the six issue areas of a transportation equity agenda for Los Angeles that we outlined earlier:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mobility</th>
<th>Transportation outcomes for youth, elderly, people with disabilities, unemployed, low-income earners</th>
<th>Distributional impacts of funding for transportation projects (e.g., sales taxes, HOV tolls)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Proximity of transit dependent populations to transit services</td>
<td>MPO Board representation and voting structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Distributional impacts of transit projects/programs (e.g., fare increases and service cuts)</td>
<td>Distributional impacts of taxation measures on different income groups</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Health &amp; Environment</th>
<th>Measures of air quality and incidence of negative health outcomes like asthma and cancer</th>
<th>Affordable housing provisions in all transportation-oriented plans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cumulative environmental impact of transportation system on neighborhoods</td>
<td>Impact of increased property values on local community members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bike and pedestrian collisions</td>
<td>Stability or net increase in transit-dependent population</td>
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</tbody>
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<tr>
<th>Job Generation and Access</th>
<th>Connections to major employment centers</th>
<th>Proximity to trade routes and ports</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Local hire and project labor agreements for transportation projects</td>
<td>Projects improving the environmental impacts of port-adjacent communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Available land for transportation-related manufacturing</td>
<td>Health and environmental impacts on local residents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{1}\) High usage of alternative modes like transit and biking when commuting to work, high percentages of people of color, and low-automobile ownership (Pollack, Bluestone, and Billingham 2010).

\(^{18}\) USC PERE analysis of 2006-2010 IPUMS ACS.
What would help?

- Inclusion of cross-cutting equity indicators—like race, income, and transit-dependency.
- Co-creation of transportation equity indicators between planners and community organizations.
- A focus on both process and outcomes when designing indicators.
- Tested data/indicators showing the need for equity.
- Funding for co-creation of metrics.

4. Building Government and Community Capacity

Capacity turns vision into reality. Community organizations either need planning capacities or good partnerships with those who have the skills. For example, Enterprise Community Partners worked with MoveLA, Reconnecting America, and SAJE to compile a popular education curriculum called “TOD University” emphasizing equity so community members can hold workshops and plan for their neighborhoods in an informed way. Just as important, government agencies need “equity” capacity, and a good place to start is including it in their mission statements. Also, government staff has expressed a desire for clear data to show the need for equity, metrics to measure progress, new training in participatory processes, and practical tools for turning community vision into community reality.

Building community capacity is central to participation, power, and equity outcomes (Freudenberg, Pastor, and Israel 2011). Government staff and stakeholders have seen equity stick with plans through the political process, but only when community organizations have had planning expertise and capacity to engage in the process—and government staffers agree that community capacity makes their jobs easier. For example, staff at the L.A. County Health Department pointed to the L.A. County Bicycle Coalition’s planning expertise as essential to establishing Glendale’s bicycle master plan. Metro credited, in part, the East L.A. Community Corporation—a comprehensive community development organization—with the success they had in Boyle Heights around the Gold Line Extension.

One way for community organizations to develop planning expertise is to partner with research organizations or academics. Indeed, many of the equity-driven nonprofits in L.A. have relationships with at least one of the region’s research universities (Soja 2010; Pastor and Prichard 2011). Organizations also work with private companies to develop technical capacity, such as the partnership between Enterprise Community Partners and MoveLA, Reconnecting America, and SAJE to compile a popular education curriculum called “TOD University” so community members can hold workshops and plan for their neighborhoods in an informed way—and also hold planners accountable to including equity. Ongoing support for these organizations matters—and specifically to expand capacity around transportation. And since transportation seems to be a second tier issue for equity groups (Carter 2008)—with a couple exceptions like the Bus Riders Union and MoveLA—deepening organizations’ capacity for that work could help.

But equally important to cultivating technical expertise at the grassroots level is continuing to invest in base building for the long-term. That is, to bring together neighborhood residents or other constituents who are there to weigh in on policy alternatives and keep government entities accountable.
Organizations work with their base to translate needs and hopes, *en masse*, to government planners—rather planners listening to a handful of individual and disconnected concerns.

For example, the Thai Community Development Corporation (CDC), based in Thai Town in East Hollywood, brought together multi-ethnic communities to work on the Station Neighborhood Area Plan (SNAP) when the Red Line was being extended. This and the formal distinction of “Thai Town” helped preserve cultural integrity (e.g., retained ethnic businesses), attract outside investment (e.g., streetscaping money from the Community Redevelopment Agency), and provide for a “health and wealth zone.” Today, city planners are evaluating Thai Town’s SNAP plan, and because of Thai CDC’s long-term presence, these planners have an organized community with whom to work.

On the other hand—and perhaps, unexpectedly—we heard that government capacity is nearly as important to the equity process. In one project, the L.A. County Health Department’s PLACE program did not see very bold bike planning because the city partner was short on staff and not really involved. (And bike planning is, arguably, one of the least politically contentious versions of transportation equity!) On the other hand, equity seems to be in the air in L.A., and there is broad political consensus that government should play a role in evening the playing field.\(^\text{19}\) When speaking with a representative from the L.A. Housing Department and the Planning Commission, both reflected that the vision for equity is real; the question is really about how to get it done at the “worker-bee level”.

Listening to government staff and stakeholders, there may be a few ways to increase government capacity. Part of this is cultural sensitivity and competency. For example, senior housing does not make much sense in communities where seniors typically live with their children’s families rather than on their own. It is not a given that planners will be aware of these types of cultural differences, and external funding for outreach, as well as data collection, could help. For example, The California Endowment (TCE) provided funding to the L.A. City Department of Planning for an outreach coordinator who worked closely with its Community Advisory Committee.

Another way to increase equity is to include it in departmental mandates. In talking with government staff, we heard that equity in planning is really driven by individual staff rather than the department as a whole. As a result, in our interviews we heard several places where it could get dropped along the way: from staff to managers, from political leadership to staff implementation, from departmental planning back to politicking. At least two of our interviewees reflected that no one is responsible for equity, it has no “institutional home.” Indeed, among the agencies we spoke with, equity is not in their mission statements, as seen in Table 3. Ironically, Metro, which arguably receives the most pushback from community, is the only government entity that is required to comply with a federal equity mandate (specifically, that of the Federal Transit Administration).\(^\text{20}\) This might also help to settle exactly what

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\(^{19}\) The region’s strong social movement history has something to do with this (Pastor and Prichard 2011)—and, in particular, moving some social movement leaders into government, itself. Mayor Villaraigosa, rose out of this rich tradition, as did Larry Frank, Torie Osborn, Cecilia Estolano, and others who have or did hold high-ranking positions within City government.

\(^{20}\) For more on that mandate, see here: [http://www.fta.dot.gov/civilrights/12328_5445.html](http://www.fta.dot.gov/civilrights/12328_5445.html)
transportation equity encompasses—a question asked by most interviewees, and one we hope this document helps to settle.

Table 3: Sample of Mission Statements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Mission Statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DPH</td>
<td>To protect health, prevent disease, and promote health and well-being. The DPH PLACE (Policies for Livable, Active Communities and Environments) Program, specifically, is dedicated to fostering policy change that supports the development of healthy, safe and active environments for all Los Angeles County residents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles Metro</td>
<td>Metro is responsible for the continuous improvement of an efficient and effective transportation system for Los Angeles County.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City of Los Angeles Department of City Planning</td>
<td>To create and implement plans, policies and programs that realize a vision of Los Angeles as a collection of healthy and sustainable neighborhood, each with a distinct sense of place, based a foundation of mobility, economic vitality and improved quality of life for all residents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L.A. Housing Department</td>
<td>The Los Angeles Housing Department is charged with the development of citywide housing policy and supporting safe and livable neighborhoods through the promotion, development and preservation of decent and affordable housing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCAG</td>
<td>Under the guidance of the Regional Council and in collaboration with our partners, our mission is to facilitate a forum to develop and foster the realization of regional plans that improve the quality of life for Southern Californians.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What would help?
- Including equity in government missions and mandates.
- Adopting a common definition of transportation equity.
- Increased organizational capacity to participate in planning processes while continuing base building.

5. Developing a Business Partnership for Equity

Building an unlikely alliance between economic and social actors can help shape the region for the better. Transportation equity advocates frequently articulate their hopes to work with the sector—particularly because it has unique and important development skills. Businesses, in turn, can benefit through the creation of a region that is more desirable for their workforce and from alliances that lead to speedier development processes. But business-community partnerships remain limited, partly because many business leaders continue to think that attention to equity will derail rather than undergird economic growth.

When talking with advocates about what it will require to “get it done” in Los Angeles, nearly all said that business needs to be in the mix. While this may seem surprising, many of the equity players in California have come to the understanding that business plays a big role in the “growth” part of “just growth,” and that business can be an important partner. For their part, businesses and developers find Los Angeles an attractive enough economy that they are willing to work for community benefits (Saito 2012). In the Silicon Valley, for example, the business-focused Joint Venture: Silicon Valley Network (JV:
SVN) was a moderating voice in regional economic and workforce battles—particularly as compared to the more traditional Chamber of Commerce—and worked toward human capital development and social connectivity (Pastor, Benner, and Matsuoka 2009). Part of this is because businesses and business networks that are “sticky” (i.e., that are not going anywhere) realizing that they cannot run from poverty issues and their dragging effect of the overall economic health of their regions (Benner and Pastor 2012).

In Los Angeles, there is a broad spectrum of business involvement in transportation equity—from a developer successfully dismantling an inclusionary zoning requirement to the Los Angeles Business Council (LABC) and its advocacy on workforce housing, energy efficiency, and transportation. Discerning the difference between different business actors is key for equity players. For example, the LABC supports “the expansion of the region’s transit system and the encouragement of housing development along rail and rapid bus corridors—not simply near transit stations” (Los Angeles Business Council 2013). For them, it is an issue of pragmatism—how to attract and retain the right talent to grow the region—but their goals often line up conveniently with those for whom equity is the central concern.

Partnering with business will require understanding the business perspective—and the barriers they face (Fan and Guthrie 2013a). Developers and employers want transit access for their residents and employees, but they “do not insist on it”—nor do they see it as a “need”—because transit access is only one among their many concerns, including costs, regulatory complexities, and the developers’ or employers’ familiarity with a geographic area (Fan and Guthrie 2013a, 49). Increasing awareness of the hidden costs of auto transportation, including the costs of parking construction and the impact of long commutes (among other things), can help businesses to see transportation equity as a high priority issue. While pent-up demand for transit-oriented development (TOD) is high, cost barriers and uncertainty of governments following through with plans for transit expansion often deter development from happening (Fan and Guthrie 2013b, 1; also see Levine and Inam 2004). One option is to target and engage affordable housing developers, who already use a variety of creative solutions that are applicable to TOD-related issues (Fan and Guthrie 2013a, 57–60).

Transportation equity advocates acknowledge their desire to partner with business because of their unique capacities and ways of thinking—and, in return, advocates can provide them with community cover. For firms, business-community partnerships can preempt conflict and speed along the planning and permitting necessary to move anything in a developed city. Moreover, by signing a CBA, community groups have a shared interest in making sure the development gets built—as the development is the generator of benefits (Marcello 2007). CBAs can provide political capital (helping with regulations); they can sustain support (helping with uncertainty); and they can add familiarity with a neighborhood or region—three elements that Fan and Guthrie found to be concern for TOD-developers (Fan and Guthrie 2013a; Fan and Guthrie 2013b).

What would help?
- Trading skills: business savvy for community savvy.
- Understanding the parameters businesses work within.
• Clarifying the costs and benefits of transportation expansion and its impact on the workforce.
• Working with businesses to streamline permitting and regulations.
• Increased government capacity to handle authentic participation through staff trainings and participatory research.

1. Turning Conversations into Community Change

_Few things are as frustrating as a good exchange of ideas that leads to no change on the ground. While discussing issues, research, and strategy is imperative, these conversations need to be part of a strategy to nimbly strike while the iron is hot. The Bay Area’s Six Wins Network did just this by quickly putting together an Equity, Environment, and Jobs scenario for its region’s Sustainable Communities Strategy planning process. Famous transportation planner Elvis Presley put it this way: “A little less conversation, a little more action please.” One funder was nearly as eloquent, suggesting that we need to move from a “circle of learning to a circle of action” (a phrase we borrow again below)._

This last section about “getting it done” has a simple yet critical message: timing matters. As detailed in “The Demographic and Policy Context” section, there are specific opportunities now and in the very near future that can help scale up L.A.’s wide-ranging transportation equity movement. The importance of timing is not just in leveraging policy and political opportunities; it is also about developing the capacity to respond rapidly. While it is imperative to discuss issues, research, and strategy, these discussions must quickly translate into policy change. As one funder put it, now is the time to move from a “circle of learning to a circle of action.”

In turning to action, there may be something to learn from the Six Wins Network in the San Francisco Bay Area. We know, we know...this may be a bit hard for Angelenos to swallow. L.A. is a different animal than the Bay, with different decision-making structures, different funding streams, and different histories, so we offer this example with humility and an understanding that one size does not fit all. But we also think it wise to look to other efforts that have successfully leveraged policy opportunities to advance a transportation equity agenda. We believe this example from the Bay Area offers some broad lessons that may apply to our work here in the Southland.

The Bay Area is certainly a different place. In particular, Bay Area actors may be more integrated in government processes, often because business and government have reached out more effectively. It’s also true that community groups see the possibilities in formal processes: for example, Working Partnerships USA in San Jose and Urban Habitat in Oakland run leadership institutes as a pipeline for low-income people and people of color to key government boards and commissions. These relationships have helped organizers in the Bay Area build capacity and position themselves strategically to take advantage of policy and political opportunities as they have come up.

For example, the Bay Area’s Urban Habitat formed the Social Equity Caucus (SEC) in 1998 with several strategic objectives in mind: to unite diverse players across nonprofit, public, and private sectors; to build power around a regional equity agenda; and to hold decision makers accountable to low-income communities of color. One of its core strategies is to cultivate and support effective decision makers within the government who will advance regional initiatives resulting in “concrete, measurable
improvements” for the region’s low-income communities of color (Urban Habitat 2011). The SEC holds annual workshops, some of which have included “Reforming the Bay Area’s Regional Agencies for More Equitable and Accountable Governance” and “Reciprocal Accountability: Bringing the Outside Movement Into Insider Advocacy” (Urban Habitat 2011). Through these types of workshops and collaborations, the SEC has become a vehicle for different actors and sectors to co-create and share knowledge about regional dynamics. As the academics would say, they have created a “diverse epistemic community” (Pastor and Benner 2011) to help figure out how to advance equity initiatives through government channels.

So when SB 375 passed in 2008, requiring regions to develop a Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS) to reduce carbon emissions through transportation and land use planning, the time that equity advocates spent developing capacities and strategies for action as part of the SEC and other collaborative efforts paid off. Public Advocates and Urban Habitat quickly convened the “Six Wins” Network, a diverse coalition of over 30 organizations, to fight for: affordable housing, robust and affordable local transit service, investment without displacement, healthy and safe communities, economic opportunity, and community power (Public Advocates 2013).

To achieve these wins, the Network developed their own alternative scenario for the SCS, which they called the Equity, Environment, and Jobs (EEJ) scenario, to be considered alongside four other scenarios on the table. In Spring 2013, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) and Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG)—the two regional planning agencies responsible for implementing SB 375 in the Bay Area region—adopted the community-created EEJ scenario as the “Environmentally Superior Alternative” (Public Advocates 2013). By uniting across sectors, mobilizing communities to attend every SCS public meeting, and developing the technical knowledge to create their own plan, the Six Wins Network successfully infused transportation equity into the regional planning process. But they could not have done it without building the capacity to jump on an opportunity like SB 375. In other words, they got the timing right and got the job done.

What would help?

• Nimble and flexible funding for rapid response.

**Tensions**

If all of this was so easy to whip together, it would already be happening, and there would be no need for a report like this, right? But as everyone involved knows, it ain’t so easy! Real tensions separate the thread of this work in Los Angeles, and it will take an intentional effort to move forward together for transportation equity. The realities of urban and regional planning is that working together on a broad yet nuanced agenda like this will be messy and require “principled conflict” (Pastor and Benner 2011). That is, conflict that respects the wisdom of different communities, that allows all parties to come to the table authentically—even in disagreement—leads to a deeper mutual understanding. From there, alliances can be formed and new options found.
But before we get there, we must first acknowledge what the points of conflict even are. While we do not presume to have the silver bullets that will dissolve long-standing tensions, we think pointing them out—as we have observed and heard in interviews—is a place to start. And while there are many, many challenges (progressives are always good at pointing out difficulties!), we see six key tensions:

1. **Vision vs. Capacity**
   
   Organizations and city leaders have a vision for transportation equity, but the technical capacity to carry through to implementation is not always there. For both, this is an issue of having the time, funding, and space to work on implementation. But it also brings up a few good questions. How do (and should) organizers bring on planning expertise? Is it realistic for each community-based organization to immerse itself in the complex world of planning? Should allied technical assistance groups be available for that sort of expanded capacity? If so, what is the model for all this?

   And on the flip side, how can city planners implement the vision of equity advocates and politicians? In our interviews we heard several places where equity gets dropped along the way: from staff to managers, from political leadership to staff implementation, from departmental planning back to politicking. What will it take to ensure that government staff has the capacity to implement equity and that it will make it through to implementation?

2. **Interconnected Issues vs.Disconnected Decision-makers**
   
   Transportation equity issues are interconnected, but decision-making structures are dispersed. The greatest blessing and curse of transportation equity is that it touches almost every issue and sector—although that puts equity at risk because if everyone comes to the table, the task seems too broad, and the movement is at risk of dilution. How can actors working on so many issues across the region come together with one voice to make an impact on decision-makers?

   Moreover, in L.A., which decision-maker? As noted earlier, we are a fragmented and reluctant metropolis that struggles to work together (Fogelson 1993; Fulton 1997). And yet transportation is a distinctly regional affair. Following the money will help, but there are deeper questions. It will take a regional approach to de-concentrate the burden of particulate matter from the Ports and industrial pollution from the Gateway Cities and downtown and to better locate affordable housing near job centers. But in the vacuum of an aligned regional leadership around a common vision, how will that happen? Will advocates have to continue making the rounds to all the necessary but disconnected decision-makers? How do we get on the same page?

3. **Input vs. Influence**
   
   Advocates know the difference between input and influence. A striking example comes from a different field: immigrant integration. Senator Harry Reid’s friendship with DREAM Act advocate
Astrid Silva fundamentally changed his view of immigration politics by putting a human face on the issue and bringing the Dreamer narrative alive for the senator. The question is if Metro and other decision-makers want to be influenced by the community and if they will let that happen.

To want to be influenced, decision-makers have to see that it is in their and their constituents’ best interest; that planning will be stronger with community influence in the process. We have tried to make the case in this report that community participation blended with planning expertise will better address need, will lead to buy-in in the planning process, and will help ensure strong implementation. What will it take for decision-makers to be open to messier processes that enable influence? What do those processes require? How will community organizations come to the table prepared and with an effective view of partnership?

4. Community Organizing vs. Community Development

Community developers and community organizers hold sacred roles: they are “gatekeepers” (in a positive sense) for the community. Chancee Martorell of Thai Community Development Corporation noted this, with respect to the role of CDCs, but it applies to community organizers, as well, even as they may be less focused on the built environment as on a community with common social characteristics. Both play important roles in ensuring that what government, businesses, and others are proposing for the community actually benefits the community.

The messy work of transportation equity may, however, strain some relationships in the midst of even principled conflict. CDC funding is often—although not always—tied to government funding. So if government wants to develop an area, a CDC might have difficulty pushing back too strong because they also need to cover their financial bases (Pastor, Benner, and Matsuoka 2009). Community organizers, on the other hand, are first accountable to their members and typically funded by member dues and philanthropic dollars; they have more space to pushback without consequence on politicians. How can community developers and community organizers work together for greater impact on transportation equity and ensure their distinct needs are met?

5. Power Building vs. Policy Reform

Related to organizing versus development, this tension highlights the need for policy advocacy as well as power building. Good policy ideas matter—the Mayor’s 30/10 (now America Fast Forward) policy option, the Transit Corridor Cabinet and equitable TODs (Pollack 2012), and revamping the CRA as SB1. Good policies come from smart people connected to the real needs of communities.

However, the rub comes in some impulses to simply fund policy advocacy without building the community capacity. Policy advocates are dependent on their relationships with decision-

21 For more, see LAANE’s webpage on SB 1, here: http://www.laane.org/projects/sb1/
makers (much like community developers) while community organizers may be able to push a bit harder, as may be needed, to pass a new policy or regulation. Beyond that, building power also means ensuring that the implementation happens once the policy passes, which is just as (if not more) important. Working together will also mean adjusting timelines, which are usually longer for community organizers. How can policy advocacy connect with the longer timelines of community organizing? How can inside and outside strategies work together?

6. Transportation vs. Everything Else

Of all the advocacy organizations in L.A. only a small proportion are distinctly transportation-oriented including the L.A. County Bicycle Coalition, the Bus Riders’ Union, MoveLA, Alliance for Community Transit—Los Angeles (ACT-LA), and Los Angeles Walks. Nonetheless, transportation is an issue that almost every community organization has an interest in because it touches on so many other areas of importance like health, education, and jobs. Despite its pervasiveness, transportation is almost always a second-tier issue for community organizing groups (Carter 2008).

In the world of organizing and advocacy where time is tight and budgets are tighter, how should transportation be prioritized? Talking with those involved, we heard that improving transportation systems could improve all sorts of other facets of life in L.A. If community organizations should be paying more attention to transit, how can they realistically do that with current workloads? Or, how can meaningful coalitions be built with existing transportation-focused organizations, as in the ACT-LA model?

Recommendations

First, we need to point out that Los Angeles is already doing a lot right. Funders, government, and advocates are already rallying around increasing equity in the region—even as what that means is being clarified. Advocates have a vision for transportation equity, and the breadth of community organizations involved is only increasing. Because of this, politicians are, largely, bought in to equity, even if the nitty gritty at the staff and implementation levels are yet to be worked out. And, to boot, funders recognize the importance of bringing it all together and are widening their funding priorities accordingly. As L.A. continues to build an equitable region, we think some key areas in which to focus are:

1. Integrate Transportation Equity and Just Growth Agendas

Transportation, land use, health, and the environment are inextricably linked. Some have questioned the impact on the economy—particularly pro-growth business forces. However, an increasing body of research is showing that Just Growth is sustainable economic growth. Pushing out this narrative and framing debates around Just Growth will pave the way for transportation equity conversations and projects.
2. **Know Together, Grow Together**

Regions that make progress on equity have spaces where a common understanding of equity can be created across sectors (Benner and Pastor 2012). In fragmented L.A. County, this is particularly important, especially when working with agencies like Metro and SCAG that cover large geographies. Having this space is needed for advocates but also for the region as a whole; a place for business, government, law enforcement, education, and community groups to come together to understand and vision for the region.

3. **Move from Circles of Learning to Circles of Action**

We have not yet figured out how to infuse our departments with equity and include it systematically in our planning processes. Government agencies and departments need expanded missions to include equity and tools for implementation at the staff level. One government commissioner met with community advocates in 2013 asking “How do we do this? Please tell us the way to include equity.”

Community advocates also need to be able to move nimbly into action when opportunities arise.

4. **Fund Grassroots Base Building**

Interviews and research show that communities that are organized make more effective partners in city and regional planning processes. Moreover, organized communities ensure both policies that address real need as well as accountability in the implementation process. If we want to pass equitable transportation policy and ensure its implementation, there needs to be dedicated, flexible funding for base building.

5. **Invest in Community-led Planning Expertise**

Organizations with significant planning expertise—or expert planning partners—like ELACC, SEACA, and the L.A. County Bicycle Coalition, are the very effective in working with government entities. We did not just see that but also heard that from government representatives. Funders and advocates would do well to work together to figure out how to best distribute planning expertise, whether in-house or from technical assistance groups.

6. **Look to the Bay Area (yeah, we know...)**

The Bay Area is not L.A. nor are they directly comparable. However, Bay Area advocates have had some transportation successes: they were able to pivot quickly and respond to the regional SCS/RTP process and, to boot, three elements of their Equity, Environment, and Jobs (EEJ)

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22 Bill Roschen, paraphrased, LA THRIVES “Big Table” meeting on the City of Los Angeles’ Transit Corridors Cabinet’s Draft Workplan, The California Community Foundation Joan Palevsky Convening Center, February 20, 2013.

23 A recent example of this: a coalition of community organizations and union allies came together with the governor to support the passage of Proposition 30 which brought in new revenue and staved off further budget cuts to education and services. When the Governor tried to allocate this money towards prisons, the coalition balked and the Governor changed course. http://www.stopprisonexpansion.org/
alternative were adopted into the One Bay Area Plan. We have a lot going for us, but we would do well to learn from the Six Wins network, in particular, and see how, if at all, to apply some of their lessons to our own transportation equity efforts here in L.A.

The Next Los Angeles

If you ask people—including Angelenos—about Los Angeles, a range of images seems to immediately come to mind: we are a car culture; we are committed to sprawling suburbia; we lack true civic engagement; and we epitomize the stark divisions by race and income that are now plaguing the rest of America. But is that old version of L.A. really who we are now?

Consider our massive investments in rail and bus, and the fact that young people are increasingly embracing mass transit. Consider the shift of development activity from the ex-urbs to neighborhoods bordering our central city (such as Echo Park and Koreatown), as well as the boom of residential living in downtown L.A. Consider the way in which community-based groups have risen to articulate their concerns, repositioning L.A. as a national leader in social-movement organizing. And consider the multicultural mix that is now producing new art and music (rather than riots and rebellions) as well as the multifaceted efforts to ameliorate income disparities through community benefits agreements and so much more. In short, L.A.’s organizers, advocates, government agencies, funders, and so many more are starting to transform our region into a model of a more equitable and sustainable world.

One of the leading lights of urban planning Bill Fulton once wrote about L.A. as a “reluctant metropolis”—unwilling to accept that sprawl had hit a wall, unable to recognize common connections between neighborhoods, unable to understand ourselves as a single city and a single region, unlikely to address the underlying income polarization and racial tension that twice produced civil unrest, and uneasy about stepping into our role as one of the world’s great cities (Fulton 1997).

We like to think that we may be reluctant no more. We face a formative era that could fundamentally shift how Angelenos relate to and move through the region. There will be challenges, of course—finding regional consensus, implementing what we mean by equity, keeping hard fought coalitions together, among other things—but the way ahead looks promising. With a vision for just growth as the lodestar and transportation equity as one of the pillars, Los Angeles may live up to the rumors that we are forging a new path ahead for America.

24 Indeed, driver licensing rates in the U.S. have fallen from 87 percent in 1983 to 70 percent in 2010 among 19-year olds, with young people crediting a preference for transit and cycling. (Sivak and Schoettle 2012)
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Appendix: List of Research Informants

*Advised, informed, or gave feedback on research
*Attended August 2013 research feedback session
Affiliations are based on the time of interaction.

Manal Aboelata, Prevention Institute
Jean Armbruster, L.A. County Department of Health, Policies for Livable, Active Communities and Environments
Tafarai Bayne, Trust South L.A.
Chris Benner, UC Davis
Manuel Bernal, Los Angeles Housing Department
Claire Bowin, Los Angeles Department of City Planning
Allison Brooks, Reconnecting America
Eric Bruins, L.A. County Bicycle Coalition
Diego Cardoso, Metro
Malcolm Carson, Community Health Councils, Inc.
Cecile Chalifour, Low Income Investment Fund
Jackie Cornejo, Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy
Joe Donlin, Strategic Actions for a Just Economy
Jose Fernandez, East L.A. Community Corporation
Rey Fukuda, East L.A. Community Corporation
Paulina Gonzalez, Strategic Actions for a Just Economy
Alan Greenlee, Southern California Association of Nonprofit Housing
Shashi Hanuman, Public Counsel
Zach Hoover, LA Voice PICO
Satish Kunisi, Strategic Concepts in Organizing & Policy Education
Jacob Lieb, Southern California Association of Governments
Albert Lowe, Alliance for Community Transit – LA
Bradford McAllester, Metro
Jessica Meaney, Safe Routes to School National Partnership
Menaka Mohan, Prevention Institute
Gloria Ohland, MoveLA
Orino Opinaldo, One LA/IAF and Strategic Actions for a Just Economy
Grace Regullano, Southeast Asian Community Alliance
Bill Roschen, Architect and Chair of the City Planning Commission and Co-chair of the City of Los Angeles’ Transit Corridor Cabinet
Jeff Schaffer, Enterprise Community Partners, LA THRIVES
Ann Sewill, California Community Foundation
Chanda Singh, L.A. County Department of Health, Policies for Livable, Active Communities and Environments
Beatriz Solis, The California Endowment
Beth Steckler, MoveLA
Benny Torres, Community Development Technologies
Sissy Trinh, Southeast Asian Community Alliance
Ethan Weiss, OneLA/IAF
Martha Welborne, Metro
Sunyoung Yang, Bus Riders Union
Thomas Yee, Little Tokyo Service Center