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

Full Report

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A translation document like this cannot exist without the contributions of so many people on the ground. We would like to thank all those who contributed – organizers, thought leaders, and funders – but the full list would be too long for this brief and so they are listed by name in the full report available on our website. We are honored to work with some of the most innovative social-movement builders in the nation and thank you for your tireless work to build regions that are just for all.
Los Angeles has been a hotbed for innovation in transportation equity. We successfully insisted on better bus service, pioneered clean trucking and shipping at our ports, and even taxed ourselves to expand our transit network (among other things) – and there are many upcoming opportunities to continue in this tradition.

Measure R, for example, is funding a transportation build-out across the region to the tune of $40 billion over the next 30 years, and the way in which it rolls out will have a huge impact on our physical, transit, and social landscape. Meanwhile, the Sustainable Community Strategy planning process coordinated by Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) aims to integrate transportation, land use, and housing policies as a means of achieving greenhouse gas emission reductions.

On top of it all, the City of Los Angeles has a new mayor with a deep appreciation for improving the quality of life for all Angelenos. As any advocate knows, getting the issues on the table is the first step, but it is also the case that growing the number of those who see why equity matters at every stage of transportation planning.

Transportation equity efforts by transportation advocates, housing developers, community organizers, health advocates, and others are one important part of a “just growth” regional effort. 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 big. 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.

We are in pretty heady days for transportation – but the inclusion of equity as a priority in these efforts is not guaranteed. Indeed, many of the earlier gains were, in large part, because advocates for those less advantaged in either our transportation system or our economy organized themselves to articulate and argue for an agenda that would be more inclusive. Comprehensive planning has been part of the mix but so has the nitty-gritty of mobilizing constituencies, developing ideas, and offering new and better policy solutions.

The current situation, however, presents a new and very different set of opportunities. As the nation has found itself mired in an economic crisis induced, in part, because of sharp and rising inequalities, advocates, academics, and many civic leaders have developed a common understanding that infusing equity into our planning (transformation and otherwise) will actually lead to a stronger and more sustainable region for everyone. Of course, we have to do what is right for moral and social reasons – all residents should have access to affordable transportation to work, school, and play. But it is also the case that growing with equity – what we call “just growth” – may be better for the region as a whole.

Transportation equity efforts by transportation advocates, housing developers, community organizers, health advocates, and others are one important part of a “just growth” regional effort. 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 big. 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.

While that is what this policy brief is, we should be clear about what it is not. First, this is not the complete compilation of our research in this arena. We offer a longer report on our website with many more specifics and illustrative examples; we could not possibly include them all here, so we ask for your grace and urge you to take a look at that version as well. As always, we hold out hope that the long version will eventually be made into a motion picture – this is, after all, Los Angeles – so consider this our submission to the short film category of the social activism and equity planning Academy Awards.

Second, this policy brief is not one of our usual efforts to offer recommendations on the Sustainable Communities Strategies or any other current planning opportunities. Equally important, we are not suggesting nor convening any new organizing tables; in our interview process we heard about many good organizing tables already in place, and we see this paper as one way to provide a general framework to integrate many of those efforts to affect ongoing policy decisions. Finally, we do not pretend to resolve any longstanding conflicts between transportation equity advocates – such as that between aficionados of rail and devotees of bus – that might make coming to those common tables hard (and make this brief unbearably long).

What we do hope an Agenda for Equity can do is to provide a framework to support what we see as big possibilities for the region. The potential in Los Angeles is being recognized by others across the nation – some arguing that our region is the one to look to for transportation innovation. But there also seems to be a “wait and see” attitude underlying these sentiments. If Los Angeles 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.

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1. For Reconnecting America’s Opportunity Mapped: The Los Angeles Equity Atlas, see here: www.losangelesequityatlas.org
Why Just Growth?

Long-standing economic theory in the U.S. has held that there is a tradeoff between equity and efficiency. But just because something is repeated does not mean that it is right: New evidence shows that regions that work toward equity have stronger and more resilient economic growth for everyone. We suggest that this frame fits the work that transportation equity advocates have been doing, that it is a frame that others can latch on to, and that it is the right frame for the future of Los Angeles.

Earlier research in this field was reported by the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland – not a usual equity advocate – which found that “racial inclusion and income inequality” are the most important indicators of economic growth. In the “Dashboard Indicators for the Northeast Ohio Economy,” completed for the Fund for our Economic Future, Fed researchers used a so-called factor analysis of nearly 120 U.S. metropolitan areas, and found that a skilled workforce, high levels of racial inclusion, and progress on income equality correlated strongly and positively with economic growth (Eberts, Erickcek, and Kleinhenz 2006).

This is not a one-off finding. Benner and Pastor report on a range of studies that point to the negative impact of income inequality, city-suburb poverty differentials, and residential segregation on economic growth rates, even in older industrial locales where some argue that equity should be an afterthought to rebooting the economy. And their most recent research suggests that income inequality is actually a statistically significant deterrent to sustained growth, with even more powerful impacts than factors usually seen as most important such as education and industrial structure (Benner and Pastor 2013).

So why is there a positive impact of equity and social connection on growth? In case studies conducted in regions getting it right and not so right, Benner and Pastor found that regional political consolidations (i.e. city-county mergers), economic diversity (i.e. a diversity of industries), a strong government presence, a robust community college system, and a Black and Latino middle class matter. But what ties all that together are “diverse epistemic communities” in which unlikely allies develop a shared understanding of their region and move forward together towards a common destiny (Benner and Pastor 2012). It makes sense: Places with social consensus spend more time working together than fighting apart (although unity may require some principled skirmishes to get there).

Governments and business (and the American public at-large) have been stuck in an understanding of economic growth wherein equity is a tradeoff. And so advocates have been fighting an uphill battle. But with this new body of research, new coalitions are possible. Now we can make the business case for infusing equity into development, because the economy only hums when everyone is included. Now we can make the case for government to put equity at the heart of planning, because the entire region will profit. Equity is not a special interest, it is a common one.

Moreover, Los Angeles is in need of both just growth and transportation equity. Our regional population growth will be coming from the Latino population (Figure 1), who also make up a majority of transit riders in our region. Figure 2 shows that while ridership declines as income rises, even at the highest income bands Blacks and Latino immigrants have some of the highest rates of transit use. 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.

As the era of mass immigration ends (the share of the foreign-born has been on the decline in Los Angeles for the past several years), the fact that U.S.-born Latinos in the top fifth of Census tracts by earnings are the top fifth of Census tracts by earnings by Census Tract, 2006 - 2010. Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

Note: Areas in gray are missing data. High people-of-color (POC) tracts are tracts with 36 percent or more POC - which represent the top fifth of Census tracts by percent POC.
higher income bands have very low rates of ridership. It is also startling that the use of public transit by non-Hispanic whites remains so low at every point on the income spectrum. The upshot is that we should work to serve the willing: We should build a transit system that emphasizes keeping these riders riding even as we continue trying to lure current drivers from their cars.

A diverse transportation network is especially important for those without cars, which includes 19 percent of Black, 17 percent of Latino, 9 percent of Asian/Pacific Islander, and 8 percent of non-Hispanic white, households. Figure 5 shows the spatial relationship between households without cars and where people of color live. There are concentrations of carlessness particularly near downtown Los Angeles, in East Los Angeles, 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 shows that we may not be doing such a good job at providing those communities the benefits of transit; as the map shows, there is a correlation between where residents of color are concentrated and higher travel times. In that light, Figure 5 is perhaps not surprising, but it is pretty worrisome: It shows the spatial mismatch between affordable housing and low-wage jobs and suggests why transit is especially important to these communities. This disproportionately impacts people of color as they tend to have the highest rates of working poverty – especially Latinos at 12 percent. So, transportation is most used by and most needed by people of color, with the racial dimension sometimes superseding income (Bullard, Johnson, and Torres 2004; Bullard and Johnson 1997). The implication: Transportation equity for just growth will need to consider outcomes by race, not just income – not to mention jobs and housing.

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

Figure 5. Affordable Housing and Low-Wage Jobs, Los Angeles County, 2006-2010

Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

Note: Areas in gray are missing data. High people-of-color (POC) tracts are tracts with 96 percent or more POC - which represents the top fifth of Census tracts by percent POC.
Defining transportation equity is foundational to getting on the same page. The definition must encompass the broad range of issue areas connected to transportation planning and policy, including issues as diverse as transit-oriented development, active transportation, goods movement, and beyond. The definition we offer synthesizes what we have seen in the literature and heard from advocates, and it highlights the importance of outcomes – both benefits and burdens – as well as participation.

In our view, transportation equity is:

1. **Equitable access** to quality, affordable transportation options and, therefore, employment, services, amenities, and cultural destinations;

2. **Shared distribution** of the benefits (e.g., jobs) and burdens (e.g., pollution) of transportation systems and investments; and

3. **Partnership in the planning** process that results in shared decision-making and more equitable outcomes for disadvantaged communities, while also strengthening the entire region.

More simply stated: People matter. The entire purpose of planning and government is really people, and infusing planning with social equity makes that real (Brenman and Sanchez 2012). For those concerned with inclusion and prosperity, people of color matter because their outcomes typically fall below those of non-Hispanic whites – and when people of color are doing well, regions tend to do well (Benner and Pastor 2003). Still, lists make for easier reading – so with a proper drum roll by way of a start, here are the top six things we think matter in evaluating transportation equity in Los Angeles:

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.

2. **Mobility Matters:** Disparities not only exist between motorists and those relying on alternative modes, 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 LA County Bicycle Coalition, Multicultural Communities for Mobility, 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 lower access to cars.

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 LA, 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.

4. **Health & 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.

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.

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.

Each of these elements contributes towards transportation equity and rounds out the agenda. They are a broader set than might be thought of, but in having conversations with advocates, we found that they all intersect and matter if our goal is to infuse transportation with equity.
What does it take to achieve just growth and transportation equity? Part of it is knowing what matters, and part of it is getting it done. Nothing indicates commitment to equity as much as seeing results. Too often, all of these issues are discussed thoroughly in the participation process, leaving everyone feeling good as they leave the room. But when we come to the final project (be it a development, a rail line, a bus corridor, or job opportunities), some community residents feel like they were just window dressing on a supposedly public process.

There are many reasons for the gap between good intentions and good outcomes – limited budgets, limited mandates, limited listening, and limited participation, to name a few. We are not here to assess blame (although we think that enhancing community voice and power would be a good starting point to strike a better balance); we simply want to state what might be six key challenges to change that need to be addressed to more deeply embed equity in our transportation planning practices.

They are (the drum roll may be overused, so just read on with minimal fanfare):

1. **Following 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 regional level, and SCAG at the metropolitan level.

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 LA 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.

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. As Figure 7 shows, 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 (see Figure 7 on page 14).

4. **Building Government and Community Capacity:** Capacity turns vision into reality. Community organizations either need planning capacities or good partnerships with those who have those skills. For example, Enterprise Community Partners worked with MoveLA, Reconnecting America, and SAJE to compile a popular education curriculum called “TOD

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**Figure 6. Key Capacities of Transportation and Some Related Agencies with Jurisdiction in Los Angeles County**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>Key Capacities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6-County Region: Imperial, Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, and Ventura counties</td>
<td>Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) - Regional research and planning for transportation, growth management, hazardous waste management, and air quality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Coast Air Basin: all of Orange County and the urban portions of Los Angeles, Riverside and San Bernardino counties</td>
<td>South Coast Air Quality Management District (AQMD) - 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 pollution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County of Los Angeles</td>
<td>Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro) - Transportation planning, coordinating, designing, building and operating.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Department of Regional Planning - Land use and housing planning for unincorporated areas.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Community Development Commission - Development and preservation of affordable housing in unincorporated areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Department of Public Health, Policies for Livable, Active Communities and Environments - Promoting policies that support the development of healthy and active environments and fund active living policy grants to city-non-profit collaborative projects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City of Los Angeles</td>
<td>Office of the Mayor and City Council - Casing city and regional vision, promoting and passing policy.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Housing and Community Investment Department - Housing policy and the promotion, development and preservation of decent and affordable housing; code enforcement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Department of City Planning - Preparing, maintaining, and implementing a General Plan for the development of the City of Los Angeles through the application of zoning regulations (Traditional zoning, Specific Plans, Overlay Districts, and special use permits, such as Conditional Uses and Variances, all regulate the use of land in the City); Designing and implementing the city’s Mobility and Housing Elements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Department of Transportation (LA DOT) - Planning, design, construction, and operations of transportation systems in the City of Los Angeles; partners with sister agencies to improve transportation service and infrastructure in the city and the region.</td>
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2. [http://cityplanning.lacity.org/Index.htm](http://cityplanning.lacity.org/Index.htm)
Figure 7. Sample Metrics for Transportation Equity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Metric</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mobility</td>
<td>Transportation outcomes for youth, elderly, people with disabilities, unemployed, low-income earners</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Proximity of transit dependent populations to transit services</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Distributional impacts of transit projects/programs (e.g., fare increases and service cuts)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Distributional impacts of funding for transportation projects (e.g., sales taxes, HOT tolls)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MPO Board representation and voting structure</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Distributional impacts of taxation measures on different income groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and Environment</td>
<td>Measures of air quality and incidence of negative health outcomes like asthma and cancer</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cumulative environmental impact of transportation system on neighborhoods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bike and pedestrian collisions</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Affordable housing provisions in all transportation-oriented plans</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Cumulative property values on local community members</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stability or net increase in transit-dependent population</td>
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<tr>
<td>Job Generation and Movement</td>
<td>Connections to major employment centers</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Local hire and project labor agreements for transportation projects</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Proximity to trade routes and ports</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Projects improving the environmental impacts of port-adjacent communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Available land for transportation-related manufacturing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Health and environmental impacts on local residents</td>
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</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).

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 have 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.

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 form 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.

6. 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 to be considered in their 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).

It’s a lot easier said than done — right? Real tensions separate the threads of this work and contribute toward the challenges that we just called out. For example, we have vision for transportation equity, but the capacity to make it happen is lacking (in both community organizations and government bodies). Another key tension: These are interconnected issues, but we have disconnected decision-makers. Without strong regional leadership, several agencies and departments are needed to create equitable transportation and sustain just growth — but that leaves advocates endlessly running from office to office and government staffers potentially working in silos.

Strategic tensions also arise on the community side. Political relationships sustain community development and policy advocacy, but they can often act to constrain community organizing which may directly challenge those on the other side of the relationship. If a diverse community of regional transportation advocates is to be built, how can developers, policy advocates, and community organizers work together for greater impact on transportation equity, ensure their needs are met, and keep moving forward over time? How, in short, can we have the fights that need to occur but still come back to work together for the common good?

Finally, advocates working to lift up the needs and voices of those less advantaged residents face a special tension: How do they balance their involvement in transportation as an issue with their focus on everything else that needs attention? Only a handful of organizations are focused specifically on transit, and many community-based groups working on social improvement focus instead on education, job training, and a myriad of other concerns. Yet improving transportation systems could improve all sorts of other facets of life in Los Angeles — and if community organizations should be paying more attention to transportation, how can they realistically do that with current workloads?
1. Integrate Transportation Equity and Just Growth Agendas

An increasing amount of research is showing that just growth is sustainable for economic and environmental growth. Pushing out this narrative and framing debates around just growth will pave the way for transportation equity conversations and projects. Moreover, since just growth is broader than transportation, it will make the linkages to land use, health, the environment, and other issues intuitive.

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 Los Angeles County, this is particularly important, especially when working with organizations like Metro and SCAG that cover huge geographies. Having this space is needed for advocates but also for the region as a whole — since it will be a combination of business, government, law enforcement, education, and community groups that need to come together to understand and envision just growth for the region.

3. Moving from Circles of Learning to Circles of Action

We have the political will but have not figured out how to infuse our departments with equity and include it systematically in our planning processes. One government commissioner shopped the challenges around to community advocates in 2013 by asking “How do we do this? Please tell us the way to include equity.” Government agencies and departments need expanded missions to include equity and tools for implementation at the staff level. 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 that policies address real need as well as the accountability that it is getting done right. 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 great planning partners — like ELACC, SEACA, the LA County Bicycle Coalition, etc. are often the most 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 Los Angeles, nor is it directly comparable. Nevertheless, Bay Area advocates have had some transportation successes that could be instructive to their Los Angeles counterparts. They were able to pivot quickly and respond to the regional Sustainable Communities Strategy process, and eventually three elements of their Equity, Environment, and Jobs (EEJ) alternative were adopted into the One Bay Area Plan. We share the SoCal suspicion of all things Bayside, and we acknowledge that L.A. has perfected a new form of movement building (Pastor and Prichard 2011) — but we might do well to learn from the Six Wins Network and see how we might apply some of their lessons to our equity efforts.

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1 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.
An Agenda for Equity: A Framework for Just Growth and Transportation Equity in Los Angeles County

Chapter 1: New Los Angeles

If you ask people—including Angelenos—about Los Angeles, a range of images seem 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 Los Angeles really who we are now?

Consider the massive investment being made 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 Los Angeles. Consider the way in which community-based groups have risen to articulate their concerns, repositioning Los Angeles 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 much more.

The fact is that the next Los Angeles is being remade before our eyes—and while there is much to do, there is a lot that is going right. Funders, government, and advocates are rallying around enhancing equity in the region—even as what that means is still being clarified. Advocates have a vision for inclusive and comprehensive transportation planning, and the breadth of community organizations involved is only increasing. Politicians are increasingly buying into equity as a fundamental building block for growth, even if the nitty-gritty at the staff and implementation levels are yet to be worked out. And funders recognize the importance of bringing it all together and are widening their funding priorities accordingly.

For a full list of references and resources, please see the full report.

One of the leading lights of urban planning, Bill Fulton, once wrote about Los Angeles 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.

Select References

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.

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