Investing in Communities with the Greatest Need:
Defining "Transportation Equity Opportunity Zones" in Metro's Long Range Transportation Plan
November 2016

Los Angeles County has the widest health disparities and wealth inequality gaps in the state and country. We believe our families can't get ahead in life if they can't get around, which is why we advocate for transportation investments that strengthens communities. When people living in Los Angeles County — especially communities of color who now comprise the majority of our county's population — are held back by transportation-related barriers to opportunity, the *entire* regional economy suffers.

Investing in Place seeks to call attention to the policy and planning decisions made in Metro's plans, as most policy and infrastructure investments are based on geographic equality and *not* equity. We seek to ensure that the update to Metro's Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) is an open and inclusive process that sets clear metrics and investment priorities in collaboration with community voices, analyzes the benefits and costs of policy choices vis-a-vis those metrics, and makes appropriate investment decisions accordingly.

Equity is the Heart of Economic Growth

"Just growth," an economic model developed by Dr. Manuel Pastor (USC) and Dr. Chris Benner (UC Santa Cruz), posits that if investments are targeted towards communities with the fewest resources, the economy will grow stronger for the long haul. Just growth puts equity at the heart of growth — and strategic transportation investments in under-resourced communities will make our region more efficient, economically strong, equitable, and sustainable.

Defining Transportation Equity

Achieving "just growth" requires starting from a shared definition of transportation equity that captures both the responsibility and opportunity for regional agencies to address disparities. An equitable transportation system is one that:

1) Provides equitable access to safe, reliable, and affordable transportation options;
2) Shares the distribution of benefits and burdens of transportation investments; and
3) Includes communities as partners in planning, investment, and implementation processes.

What is the Opportunity for "Just Growth" in Los Angeles County?

With an annual budget of over $5 billion, Metro — as the primary planner, funder, designer, and builder of Los Angeles County's regional transportation system for all modes — has the resources to deliver a public works program of historic proportions and help strengthen communities through transportation investments.

Transportation investments in Los Angeles County have not always included feedback from historically marginalized communities throughout the decision-making process, resulting in freeways that crisscrossed communities of color and bus service cuts that disproportionately affected communities of color and low-income transit riders. These same communities continue to experience reduced access to economic opportunity, higher traffic fatality and serious injury rates, and toxic environmental conditions. And yet, if and when investments finally are made, longtime residents fear the effects of increasing land values in the absence of strong anti-displacement policies to accompany those investments.

The opportunity for "just growth" is through Metro's Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), the long-term transportation plan for Los Angeles County that determines *what* will be built *where* and *when* over the next four decades and beyond. The LRTP is the most appropriate place to set measurable objectives for transportation equity—alongside objectives for mobility, access, safety, and sustainability—and evaluate projects, programs, and policies against those intended outcomes.

Our advocacy efforts to define "Transportation Equity Opportunity Zones" would help ensure that health equity and mobility for low-income residents are at the center of policy and decision-making by advancing equity metrics for all transportation planning and mobilizing a multi-sector collaborative with community leaders at the forefront. After all, Metro's investments have rippling effects on land use and whether people can access education, employment, health care, social, and recreational opportunities.

Defining Transportation Equity Opportunity Zones

Using the "just growth" framework, Investing in Place recommends that Metro adopt an equity policy in its LRTP that includes a geospatial definition of "Transportation Equity Opportunity Zones" and measures the benefits and impacts of its plans, policies, and programs within these places.

Through our Transportation Equity Work Group, Investing in Place has identified three factors that most succinctly capture historical patterns of transportation inequity and can serve to mitigate these negative outcomes by targeting specific neighborhoods for transportation investments. These communities are identified by two factors that have historically been determinants of disinvestment and disenfranchisement: **race/ethnicity** and **household income**. A third factor, **households with low vehicle ownership**, presents an opportunity to target new mobility investments in neighborhoods with a higher propensity to take full advantage of them. These three recommended criteria to identify equity opportunity zones represent a relatively simple way to begin implementing a transportation equity policy.

Next Steps:

- Follow #JustGrowth on social media for the latest updates, events, and advocacy alerts.
- Read the policy brief made by the Transportation Equity Technical Work Group: http://bit.ly/TEOZpaper
- Sign up on Investing in Place's email list for the latest updates: www.investinginplace.org
- Join our Just Growth working group: http://bit.ly/JoinJustGrowth
- Contact John Guevarra for any questions – john@investinginplace.org