

September 1, 2015



day one

Pacoima



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Via email: [washingtonp@metro.net](mailto:washingtonp@metro.net)  
CC: Metro Board of Directors

RE: Initial Stakeholder Input for potential 2016 Los Angeles County Transportation Ballot Measure

As the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority ("Metro") considers putting forward a fourth regional transportation revenue sales tax, we welcome the opportunity to work with your agency to develop an equitable framework to inform transportation investments. The undersigned organizations and individuals represent the fields of public health, social and economic justice, active transportation, environmental policy and planning, and business. Our diverse group is excited for the opportunity to work with Metro to develop a transportation investment framework that would facilitate increased transit ridership, enable better public health outcomes, and produce a fair return on investment for Metro's core transit users. As stakeholders, we are committed to equity and will work with Metro to ensure that all Los Angeles County residents benefit from a safe and just transportation system. We also strongly support a robust community engagement strategy to assist in planning, developing, implementing, and tracking outcomes for the proposed framework. This engagement strategy should employ the strength of local community and civic organizations, leveraging their expertise to provide Metro with culturally appropriate and competent outreach and technical assistance. Only by resourcing community groups to engage residents in organically identifying their priority needs will the sales tax expenditure plan address those needs.

Los Angeles County voters have historically been willing to raise transportation funds through regional sales taxes (Proposition A-1980, Proposition C-1990, and Measure R-2008). Local residents have made it possible for the region to pursue large-scale transportation projects without relying heavily on federal and state resources. Now, as Metro considers asking voters to approve another transportation sales tax measure, the agency must convince residents that their dollars will be invested wisely. To demonstrate this, Metro should deploy a data driven framework that allocates revenues in a manner that helps address the disproportionate burden that sales taxes impose on low-income residents. The



County cannot afford to put forth another sales tax measure without ensuring residents that a robust social equity and public health policy will guide the allocation and expenditure of tens of billions of dollars.

Investing in Place, a new project under the non-profit Community Partners, employs a collaborative model to help stakeholders deploy funding in a manner that achieves social equity, public health, and environmental policy goals. In its first year, the organization has conducted multiple convenings with elected officials, policy makers, public agencies, and community-based organizations across the Los Angeles region. Through these engagements, Investing in Place and its partners have developed strategies to help Metro guide its proposed transportation investments. These strategies, reflected in the following recommendations, prioritize enhancing public health and fostering more socially equitable outcomes.

**1) Develop a data-driven framework that prioritizes funding for projects that advance social equity, enhance public health, and achieve environmental goals.**

To advance these goals, Metro should deploy sales tax revenues in a manner that addresses the mobility needs for our most vulnerable populations (i.e., low-income communities of color, individuals with disabilities, youth, and seniors). Likewise, Metro should prioritize investments that enhance safety and ease access for the most vulnerable users of our transportation network, including people who walk and bike. By prioritizing investments to help address the needs of these vulnerable groups, Metro stands to promote social equity, enhance public health, and advance environmental goals. To demonstrate the region's commitment to advancing these goals, Metro should invest funds to achieve the following outcomes:

- Reducing the number and rate of traffic injuries and fatalities for all travelers in Los Angeles County, with an emphasis on improving safety for the following groups: seniors, youth, individuals with disabilities, and people walking and bicycling
- Ensuring robust funding for transit operations, high frequency transit service, and low transit fares, especially on bus service, which constitutes the overwhelming share of Metro's transit system
- Increasing transit ridership
- Reducing vehicle miles traveled (VMT)
- Investment and development without displacement

In short, Los Angeles County needs an investment process framed by transportation equity.

<sup>1</sup> For agendas, attendees and meeting recaps please go to <http://investinginplace.org/events/>

<sup>2</sup> Quality of life scores run along racial lines in California, Los Angeles Times 1/22/15

<sup>3</sup> A Portrait of California, Measure of America: A project of the Social Science Research Council 12/9/14



## 2) Create prioritization investment areas based on income levels and race/ethnicity.

The Los Angeles metro area has the state's worst income inequality, and the significant gap between the region's wealthy and low-income communities manifests itself spatially. In Los Angeles County, where you live can greatly affect educational attainment, job access, health outcomes, public safety, environmental quality, mobility, and more. Simply put, place matters. Regional inequities are apparent in our transportation network, with a Metro bus rider's annual household income averaging \$15,000. In Los Angeles County, carless households are overwhelmingly located in communities of color.

A focus on transportation equity requires an understanding of how class, race, and ethnicity can have profound effects on social, socioeconomic, and health outcomes. It also requires an acknowledgment that policy decisions regarding the allocation of funding can exacerbate or ameliorate existing inequities. During our research and through our partner convenings, we consistently find race and ethnicity matters to address social equity. Therefore, we recommend that Metro establish criteria for investment priorities based on income and race, as these characteristics are well-established indicators to quantify health and resource disparities in the region. While Los Angeles County is one of the strongest "self-help" regions in the nation, with close to 70 percent of all transportation investments paid for through three existing county sales taxes, it is important to highlight that sales taxes are a regressive form of revenue generation imposing a greater burden on the poor than the rich.

## 3) Better serve transit-dependent populations by maintaining low fares, ensuring funding for transit operations, increasing frequency of service on high-ridership lines, enacting policies that enable development without displacement, and supporting integrated housing and transportation initiatives.

Today, the County is experiencing unprecedented transit construction, largely due to the most recent transportation sales tax Measure R (2008). We applaud Metro in its current undertaking of one of the largest public works programs in the country, delivering 12 major transit projects and numerous highway projects over the next several decades, all while operating and maintaining the nation's third largest bus and rail system. Yet, we also note that these investments have not translated into mode split increases: from 1980 - 2012 Los Angeles transit

<sup>4</sup> Why Place Matters, PolicyLink 2007

<sup>5</sup> Addressing poverty and pollution: California's SB 535 Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund, Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Review, Vien Truong.

<sup>6</sup> Metro 2015 Ridership Survey, <http://thesource.metro.net/2015/08/05/results-of-metros-latest-customer-survey/>

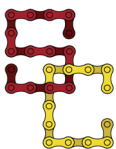
<sup>7</sup> An Agenda for Equity: A Framework for Building a Just Transportation System in Los Angeles County, USC Program for Environmental and Regional Equity, November 2013.

<sup>8</sup> Metro 2015 Ridership Survey, <http://thesource.metro.net/2015/08/05/results-of-metros-latest-customer-survey/>

<sup>9</sup> The Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, "Tax Fairness Fundamentals"

<http://www.itep.org/pdf/guide1.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Why do Voters Support Public Transit? (Michael Manville and Benjamin Cummins, 2014)



use as the share of commute trips has remained around seven percent. Metro can demonstrate its success serving transit-dependent populations by showing increases in ridership and by demonstrating that transportation investments are reducing total vehicle miles traveled. Further, by collecting data for non-work transit trips, our region will have a clearer understanding of the overall demand of the transit system, particularly for users who have few travel options other than public transportation. We want to ensure that the potential 2016 sales tax measure will maintain and grow transit ridership, and put the county on course for achieving greenhouse gas reduction goals by reducing auto dependency.

#### **4) Increasing funding for Active Transportation and other travel options for low-income and carless households.**

As discussed above, the combination of Propositions A and C and Measure R provide close to 70 percent of the county's transportation funding, giving Metro significant control over transportation investment decisions. Despite broad transportation planning responsibilities, Metro has historically limited itself to large capital projects, often overlooking fine-grain investments like first/last-mile access to transit, pedestrian and bicycle improvements, and safe routes to school --investments that make our communities more livable and directly impact vulnerable communities. Since 2000, several California counties have set aside as much as 11 percent of sales tax revenues for walking, bicycling, and safe routes to school projects and programs, providing a potential model for Los Angeles County as Metro again considers an additional sales tax measure. Based on best practices and existing research, we recommend that Metro allocate at least 10 percent of any future measure to active transportation.

Future transportation investments should aim to advance new and innovative mobility options. These investments should help meet the demands of low-income, aging, and carless households. As socioeconomic and demographic trends point to a future with diminishing reliance on private automobiles, Metro may consider options such as low-income bikeshare and car share programs to address growing needs.

#### **5) Support Meaningful and Authentic Community Participation during this process.**

Through our research and listening sessions on this framework we find a consistent theme: meaningful stakeholder engagement is critical to successfully

<sup>11</sup> Transportation Finance in Los Angeles County: An Overview – February 2013, Safe Routes to School National Partnership and Los Angeles County Bicycle Coalition.

<sup>12</sup> "The relationship of pedestrian injuries to socioeconomic characteristics in a large Southern CA County," Chakravath, Bharath et al. 2010 University of California Irvine.

<sup>13</sup> Policy Brief: Funding for Active Transportation in Los Angeles County Advancing Health and Social Equity in Metro's LRTP and Expenditure Plan - June 2015, Investing in Place and Los Angeles County Bicycle Coalition.

<sup>14</sup> An Agenda for Equity: A Framework for Building a Just Transportation System in Los Angeles County, USC Program for Environmental and Regional Equity. November 2013.

adopt and implement these policies. Engaged partnerships and collaborations arise from a shared distribution of power, willful information sharing, meaningful incorporation of feedback, and a deliberate analysis of outcomes. We believe an underlying principle of stakeholder engagement is that stakeholders have the chance to influence the decision-making process. Metro must develop stakeholder engagement strategy that enables that process, a strategy that improves decision-making and accountability for both the potential 2016 ballot measure expenditure plan and the subsequent Metro LRTP update.

**Next Steps: Creating a Disadvantaged Communities Framework for Los Angeles County to prioritize investment areas and stakeholder engagement**

We propose starting with two key metrics of low-income households and communities of color to begin mapping priority areas for investment at the census tract/urbanized zone area (UZA) level. These criteria acknowledge the socioeconomic and racial composition of 80 percent of Metro's ridership, but also race and income are strongly correlated with other characteristics of "disadvantaged communities." These other characteristics include health outcomes, employment, mortality and morbidity rates, vehicle access and housing cost burden.

Metro's countywide transportation system needs to yield meaningful and sustained growth in transit ridership and support safe and accessible walking and bicycling in Los Angeles County, while avoiding harms (e.g. displacement) to vulnerable populations. State and federal transportation funds prioritizing and evaluating investments based on identified need are growing. Metro should focus making targeted investments in projects, programs, and initiatives where goals are well-defined and outcomes are measurable. These investments should be intentional, data-driven, and systematically geared toward communities where there is a demonstrated need and/or unique opportunity. By making these strategic investments and codifying them as part of Metro's long-term planning efforts, the agency will demonstrate good stewardship and will ensure that its Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) will be relevant in a funding environment that values needs-based prioritization.

While the State of California and numerous regional authorities have adopted policy goals that prioritize disadvantaged communities, this has not yet happened at Metro. With so much of Metro's funding locally generated and locally controlled, the agency has a tremendous opportunity to impact equity and health outcomes through intentional and targeted investment in high-need communities.

There are several examples Los Angeles County can learn from as well as align with to be consistent with State goals:

State of California: SB 535 - Funding opportunities from state Cap-and-Trade auctions, California Climate Investments (previously Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund), prioritize Disadvantaged Communities (DAC) based on the CalEnviroScreen 2.0 methodology. SB 535 (2012) requires that at least 10 percent of Cap-and-Trade funds be invested within DACs and at least 25 percent benefit DACs, which are identified and ranked statewide at the census tract level. The criteria for DAC definition is calculated from metrics of exposure and environmental effects (pollution burden) and vulnerable socioeconomic and population characteristics.

State of California: The Active Transportation Program funding opportunity requires at least 25 percent of funds benefit DACs, and the guidelines say that the project must be in a DAC and justify how it provides meaningful benefits to disadvantaged residents. Offers multiple ways to define DACs for project applicants, including income, CalEnviroScreen 2.0 ranking, and student free/reduced lunch eligibility.

City of Los Angeles: 2012 Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Strategic Plan, which relies on four metrics to prioritize need among the City's 495 public schools. Metrics are: number of vehicle-pedestrian/bike collisions, number of students who live within a quarter-mile from school, number of students eligible for Free-Reduced Price Meals, lack of prior state/federal SRTS funding.

### **Summary**

A diverse and organized movement is growing in Los Angeles County to prioritize social equity and public health in the allocation of transportation investments of public funds. The movement is inspired by the understanding that where you live determines social outcomes, including access to resources. We aim to address this by supporting a transportation finance social equity and public health framework that is developed and implemented with a strong stakeholder engagement strategy for both the potential 2016 ballot measure expenditure plan and the subsequent Metro LRTP update.

As we have outlined above, Metro is in a prime position for a context-sensitive, data-driven framework led by social equity and public health outcomes for future transportation investments. Race and income are strong indicators to direct transportation resources towards populations of the highest need, heaviest reliance on Metro's transit system, and most burdensome relative contribution towards generating transportation funds from sales tax revenue. Utilizing an equity framework for potential sales tax revenues and to guide the Metro LRTP update would also make Metro more competitive for increasing state and federal transportation funding opportunities as well as lead to agency goals of increasing transit ridership by focusing on Metro's core customers.



Investing in Place and our partners seek to develop a policy definition for prioritizing investments based on social equity and public health criteria, believing that prioritizing the needs of residents most in need (already using transit, walking and bicycling options) will most effectively increase use of these modes and safety for vulnerable road users. We look forward to working with the Metro Board, staff and fellow stakeholders to develop a framework for the potential ballot measure in 2016 that will achieve outcomes such as: increasing transit ridership, reducing vehicle miles traveled, reducing collision rates for all - especially people walking and bicycling, improving our air quality, supporting development without displacement, and improving mobility options so community members can age in place and more.

Please contact Investing in Place Managing Director Jessica Meaney at [jessica@investinginplace.org](mailto:jessica@investinginplace.org) or (213) 210-8136 for more information. We look forward to working together with Metro to support an even better Los Angeles County for all.

Sincerely,

Advancement Project Megan McClaire Director of Healthy City	AIA Los Angeles Will Wright Director, Government & Public Affairs	Asian Pacific Policy & Planning Council Mark Masaoka Policy Director
Bike the Vote L.A. Marc Caswell Steering Committee Member	Bikecar101 Kayla and Mike Kaiser Co-Founders	BikeSGV (Bike San Gabriel Valley) Wesley Reutimann Program Director
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Prevention Institute Manal Aboelata Managing Director	Ryan Snyder Associates Ryan Snyder President	Safe Routes to School National Partnership Bill Sadler Southern California Regional Policy Manager



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