

MOTION BY:

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MTA Board
Item 18

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Defining Equity Focus Communities

In February 2018, the Metro Board adopted the Equity Platform, a groundbreaking policy framework for addressing disparities in access to opportunity that result from historical disinvestment in low-income communities and communities of color. The Equity Platform included four key pillars to guide the work of the agency. The first of these pillars, Define & Measure, is foundational for all equity work moving forward. Over the past year, the lack of a clear definition of equity has hindered the application of the Equity Platform to agencywide planning efforts.

Los Angeles is one of the most inequitable regions in the United States, according to the National Equity Atlas. The significant gap between the region's wealthy and low-income communities manifests itself spatially, which affects educational attainment, job access, health outcomes, public safety, environmental quality, mobility, and more. Regions with greater disparities in educational and employment access are associated with slower economic growth and less social cohesion. In contrast, researchers at the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland, the International Monetary Fund, Standard and Poor's, and USC Program for Environmental and Regional Equity (PERE) have all found that regions that intentionally prioritize equity enjoy more robust economic growth over the long haul. Beginning to address these disparities is an urgent need, since it takes time to realign agency priorities and resources from historical practices. Adopting a working definition for use during the critical planning efforts underway, most notably the NextGen Bus Study and the Congestion Pricing Feasibility Study, would result in real benefits for communities that have waited a long time for their needs to be addressed equitably.

As part of the LRTP Draft Values Framework, Metro planning staff have developed a definition of Equity Focus Communities, learning from renowned academic experts at USC PERE and in consultation with the Metro Policy Advisory Council. This definition identifies two demographic factors that have historically been determinants of disinvestment and disenfranchisement: household income and race/ethnicity. 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. Together, these three factors represent the locations where strategic transportation investments can have the greatest impact on reducing disparities in access to opportunity. While it is undoubtedly possible to further refine this definition, it would be imprudent to let this excellent work sit idle when it could be put into practice immediately.

WE, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board direct the CEO to:

- A. Adopt Equity Focus Communities as a working definition under the first pillar of the Equity Platform;
- B. Utilize this definition of Equity Focus Communities to evaluate scenarios in planning efforts currently underway, including NextGen and Congestion Pricing, along with supplemental metrics if necessary and appropriate;
- C. Continue to refine the definition and applicability of Equity Focus Communities through the development of the LRTP and in consultation with the Policy Advisory Council and Chief Equity Officer.
- D. Report back to the Board on the status of hiring the Chief Equity Officer.

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Equity Focus Communities (EFCs)

Equity focus communities (EFCs) are those communities most heavily impacted by gaps in inequity throughout the County. The transportation performance of EFCs can be evaluated by setting a threshold of census tracts in the County. A 30% threshold was presented to PAC and is presented as a draft in Figure 4. The 30% threshold represents approximately 3 million people in LA County and is distinguished by:

- More than 40% of the census tracts having low-income households over the County average; and
- Either more than 80% of the census tracts having non-white populations over the County average; or
- More than 10% of the census tracts having zero-car households over the County average.

Most of the other demographic factors are strongly correlated with these three factors.

Figure 4-4 Equity-Focus Communities

