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Authors

McCullough, Sarah R., PhD
van Stokkum, Rebecca, PhD

Publication Date

2021-03-01

DOI

10.7922/G2RX99DZ

Answers from the Margins: Participatory Planning with Disadvantaged Communities

Sarah Reboloso McCullough, Ph.D., Associate Director, Feminist
Research Institute, University of California, Davis

Rebecca van Stokkum, Ph.D., Visiting Researcher, Information
Center for the Environment, University of California, Davis

March 2021

Technical Report Documentation Page

1. Report No. UC-ITS-2019-06	2. Government Accession No. N/A	3. Recipient's Catalog No. N/A	
4. Title and Subtitle Answers from the Margins: Participatory Planning with Disadvantaged Communities		5. Report Date March 2021	
		6. Performing Organization Code ITS-Davis	
7. Author(s) Sarah R. McCullough, Ph.D., https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2101-8931 Rebecca van Stokkum, Ph.D., https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2009-6308		8. Performing Organization Report No. UCD-ITS-RR-21-14	
9. Performing Organization Name and Address Institute of Transportation Studies, Davis 1605 Tilia Street Davis, Ca 95616		10. Work Unit No. N/A	
		11. Contract or Grant No. UC-ITS-2019-06	
12. Sponsoring Agency Name and Address The University of California Institute of Transportation Studies www.ucits.org		13. Type of Report and Period Covered Final Report (October 2018 – January 2021)	
		14. Sponsoring Agency Code UC ITS	
15. Supplementary Notes DOI:10.7922/G2RX99DZ			
16. Abstract The public mandate to engage the public in transportation planning processes is in the process of becoming more rigorous and democratic. Transportation agencies are recognizing the limitations of past modes of engagement and seek to connect more dynamically with the public, particularly with historically marginalized communities. Doing this work well is a topic of interest to a growing number of transportation professionals. This study identified four successful engagement processes with historically marginalized communities in California by surveying transportation professionals. Stakeholders at each site were interviewed and public documents from the processes were reviewed to identify common themes for positive public inclusion. Interviewees included community leaders, transportation staff, and consultants. Interviews were coded and analysis was conducted using a mobility justice and critical race studies framework. Ten key themes of successful community engagement with historically marginalized communities were identified. These themes are: (1) trust is crucial; (2) treat community-based organizations as equal partners; (3) pay community partners fairly; (3) let community-based organizations decide what good community engagement is; (5) translate technical jargon; (6) engage in community concerns beyond the scope of the project; (7) address major community concerns such as displacement, policing, and youth development; (8) know local histories of transportation injustice; (9) include the community in the final reporting process; and (10) follow-up on planning with implementation in a timely manner.			
17. Key Words Public involvement, disadvantaged communities, city planning, case studies, social justice, community engagement		18. Distribution Statement No restrictions.	
19. Security Classification (of this report) Unclassified	20. Security Classification (of this page) Unclassified	21. No. of Pages 36	21. Price N/A

Form Dot F 1700.7 (8-72)

Reproduction of completed page authorized

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Acknowledgments

This study was made possible through funding received by the University of California Institute of Transportation Studies from the State of California through the Public Transportation Account and the Road Repair and Accountability Act of 2017 (Senate Bill 1). The authors would like to thank the State of California for its support of university-based research, and especially for the funding received for this project. The authors would also like to thank the UC Davis Feminist Research Institute, Clarissa Cabansagan, Danny Gamboa, Christopher Kidd, Jeff Knowles, Ezra Kong, Lyslynn Lacoste, Warren Logan, Monique Lopez, founder of Pueblo Planning, and Rfo Oxas co-founder of RAHOK.

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Sarah Reboloso McCullough, Ph.D., Associate Director, Feminist
Research Institute, University of California, Davis
Rebecca van Stokkum, Ph.D., Visiting Researcher, Information
Center for the Environment, University of California, Davis

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Executive

Summary

Executive Summary

Transportation agencies are seeking better modes of community engagement, particularly with historically marginalized communities such as Black communities and communities of color. This project studied four successful participatory planning processes throughout California with the goal of identifying what made the process successful and where further improvements were needed. Through analysis of planning documents and interviews with planning process participants (agency staff, planners, and community members), we identified ten key themes of successful community engagement with historically marginalized communities. They are summarized below.

1. **Trust is crucial.** Residents showed up and engaged in transportation processes because people or organizations they trusted invited them. This trust did not extend to city agencies due to years of neglect and mistreatment. Building and maintaining respectful partnerships with community-based organizations (CBOs) can offer city agencies access to historically marginalized communities, which over time may develop into trust.
2. **Community-based organizations should be treated as equal partners.** While it can be easy to treat CBOs like consultants, they are better thought of as equal partners. They represent a strong public constituency with different expertise than most government agencies. CBOs often have strong local leadership and significant collective power. An attitude of humility will aid planners in recognizing and honoring the expertise in CBOs.
3. **Pay community partners fairly.** CBOs are providing transportation agencies with an invaluable service—access to hard-to-reach residents and sophisticated local cultural knowledge. They should be paid as experts, and community members should be incentivized for their participation.
4. **Let community-based organizations decide what good community engagement is.** CBOs know their constituencies and what will make them show up. Let them take the lead in planning engagement processes and events.
5. **Translate technical jargon.** Translating bureaucratic processes and technical details is crucial to maintaining transparency and ensuring that communities have full information to inform their decisions. Think creatively with CBO partners about how to make information and processes accessible.
6. **Engage in community concerns beyond the scope of the project.** Be willing to go outside the scope of the current project and engage in conversations beyond transportation. Consider how the agency or planner/consultant can use their power and relationships to help address other community concerns. This will help build trust.
7. **Address major community concerns such as displacement, policing, and youth development.** Transportation challenges within historically marginalized communities are intimately connected with

issues of displacement, policing, and youth development. Researching these issues ahead of time and being prepared to address them in a meaningful way will help transportation goals.

8. **Know local histories of transportation injustice.** Virtually every community in the U.S. has a history of using transportation infrastructure and planning to harm Black communities and communities of color. Enter into public engagement processes knowing this history and talk about it up front. Consider how new projects can amend for these past harms.
9. **Include the community in the final reporting process.** Document the community engagement process in final reporting and include them in the process. Give credit to their contributions and ask them for feedback on report drafts. Consider how final recommendations can support the work of partner CBOs.
10. **Follow-up on planning with implementation in a timely manner.** Many historically disadvantaged communities have been waiting for improvements for a long time. While involvement in the planning process means a lot, immediate follow-through on community recommendations means even more. Consider setting aside funds for quick-build or pilot projects. Update CBOs regularly to let them know the status of implementation plans.

Contents

Introduction

“Community engagement is in everything that you are doing, and so what that looks like depends on what your organization is, who you are personally, how comfortable you are... I will just say this, there is going to be a lot of failures, but you can grow and learn from that. You have to have thick skin.”

-Quote from study participant

Engaging the broader public in transportation processes has long been a mandate, though what is entailed in engagement has changed over time. Historically, much of the public process of transportation planning can be described as DAD (Decide, Announce, Defend), dedicated to convincing the public to support plans already made (1). This approach is not a robust form of public engagement and can build mistrust and undermine public regard for local government (2). In recent years, there have been calls for more dynamic forms of community engagement, particularly with historically disadvantaged communities (3–5). Previous research has looked at mechanisms and performance measures in public engagement (6–9), but less research has been done within the context of historically disadvantaged communities.

A commitment to transportation equity demands that we overcome challenges to including disadvantaged communities in the transportation planning process in a meaningful way. We may not meet the needs of the most affected parties in all transportation projects. However, one goal of such processes can be to enhance an agency’s connection to its constituents—to make them feel heard and that the agency is responsive to their needs. Successful public engagement process can also create projects better suited to users, increase community buy-in, and lower resistance to change. Looking at recent community engagement processes that participants identify as successful offers insight into how transportation agencies can customize what worked well elsewhere for their own particular locale.

The four sites of analysis were chosen based on a survey of transportation professionals in California who were asked to share successful community engagement processes with historically marginalized communities. Planning materials and final reports from each site were reviewed. Two to four stakeholders in each project were interviewed, including agency staff, consultants, and community members. The majority of those interviewed identified as Black or people of color. Interviews and final reports were analyzed for key themes, which produced the findings that follow. See appendix A for full description of methods and appendix B for a description of the four projects that were analyzed.

The structure of this paper is as follows: A review of background literature on community engagement and relevant literature on equity, justice, and race, followed by detailed descriptions of themes and recommendations, and ending with concluding remarks with suggestions for further research. Methodology and a description of the case studies examined are in appendices.

Background

Literature Review

Public Engagement in Transportation

Based on a review of best practices in public engagement in transportation processes, Wagner suggests three strategies for good public engagement: (1) accessible events, (2) engaging interactions, and (3) an outcome-oriented process (9). Recent literature on transportation equity continues to highlight the importance of public engagement, especially as a means to include the voices of historically marginalized communities. Van Dort et. al. recommend that planners engage with historically marginalized community members by letting them set the agenda in terms of transportation needs and potential solutions. More specific recommendations complement findings of this study including: engage in spaces where community members are already meeting, learn local histories, accommodate needs of community members, build trust over time, leverage community organizations, and compensate community organizations (5). A study by Christiansen points towards the importance of attending to sociality and cultural norms. He noted how diversity decreased as public engagement processes became more formal. In more organic environments, such as neighborhood block parties in which engagement was infused, participation was more robust, engaged, and diverse (10).

Historically marginalized communities refer to communities whose neighborhoods and transportation infrastructure has been systematically neglected or dismantled. These communities also face numerous other forms of discrimination and systemic bias grounded primarily in racism, though classism, ableism, and xenophobia also play significant roles. In transportation planning research and policy documents, these communities are also called “underserved,” “underrepresented,” “vulnerable” and “marginalized.” At times these racialized communities are lumped in with other populations including women, elders, youth, and those with disabilities. While it is important to attend to all populations that fall outside the established “norm” of the white able-bodied man, it is also important to be specific about the unique challenges and histories faced by these differing populations. While more research and policy work concerned with the needs of women, elders, youth and those with disabilities is still needed, in this study, we focus specifically on non-white-dominant communities. The decision to focus on race addresses a dearth of research on race in transportation.

Attention to race also enables us to think about public engagement in the context of historical structural inequalities in the distribution of resources. Disadvantaged communities have often not borne the benefits of transportation infrastructure, but rather have carried some of its costs (Grenns, 2002, 2005; Wells, 2012). Transportation systems have contributed to racial segregation and the disempowerment of low-income communities and communities of color (Avila, 2014; Bullard, Johnson, & Torres, 2004; Estrada, 2005; Rosen & Fisher, 2001). These communities have experienced long neglect of their neighborhoods (Pulido, 2004; Sze, 2006). As cities have once again become more attractive to developers and more privileged populations, these communities have become the target of gentrification that now displaces the residents who have long been

struggling to improve the quality of life in their locale (Squires, 2011). Transportation infrastructure is sometimes seen as a handmaid to gentrification and displacement (Flanagan, Lachapelle, & El-Geneidy, 2016; Hoffmann, 2016; Lubitow & Miller, 2013; Stehlin, 2015). Further, the disparities suffered by these communities are vast: greater collision-mortality rates, worse pollution, more public health risks, less public transportation options, fewer parks/green spaces, and lower quality food, housing, and education (3, 11). Given these histories and contemporary dynamics, robust public engagement with racialized communities becomes even more important. Karner & Marcantonio propose an alternative three-step process that can begin to address historic inequities: (1) identify current, priority unmet needs of disadvantaged community through democratic processes such as participatory budgeting, (2) allocate immediate funding to address top priorities, and (3) tailor the metrics to the stated community needs and measure progress (3). These suggestions complement the findings of this study.

Transportation Equity, Transportation Justice, and Mobility Justice

This report builds on literature and theory from transportation equity, transportation justice, and mobility justice. Karner et. al. (12) provide a review and helpful orientation around differences between an equity approach versus a justice-oriented approach. They argue that we can see justice-orientation as a “desirability to transform social structures” and equity as reforming processes and fine-tuning distributions of social goods and opportunities (12). An equity approach tends to focus on distribution of resources and focuses on reform to state systems of power. Thus, the focus would be on how we can work within existing institutions to create fairer transportation conditions. A justice perspective argues for a reconstruction of the system itself that results in redistribution not only of resources, but also of power. Justice-based approaches often point out how the foundations and assumptions of state-based systems reinforce racial hierarchies. Thus, justice-based approaches often undertake strategies that may be oppositional or outside official state channels. Mobility justice expands upon this further by also incorporating a restorative approach, which seeks reparations for past harms that continue to produce unequal living conditions. Further, mobility justice seeks to challenge traditional hierarchies of knowledge and expertise—that is, they challenge whose voices should be central to the conversation (13–15). Specifically, the voices of those historically marginalized are centered. Their lived experiences are seen as a rich site of expertise. Valuing new forms of knowledge in this way is also known as epistemic justice. This approach is supported by long scholarly traditions in the fields of ethnic studies, critical disability studies, and feminist research, as well as long activist traditions (16–20).

Critical Race Theory

This paper advocates for the utility of applying the lens of critical race theory to transportation, in accordance with Ingram et. al. (2020). Critical race theory moves the expertise of Black communities and communities of color as central to understanding and addressing past inequities. Their lived experiences with the consequences of past actions and ongoing systems of racism give them a crucial perspective to achieving transportation equity goals. This has been called a “double consciousness” or the experience of “living at a crossroads” (16, 21). Current public engagement systems are not set up to bring these expertise into the

planning process. However, new modes of engagement offer promise in pointing toward the direction we must move to reach a more equitable and just future.

What Community Engagement Is, and What It Is Not

While “there is no cookie cutter approach,” there are some consistent themes in how to do community engagement well. Many planners we interviewed pointed out that engagement is not historically a strength of planning agencies. They also noted the crucial difference between outreach and engagement. As one planner noted, “The way that planning typically works is that you put a notice on a board that says this is happening. If you want to engage on this, come down to city hall, which is probably nowhere near where that post is. And tell us your feelings about something we've already decided on.” A community leader noted, “The [city] really does not know the difference between community outreach and community engagement... when people think of community engagement, they're thinking more of we're just going to go out into the community and tell them what we're doing.” At best, this form of outreach is seen as a public relations move, designed to convince the public of a plan that is mostly already in place. Planners noted a significant change in recent years in the status quo, where cities are striving for more genuine engagement. Some surmised that this is in part being driven by policy, as more funding opportunities are requiring robust community engagement. One planner, Monique Lopez of Pueblo Planning shared, “Because of the way funding's being structured, public agencies are required... to engage with low-income communities in particular, to access this funding. I think that's one of the mechanisms which is driving a lot of this community engagement to happen with low-income communities.”¹ This points toward the potential power of policy change that favors quality community engagement.

The results of solid community engagement are worthwhile for agencies to serve long-neglected residents and enact a commitment to equity. All projects had robust engagement with populations that traditionally are not a part of planning processes: unhoused people, youth, elders, non-English speaking people, people recently migrated, Black communities, communities of color, and low-income communities. One planner shared, “We've reached the most people and especially we've reached the hardest to reach people, the vulnerable populations within the [neighborhood]. It's all been through either events or opportunities that were organized or identified by our community partners.” These community partners usually begin with community-based organizations (CBOs).

¹ Monique Lopez requested to be identified in this report, and we do so as a means of acknowledging their expertise and contributions to this work.

Key Findings

Trust is Crucial

All successful community engagement processes studied hinged on the strength of relationships. Trust was a key word that came up repeatedly in interviews. All projects drew upon previously established relationships of trust between CBOs and community members, and among CBOs. No project began with a strong relationship of trust between the government agency and the community/CBOs, though some had already begun the process of trust-building. For three of the four projects studied, the community engagement process was seen by the city as a way to begin to grow a better relationship of trust in the community. One planner shared that the city agency, “really wanted to use this as an opportunity to try to build trust and stronger working relationships in communities that have a lot of suspicion of [the city agency] where we don't have the best track record.” The CBOs came into the partnership aware of their value and priorities. They knew the histories of injustices their communities had suffered at the hands of the government. They also knew that their most valuable asset is their community relations—the trust the community has in them.

All four communities studied have rich expertise and histories of community organizing. Community organizing is the mobilization of people toward a shared goal or change. It is a longstanding strategy within the U.S. democratic system and has been crucial to addressing systemic inequity. This history of community organizing is communities’ longstanding foundation, and thus a crucial aspect of partnership. However, it is important to remember that this organizing was necessary because of historic government neglect and mistreatment. The very networks that cities need to rely upon for better community relations were created because cities mistreated residents. This is an important tension that planners would do well to remember. As one planner noted, “There's a really phenomenal history of advocacy... and an enormous number of very strong community leaders. It's not due to the lack of know-how within this community that they're at where they are.” Many of these community members know and lived the histories of institutional racism and neglect. They mobilized against it, often in very recent memory. One community leader still sees this operating in her city: “I think that what the press coverage really misses is that story of community power. This was really a David and Goliath experience. It was community members standing up against the power structure.” The success of the process was due to legacies of community organizing. As one participant noted, it was residents that “took leadership and created their own alternative plan and identified the projects that they thought would benefit the entire community.” This led to a near-unanimous vote in favor of their plan in a participatory budgeting process. These stories illustrate what can happen when city agencies cede power to residents. If residents need to fight for power with resistance from agencies, mistrust will remain. If power is voluntarily shared, then trust will grow. As one community leader said, “It really is more of the folks that already have power letting go some of that power. And trusting that community members have the expertise and the skill in order to be able to carry something out.”

The capacity of CBOs to mobilize community power is precisely why they can be good partners for meaningful community engagement. One planner noted,

There's enormous stake placed in the reliability and the trust of your trusted local network. And so, it's like Mrs. Washington down the block comes by and tells you that you need to attend this community meeting because it's important. That's going to get you to turn out. It's not going to be an email blast from this advisor's office or from our agency or whatever.

However, trust is much easier lost than gained, a truism of which CBOs are well-aware. CBO leadership know that they have a lot to lose if the project does not go well or serve the community. Their reputation is on the line, and that is their greatest asset. City agencies rely upon the relationship of trust between the CBO and the community. The CBO's partnership "vouched" for the city's process. Though city planners and consultants often expressed a desire for this trust to shift to them, this was not necessarily accomplished.

Community-Based Organizations Should Be Treated as Equal Partners

One key insight gained in this study is that agencies often think of CBOs similarly to community engagement consultants. This equivalency proved problematic. CBOs are better seen as partners than consultants—ideally equal partners. Members of CBOs sometimes felt that the city wished for them to leave their mission and agenda at the door. This was an untenable proposition for the CBOs, because a CBO's mission is its heart and soul. One participant who straddles both the worlds of professional planning and community-based work attended a meeting where a regional agency was discussing contracting with CBOs. The tone of the conversation concerned her, as it demonstrated a fundamental misunderstanding of what CBOs are and do. She said,

They were saying that these CBOs need to know that they are not lobbyists... They would be working for the agency, not working to push their own agenda into the work. We were not really comfortable with that. You engage the CBOs because they have this constituency and they have this point of view. Then you tell them, "In order to come in, you have to leave your point of view at your door. Just give us your constituency."

CBOs provide more than a means to connect with hard-to-reach individuals. They are mission-driven institutions that often engage in collective action. McAndrews & Marcus (2015) point out how traditional notions of public participation focus on input from individual actors. The efforts of groups organized around a shared goal can be systematically discounted (4). It is important to note that this is *not* a dynamic that was highlighted in the projects of this study. In fact, it was the respect that city agencies and consultants demonstrated for the CBOs and their mission that helped to create good community engagement processes.

When an agency is fully engaged with CBOs and developing a real relationship of trust, conflict and challenge will arise. Planners and consultants are advised to have humility as they move through these processes. As one planner said, "Humility is super important, and that's just how we have to show up to every conversation. I

think if you keep showing up with humility, you do build space for trust.” Doing so will allow planners to hear the expertise that exists within the community.

From the city’s perspective, working with CBOs was a challenge due to their lack of uniformity. City planning offices and consulting firms already have particular norms around what they expect from a community engagement partner, and those norms are shaped by professional consulting firms. A planner noted that in working with CBOs, “You can’t make the types of assumptions about understandings for projects or process that you would for a consulting firm. If you have a consulting firm that does this day in and day out, it’s like, yeah, they’ve already got a playbook, they know exactly how it works.” This required more flexibility and time on the part of consultants. A consultant said, “The first test that was passed on our part was really ceding some of that decision making to them [CBOs], and letting them truly be the host in their communities, and us being just invited guests to listen.” He went on to say,

Our first meeting with our community partners was eye opening for us on the consultant and [agency] staff side because the community-based organizations raised a lot of concerns about the planning process and plan outcomes, and items that we were not expecting. We were kind of expecting them to be totally on-board with carrying the water for the city and the plan, and to immediately go out and start organizing meetings for us to present at, but it turned out we needed a few more additional meetings to get on the same page and talk about their expectations, their concerns, and really build a certain level of trust at the outset before they were comfortable going out and using their name and their reputation to build meetings or host meetings on our behalf.

Creating the relationships necessary to do successful community engagement required a significant investment of time and funding on the part of the city, often more than was originally anticipated. What was originally envisioned as one introductory meeting between planners, consultants, and CBOs became a series of three meetings. It also required the city staff and hired consultants to cede some of their power to CBOs. This was needed to establish an agreed-upon baseline for partnership.

Provide Fair Compensation

Another key finding from all sites is that CBOs need to be paid for the value they bring to projects. CBOs at all four sites were compensated for their involvement. Funding for three came from government sources. In the fourth case, funding came from a local coalition organization. A person from this coalition said,

The biggest challenge to community engagement is funding community engagement work. I think most people assume, again, that it’s easy, or it’s low cost or free, and nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, when you’re engaging, especially communities that are low income, or communities that are predominantly communities of color, it actually requires a lot more resources.

Resources may be needed for transportation, meeting supplies, food, childcare, interpretation, room rental, entertainment, as well as the time and expertise of community leaders and members. CBOs may not want to

donate their time, expertise, or resources to a project without adequate compensation. As one organizer put it, “If we’re going to do community engagement, we want to off the bat, to make sure the budget is actually going to meet our needs, and then we’re all kind of on zero time.” The CBOs were not willing to donate extra time or resources to the project. In fact, in one project the network of CBOs joined together to address a number of issues they felt arising including under-payment, incentives/payment for community members, policing in transit, and potential displacement. The original budget allocated to CBOs was not sufficient to do the work. Similarly, the scope was too narrow and did not encompass all the work needed to make the project successful. The CBOs felt that approaching the city agency collectively and in solidarity was important in negotiating for adequate funding and addressing other demands.

One challenge CBOs raised is that even in the most successful engagements, they still felt that their labor was under-valued and that they were under-paid. One organizer said, “They pay extremely exuberant amounts to these professionals of engineers and corporations who are often not even local. And yet when it comes to the CBOs, they severely undercut us.” CBOs are often subcontracted under consulting firms. This model has pros and cons. Benefits to CBOs of being subcontractors include more flexibility in payment schedules and procurement rules around insurance, liability, etc. CBOs may not be able to afford to front costs and wait months for payment. Subcontracting offers more flexibility and reduces red tape. A detriment of the subcontracting process was the distance it put between CBO leadership and city officials. This can be mitigated by fostering direct communication between city officials and CBO leadership.

Just as agencies need to pay CBOs adequately, they also need to compensate or incentivize resident participation. This is a way to show that their time and knowledge is valued. It also strengthens partnerships with the CBOs, as it gives them something tangible to offer their constituents. Oftentimes, food was served. Childcare, transportation provisions, compensation, and entertainment were also offered or suggested for engagement events.

Let Community-Based Organizations Decide What Good Engagement Is

Crucial at all sites was letting the community groups decide what engagement should look like. They were the experts on what their constituencies would respond to. This meant that community engagement looked different from one organization to another, even within the same project. Many groups did host formal meetings, but often as add-ons to existing meetings, programming, and events. This allowed community members to take part in the planning process at something they already planned to attend. They did not have to add one more thing to overburdened schedules. One CBO led a bike ride highlighting the neighborhood’s poor street infrastructure, while another led a historic tour of the transportation injustices and community strengths of the neighborhood. The audience for both of these events was planners and consultants, flipping the script on who needed to be “engaged” in the process. Others organized pop-up events. Listening sessions were added on, which differed from the workshops presented at other meetings. At first glance, these may not sound that different than modes of engagement cities already do. What made this different and more successful was *how* they were done. As one planner put it, there’s a difference between saying “Please come...

You're invited to..." and saying, "Please be advised that this meeting will be held at this time." CBOs know how to extend an honest and open invitation. They recognize when norms of planning do not match community norms and change the format in subtle, but important ways. This extends to choices around venue, food, music, childcare, language of materials, and even engagement design. One CBO representative who is also a researcher noted that the way the survey questions were written included biases around safety that contrasted with local residents' lived experiences. They pointed out how these survey instruments "reinforced the dominant narrative," and compensated by encouraging written comments that elicited views not encompassed in the official survey. As one participant said, "You really do need to go where people are, and get them to bring in their people, but that's a job in and of itself. But that's what CBOs do and I think that's the value of using CBOs."

Translate Technical Jargon

A major role planners can take when working with communities is as a translator of technical jargon and processes with transparency and honesty. As one planner said, "Transparency means being able to explain technical things in a way that's actually accessible because the technical jargon we use is a way of gate-keeping people from knowledge." Doing so is a difficult task that requires time and patience. Planners who came from low-income communities or communities of color were particularly helpful in this process, as they drew upon their dual expertise as planners and community members to translate planning. It is worth noting that the majority of interviewees identified as Black or people of color. Many of them spoke of how their lived experience with race and class contributed to the success of the project.

One planner described developing an iterative process to identify the best modes of communication: "We were very, very, focused on making sure that anything that we developed would be extremely versatile and extremely accessible." Planners needed to move out of their usual mindset and empathize with the experience of community members to best engage. This included letting them know of any unanticipated consequences of their solutions. For example, when residents identified a priority that may have led to the installation of paid parking—something residents opposed—the planner made the residents aware of this possible outcome. This enabled residents to brainstorm new solutions with full information, and information they would not have had if the planning staff had not been forthright. As one consultant pointed out, "Without people being able to make an informed decision, it's not consensual. Consent is a big part of that in a larger picture. Withholding information is non-consensual." Balancing quantitative and qualitative data in the planning process can also be challenging. The qualitative allows residents to share their lived experiences, but also makes comparison difficult. One method utilized to address this was by bringing results of data analysis back to the community at all stages in the process. Asking them to validate findings is a way of honoring their expertise and bridging divides between the stories numbers tell and the stories residents live.

Go ‘Outside Scope’

Another consistent theme was the importance of being willing to move outside of the “transportation” scope or the specific project at hand. Transportation is a thread that connects many other areas of people’s lives, and it needs to be talked about as such. Key to this is also an understanding of power. A city planner or a consultant hired by the city enters the community as not just a representative of one specific project, or even their division or company—they also represent the government writ large. By and large, they occupy a position of greater influence within governing structures due to their professional status. Thus, when residents raise issues outside of the project scope, agency representatives should consider how they can document these concerns and help to address them. One community leader consciously structures meetings in this way: “Sometimes in one meeting we’ll talk about completely different things. We can be talking about water accessibility and then the need for transportation, and hey, we want a park as well.” Consider how to document their concerns, pass them along, advocate, or partner with other divisions. Better still is to invite representatives from other agencies or department leaders to meet with the community. The same community leader shared, “One of our biggest strategies is inviting staff and state agencies to come into the community and talk to these individuals.” Doing so can go a long way to building trust. This includes issues both within and beyond the transportation scope. Common issues that often arose alongside transportation planning processes of community engagement were housing, displacement, labor development, policing, concerns about youth, and concerns about elders.

Community leaders are stretching themselves by moving from their central area into transportation. One CBO leader shared,

I would never have thought that when thinking about juvenile justice I would think about transportation. But it makes sense, especially here in this community where there are turf wars, and there are invisible lines that we do not know of, but the young people are aware of, and they are telling us they can't get to this program because they don't feel safe crossing the street or they don't feel safe wherever this program is located.

Just as she recognized the integral role of transportation to juvenile justice, so must transportation planners recognize the role of an issue such as juvenile justice on transportation. This reciprocity is valuable in doing solid community engagement work.

Address Displacement

Displacement was the most pervasive concern raised, and the one least addressed. When asked what the biggest challenge or shortcoming of the projects were, displacement came up most often. Though community members may greatly desire infrastructural improvements, they often rightly wondered who the improvements were really for. Transportation improvements such as light rail, transportation hubs, transit-oriented development, and bike lanes, can accompany redevelopment, gentrification, rising property values, and displacement, though a robust literature shows this is context-dependent (22–28). Longtime residents of historically marginalized communities are highly aware of this trend, especially if proposed “improvements” are

not something they have requested. Displacement was not always on the radar of partnering government agencies, and CBOs often had to educate them about the impact of displacement on residents. Bike lanes are one key signifier of potential change, especially if they are conceived and built without strong community input. One planner shared, “[The CBO members] really were not interested in recommending any of the bike lanes if it meant that there'd be a chance of adding to the displacement pressures that the people that they represent face every day.” This is not to say that residents were “anti-bike lane,” but that they had well-founded concerns about who these bike lanes were for. They shared a concern about street safety for bicyclists, but sometimes sought other solutions.

Some projects chose to address this issue through education and harm reduction. At one site, CBOs mitigated the potential impact of displacement by inviting eviction rights defense organizations to events. This strategy recognized the limited control they had over change, while also seeking to reduce potential harm. One planner and community leader recognized the long history of transportation improvements and displacement, dating back to the transcontinental railroad, a historically grounded observation. They said, “The fact that housing and other policies are not being combined when a transportation agency is upgrading something, to me it's classic racism.” They proposed an alternative vision of the future: “That would be an amazing headline that, [transportation improvements] have been fully implemented, and we have seen no evictions, no displacements and there's been a decrease of deportations, and imprisonments in the neighborhoods.”

Address Policing

Policing also emerged as a consistent point of tension. Heightened law enforcement presence translated to a less safe environment for some communities represented by CBOs. Policing was cited as an impediment to both bicycling and transit use. Many agencies employ police officers or have agreements with local law enforcement agencies. These posed problems for community partnership. During the course of one project, the city agency increased enforcement at the site where community engagement was taking place. CBO partners were not notified of this policy change. Even more disturbing, a young man was killed while being stopped by police for a minor transportation-related citation. Both of these events made CBOs question their involvement with the project. They were disturbed that they were not consulted or notified of the changing policy. They also worried that their continued partnership would imply in their constituents' view that they sanctioned these actions. They decided to use mitigation strategies, as one community planner related, “We made sure we connected with other folks who do “Know your rights” trainings so that people know how to deal with cops.” If issues such as policing and displacement are not addressed, trust with CBOs is limited.

Address Youth Development

Other core concerns of CBOs were concerns related to youth development and elders. In one planning process, the community specifically prioritized youth and elders over the community as a whole, seeing their needs as most important. In another site, youth were employed in the community engagement process, helping with walk audits and other planning processes. As one community leader shared,

They feel appreciated because this work is important. Imagine how it would feel if someone tells you, this weekend I'm going to stipend you to work with me for a few hours, we're going to walk around your neighborhood and this work that you do is going to inform a plan that is going to invest up to \$1 billion in your area? That's powerful. And that's why they did it. So that's why it's important to involve youth in everything. They are the experts. Like I said, I learned more from them than I did from any of the planners that I've ever worked with.

One youth who took part in this process shared, "It's just given me a whole new perspective. I always used to just look at my environment, and think, 'I don't like that, but what can I do? It is what it is.' Now I look at it as, 'I don't like that and here's what I can do about it.'" Another CBO created a planning certification program to provide youth and elders with frameworks for advocacy based in what one community planner called, "the five D's, which are decolonize, decongest, decriminalize, dignify and determination." This innovative approach to community engagement and youth education not only involves youth in the planning process, but also empowers them to think about becoming the next generation of planners and advocates.

Know Local Histories of Transportation Injustice

Before entering into dialogue with the community, agencies and consultants needed to do their homework about local histories of transportation injustice, past planning efforts, and city relations. All four projects took place in sites of historic transportation injustice. Beginning the partnership with open and full acknowledgement of the transportation department and/or city's role in this history of oppression was crucial for building future trust. In one locale, the city acknowledged its role in harming and denying resources to communities of color. One community professional saw this as pivotal. She shared, "For the city to start to, in public meetings, admit to the wrongs they have done to communities of color, that was extremely successful." The communities are often cognizant of past harms going back generations. These include redlining, highway construction through community centers, environmental injustice such as pollution that leads to health inequities and higher mortality rates, job loss, disinvestment, and displacement. All of the sites of this study were subject to some or all of these policy and infrastructural decisions. Histories of redlining and zoning of industrial pollutants deeply impact the well-being of the community. As one community leader put it,

It's not an accident that today, we... rank as the most heavily polluted community in the entire state of California. It's not an accident that we see black infant mortality rates that are really at or higher than third-world country levels in [our neighborhood], that we see the highest concentrated poverty rates, that we see a 20-year life gap in terms of life expectancy between [our neighborhood] and [other areas of the city].

At another site, coming in with a deep knowledge of past transportation plans was crucial. One planner discussed how prior to engaging the community, he read and analyzed all transportation plans in the past decade. This became the starting point for engagement. He shared that asking what the community wanted without attention to past engagements was harmful. He said,

That's really a slap in the face to people who, for decades, have been pleading for things that they need and have been involved in past processes to try to identify exactly that and then to come in and say, what do you want? ...We're really trying to focus on actually demonstrating that we'd done the work, that we paid the respects to understand what this community's been through but then also what they've asked for and what work has gone before us.

Include the Community in the Final Reporting Process

An issue of “credit” for community engagement efforts arose at times. Distrust builds when a city attempts to take credit for community engagement that they did not finance or were not a part of. A community leader shared,

The city didn't invest any money in community engagement. All of that money that was invested was all through [a local nonprofit]. We were the ones that provided small grants to community organizations in order to be able to engage community members. We were the ones that provided technical assistance to community members... We were the ones that did presentations in between the official meetings so that folks were geared up for that. And all of that gets lost when the city just wants to take credit for the outcome. And that's the piece that I think if we're not intentional and transparent about how engagement happens, then we're missing the formula of how we need to budget for community engagement.

She points out that community engagement does not just magically happen. It is a lot of work. When the city attempted to take credit for having done an engagement process, they erased and disrespected the work of the local nonprofit and community organizers.

In other sites where the city did pay for community engagement efforts, it was still of great important to recognize the contributions of CBOs. Highlighting the contributions of the CBOs to the project and the community as a whole in final documents assisted in building trust for future partnerships.

The final plans were approachable and readable to average community members. They were visually compelling and written in a jargon-free manner. They included information about the community engagement process and the voices of those in the community. Sections were co-written by individuals representing CBOs, or CBOs acted as reviewers of draft plans. Plans included a section on the history of the area of study documenting transportation racism and inequities. These histories were contextualized into the current-day plans. They described the process of community engagement. Importantly, they held up the contributions of CBOs, both to the plan's creation and in achieving the goals of the plan. They included the voice and image of the community. In one city, they hired photographers to create a more diverse archive of images. As one community partner put it,

We're going to out there, take photos of people of color on bikes, they might not be in the bike lanes, they might be on the sidewalk. They might be the grandma with the grocery bags in Chinatown, going

in the wrong direction. It might be the man carrying recyclables and garbage bags on a bike so that he can have some food to eat at the end of the day. But we're going to document that and put it in this plan.

Inclusion of local history, community contributions, community voices, and community faces was important to the participants. They also appreciated that reports did not just include the “good stuff.” More critical perspectives were also included. For example, when asked if they thought the plan would help meet local transportation needs, one CBO representative was quoted in the final report as saying, “Not really. Some things will be fluffed up because of the newer demographics but [name of neighborhood] is still [name of neighborhood]. We'll maybe see a few shiny new things being done to make it seem like there is a change, but it won't last.” This cynicism is understandable given the legacy of devaluation the neighborhood has experienced, and including that in the official record is a good reminder that harm is not healed overnight.

In one case, CBOs were successful in advocating to take part in authoring the plan. The agency agreed to this arrangement, and to pay the authors. The CBOs nominated to this role two trusted consultants with experience both in planning and grassroots organizing. These two consultants became the primary authors of the plan. They interviewed people from each CBO to learn their experience of the process and what they wanted transmitted in the report. In the words of one of the authors, Monique Lopez:

We interviewed a couple of people from each CBO that was a part of the project, and through those interviews we were able to draft the narrative for the final report, which is actually quite different than most... reports. So, it has a social, cultural, historical context section. Sometimes when you see those types of sections, it's like, "And here's that section," but that narrative sets up the foundation and is woven throughout the document in terms of recommendations that are moving forward.

Their document reads as a “call to action” to the agency, highlighting first and foremost how to do good community engagement. Recommendations consistently link back to the engagement process.

Implementation... Where the Rubber Meets the Road

All the projects studied were planning processes. Community engagement seems most prevalent and useful at this stage. And yet, implementation is what matters most to historically neglected communities. As one planner put it, “What it really comes down to is we need to come in and actually start delivering for these folks.” Planning documents are of immense importance, as they set the agenda for grant applications and (hopefully) implementation for years to come. And yet, many plans never make it off the shelf and onto the streets. It can also be difficult to engage people in changes that are years down the road. As one longtime transportation professional put it, “You can get more people to show up for implementation because then it becomes more real, but if you haven't done hard work in the planning, then it's a harder push to get something changed that was never considered in the first place.” It can also be challenging to keep residents engaged in the lag time between planning and implementation. This was a challenge cited in numerous projects. Delays and a lack of follow-through can lead people to feel that their time was not well-used. In one project, a

community leader noted, “Now it's been two years since the whole process started. There's still a lot of that skepticism of, ‘Is this really going to happen?’ It's been two years, where are we with this?” In some cases, the lack of an immediate funding source can lead to projects falling short of their goals, as was the case in one project. One community leader shared, “We had all these folks at the table, an active audience, but we weren't really focused on the funding piece and that ultimately hurt us because there was this gap in time between the business plan and the implementation. We lost a number of our CBOs that were invested, and the funding that we got was not sufficient.” Historically marginalized communities may be particularly skeptical about the “realness” of a planning document and may withhold belief in the authenticity of a partnership until shovels are in the ground. In the interim, there are many pitfalls for losing hard-won trust generated in the engaged planning process.

Two projects responded to this challenge by having implementation that complemented the planning process. Participants also recommended continuing to engage with communities through implementation. Things can change between planning and implementation. Staying in dialogue with impacted communities ensures that the end-product meets their needs as they anticipated. Processes that had mechanisms for quick follow-through on implementation or recently implemented projects in the community fared well. In one site, a community-generated innovation that was implemented during the planning process helped to foster trust in further planning processes. Set-aside funds for quick implementation was key in another site.

Community involvement through implementation was also highlighted. As one senior planner said, “Every step, things change... You almost can't take your eye off the ball through the whole process because things could change. Somebody has to hold everyone accountable along the way to make sure that things don't change.” Communities asked for clear processes to help hold city agencies accountable. Two plans included detailed processes for continued community involvement. As one planner shared, “[The CBO] asked us for more specifics implementation and prioritization... We also included a section on the principles of community collaboration... That calls out a four-step process of how the community will be involved in... implementation.” Such measures point toward the importance of continuing to foster the relationship after an “official” planning process ends.

Conclusion: Early Steps in a Long Process

Though these were all projects chosen as “success stories,” no one interviewed considered the process and outcomes an unmitigated success. All saw limitations and a need for deeper and ongoing work. What made these processes successful is that they were a step in the right direction regarding city agency-community relations and these historically neglected communities saw the hope of tangible change in their neighborhood from which local, longtime residents would benefit.

As community-engaged processes in transportation planning become more common, researchers must continue to track their progress. Key questions that arose in this study that bear future investigation are listed below by topic.

- *CBO Relations:* How do we ascertain whether CBOs agencies partner fully represent the community? How do we reach residents that may not be tied in with partner CBOs? How can we create better processes for working with CBOs at varying organizational capacities? How can transportation agencies leverage their relationship with other government branches to have more of a community’s needs met, even when they fall outside the scope of transportation?
- *Planner Training:* What professionalized training can help planners enter into these partnerships with the skills needed to succeed? Potentially crucial to the success of these processes was the high percentage of planners involved who identified as Black or people of color and/or came from highly diverse neighborhoods. What specialized expertise are they bringing to their professional work? How accessible are local transportation histories to planners, and how can these histories become better known? What are best practices for translating the complex processes of transportation planning and implementation to everyday residents?
- *Institutional Priorities:* How often are community engagement processes with historically neglected communities leading to satisfactory implementation of desired changes, and how quickly? How does the involvement of community groups change implementation and city priorities?
- *Displacement:* How can planning and implementation processes mitigate or prevent displacement?
- *Youth Development:* How can planning processes act as a pipeline and professional development opportunity for local youth?
- *Safety:* How can transportation agencies create safer transportation systems without using standard law enforcement practices, which can threaten the safety of Black residents and residents of color? What community safety solutions have neighborhoods who have suffered from police violence created?

- *Funding:* What are the costs for quality community engagement? How often are agencies compensating community partners, and at what rates? What funding strategies are being used to pay for adequate community engagement, and how can these opportunities be expanded?

As these questions point out, more work is needed to fully understand the important role of community engagement in creating a more equitable transportation landscape.

Appendix 1: Methodology

We contacted 60 transportation professionals in California who do community engagement work, requesting that they complete a short survey about a successful community engagement project in which they had participated. Professionals were identified through recommendation from partner organizations including the National Center for Sustainable Transportation; the Policy Institute for Energy, Environment, and the Economy at UC Davis; the Center for Regional Change at UC Davis; People for Mobility Justice; CalBike; Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG); and Oakland Department of Transportation (OakDOT). Initial contacts were via email.

Eight people responded directly to the survey. Eighteen people responded via email expressing a desire to participate or with recommendations of others to contact. This gave us a total of 26 respondents with the majority (13) identifying as working for community-based organizations (CBOs). Small planning firms (5) and local/regional agencies (4) were the next most common respondents.

Table 1. Respondents to Initial Survey

Place of Employment of Respondent	# of Responses
Community-Based Organization	13
Small Planning Firm	5
Local or Regional Agency	4
State Agency	3
National Nonprofit	1

Eleven potential projects were recommended for further investigation. They spanned the state, with four in Northern California, two in Central California, and five in Southern California. Four projects occurred in major cities, four in mid-size cities, and two in rural locales. Disadvantaged groups targeted through community engagements included: Black communities (2); Latino communities (3); mixed communities of color (5); Spanish-speaking communities (5); women (1); people with disabilities (1); and youth (1). (Note that there are overlaps between these groups.) All targeted low-income populations, with one specifically targeting those who are homeless.

Activities conducted varied widely. They included public workshops and meetings, youth-led projects, pop-up art workshops, tabling at flea markets, data analysis for prior public processes, street surveys, and door-to-door canvassing.

Four final sites were selected for further analysis. These were selected to attain geographic diversity across California, to represent different models of community engagement, to have a diversity of disadvantaged communities, and to include different scales of projects. In each site, two to four process participants were interviewed, with twelve interviews conducted in total. Of these, four were conducted with community-based organization leaders, four were conducted with planners working for the agency or as a consultant, and four were conducted with individuals who possessed planning expertise and were members of or had strong relationships with local CBOs. Six identified as female, three identified as male, and three identified as non-binary or gender-fluid. We allowed participants to self-identify their race/ethnicity. Three self-identified as white, one declined to be categorized, and the remaining eight identified as Black or as a person of color. They ranged from early to late career professionals. Interviews were conducted between May and June 2019.

Interviews were coded using a semi-open-ended coding scheme. Key themes were initially identified such as funding, history, method, documentation, implementation, and relationships. These were refined and sub-categorized in an iterative process. Analysis was influenced by critical race theory, frameworks of mobility justice, and feminist theory (14, 15, 29, 30). Representative quotations were selected for inclusion in this final report.

As this was not an exhaustive study of each site, we do not claim to represent the “whole story” of any of these case studies. Rather, we analyzed the results both in context and holistically. In analysis, we considered the place-specific context of each case study, as this was highly relevant to the interview data. For this final report, we chose to present results in a holistic manner that attends to overall trends and themes.

Appendix 2: Description of Four Case Study Sites

Below is a short overview of the four sites selected for examination.

Case Study 1: Improving Transportation in Bayview Hunter's Point

Bayview Hunter's Point (BVHP) was chosen as one site of community engagement for study. BVHP is a historically Black community in San Francisco's southeastern corner. It is isolated from the rest of San Francisco by geography and built infrastructure. It is also a site of historic neglect and environmental injustice due to institutional racism. During the Great Migration, Hunter's Point Shipyard attracted a large number of African American workers to "clean" nuclear residue from contaminated U.S. Navy vessels, residue which subsequently became an equally difficult toxic waste problem that continues to this day. With the closing of the shipyard in 1973, this red-lined community suffered sharp economic decline. In recent decades, the neighborhood has seen an exodus of many Black residents and an influx of Latinx residents and Asian-American residents, including recent immigrants. Despite this, BVHP continues to house 22% of San Francisco's Black residents, the largest of any district. Current redevelopment plans near the waterfront threaten further displacement. Many residents live in economically precarious conditions. 42% of residents live in poverty, nearly double the rate of the rest of the city, and unemployment is high.

This is also a community that has been "studied to death." Between 2007-2017, there were 20 transportation-related studies of BVHP (31). Within the scope of this study, we interviewed participants from three different projects: the Bayview Hunters Point Mobility Study (32), the District 10 Mobility Management study (33) and the Bayview Community-Based Transportation Plan (34). This demonstrates the confusing planning landscape in which the community finds itself. All plans conducted strong community engagement. The first study's purpose was to address service gaps in the community and resulted in a business plan and pilot study for a shared van service providing for the youth and elders of the community. The second plan's purpose was to identify programmatic ways to reduce vehicle miles traveled and recommended implementation of various micro-mobility programs. The final study's purpose was to improve physical mobility in BVHP, which resulted in a series of quick-build projects and prioritization of future projects.

Case Study 2: Let's Bike Oakland

Oakland is well known for its diversity, history of activism, and current gentrification. The last has resulted in sweeping displacement of longtime residents. The city has also dedicated itself to becoming more bicycle-friendly, beginning with the adoption of their first bicycle plan in 1999. Since then, bike lanes, bike boulevards, and bike traffic have become common. These two trends—displacement and bicycling—often happen

concurrently and can seem connected to many longtime residents. Mainstream bicycling and attendant infrastructure such as bike lanes are often seen as a harbinger of rising property values and displacement (24), and Oakland is no exception. Thus, when the city decided to create a new bicycle plan in 2019, they made equity a core tenet. They were influenced by the creation of a new department in the city, the Department of Race and Equity, launched in 2015. This department works with other units to maintain diversity, eliminate racial disparities, and create racial equity. The Oakland Department of Transportation (OakDOT) put significant investment into community engagement in the creation of the new bicycle plan and created a final plan with a strong equity focus (35). The plan engaged more than 3,500 Oakland residents and received more than 2,300 online comments. This plan, along with the City's Repaving Plan, established a new model for engagement moving forward (36).

Case Study 3: Transform Fresno

Fresno is a mid-size city situated in California's Central Valley, surrounded by farmland and small towns, many populated by low-income farmworkers. Residents of some of these small, isolated communities live in sub-standard conditions with little to no public transportation options. Some towns have begun to experiment with community-run and owned rideshare programs. These grassroots rideshares supplement existing informal rideshare systems and offer residents better access to larger surrounding towns that they must access for medical appointments, shopping needs, and other essential services.

Fresno also experiences significant infrastructural disparities, which are particularly dire in Southwest Fresno. Southwest Fresno was a historically red-lined community, keeping many Black families within its bounds. Businesses succeed in the past, but a combination of highway construction and redevelopment destroyed the thriving community. The city permitted heavy industry to move in and concentrated low-income housing in the neighborhood. Residents face dire environmental burdens, infrastructural neglect, and ongoing poverty. This long legacy of institutional racism has left residents at greater risk of developing health conditions such as asthma. The neighborhood also has little green space (37). Yet in the face of these challenges, there is strong community mobilization. Legacies of organizing contributed to the development of a plan that will result in significant community improvements. These improvements are financed by the Strategic Growth Council's Transformative Climate Communities grant. The funding covers an array of projects, from the establishment of parks and green space to the building of a community college hub. Transportation improvements include the development of a clean shared mobility network that will establish a low carbon and affordable transit system of electric vehicles and bike shares, pedestrian and bike infrastructure, and bus transit improvements (38). The final plan was developed by a group of Southwest Fresno residents as an alternative to proposed city plans. Though this project had a high level of community engagement, this was organized and financed by local community-based organizations (CBOs), as opposed to a city agency.

Case Study 4: First Mile/Last Mile Along Los Angeles's Blue Line

The Blue Line, Metro's oldest rail line, connects Downtown Los Angeles and Long Beach. It runs through many low-income and Black, Latinx, and mixed-race communities. This comes as no surprise, given that the majority of neighborhoods along its route were historically redlined, effectively constraining those who lived there. These communities were subject to the same cycles of institutional racism as many others, such as Bayview/Hunters Point and Southwest Fresno. The Blue Line was built along existing right-of-way, which lowered costs, but limited accessibility along its corridor. At-grade construction also created dangerous situations for residents. The most egregious of these was in Compton. The city of Compton requested a below-grade crossing, due to safety concerns. The proposed line ran just a quarter mile parallel to an existing freight line that already caused significant traffic delays and impeded emergency vehicles. Their request was denied. In the following years, crashes and deaths were frequent, from both car and pedestrian traffic. Though many safety improvements have been made, barriers to access continue to exist. The First Mile/Last Mile study planning process used partnerships with community-based organizations to identify improvements driven by local need (39).

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