



Safety, Growth, and Equity: Transportation

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Introduction

Our nation's transportation infrastructure is composed of many interconnected systems—a network of interstate and regional highways, local streets and roads, rail and bus transit systems, bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure (such as bike lanes, sidewalks, paths, and greenways), as well as paratransit and other transportation services for the elderly, the disabled, and others with special transportation needs.

Local and regional governments play the lead role in financing the construction and maintenance of our transportation infrastructure, with the federal government playing a smaller, but nevertheless significant, role via subsidies. In 1956, Congress established the Highway Trust Fund to finance the construction of the interstate highway system, with revenues from the federal tax on gasoline. In the early 1980s, Congress broadened the fund to provide some funding for transit as well. For every 18 cents of federal gas tax, about 3 cents flow to transit, and about 15 cents to highways.¹

With the passage of the federal ISTEA (Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act) law in 1991 and the TEA-21 law in 1998, some new flexibility was given to states to determine how best to spend their federal transportation dollars. This included using some highway funds for transit or alternative modes of transportation. California has taken advantage of the new flexibility and funding for alternative modes of transportation more so than most other states. It alone accounted for over half of all federal funding flexed to transit during 1998–2002.

Annually, California spends over \$15 billion on transportation; about half of that funding is raised locally. The state receives between \$3 and \$4 billion in federal transportation funding annually, and the state kicks in over \$4 billion as well.² Local funds equal twice the federal contribution. In fact, federal funds account for only one-sixth of San Francisco Bay Area transportation funding.

Transportation and Regional Development

Transportation investments have a strong impact on development and the quality of life for local residents. Roads and transit systems have the potential to bring great economic benefits to communities and individuals. The U.S. Department of Commerce estimates that a \$1 billion investment in highway and transit improvements in California would directly and indirectly provide over 26,000 jobs, generating about \$870 million in personal income.³ Investments in transit systems and transit-oriented development (TOD)—a mix of housing and commercial development within walking distance of transit stations—can spark new investment and redevelopment in local communities. Good transit systems connect people to jobs, services, and educational opportunities. This is especially important for households without access to a car. Investments in clean transit can also reduce traffic congestion and air pollution as well as improve public health at the community level.

* PolicyLink thanks Kristi Kimball for research that contributed to this brief.



An equitable transportation system will be flexible and responsive to the needs of different communities and groups.

Likewise, transportation projects can also have serious and negative impacts on communities. For example, the practice of siting urban highways through existing low-income and minority communities has displaced thousands of families in cities across the nation, reduced the supply of affordable housing, physically divided thriving communities, and served as a precursor to disinvestment and urban blight in these areas. Additionally, automobile emissions, noise, and traffic danger from highways and major thoroughfares impact the health of families living nearby.

Investments in transportation infrastructure have been a driving force behind regional growth trends and the rise of “suburban sprawl,” a dispersed, low-density pattern of single-use development that makes driving the only convenient mode of travel. In a recent survey, the nation’s leading urban scholars ranked the federal subsidy of the interstate highway system as the number-one influence on the American metropolis over the past 50 years.⁴ The 41,000-mile interstate highway system transformed American cities by facilitating suburbanization and sprawl development and triggering white flight from central cities. By paving new roadways to cheap land outside the central city, highway builders made it possible for developers to put new housing and development in outlying areas which were previously inaccessible.

The car is king in California. The state’s residents make the vast majority of their trips by car (86 percent), and 84 percent of trips to work are made by individuals driving alone. Public transit accounts for 2.2 percent of trips annually, 8.4 percent are made on foot, and about 1 percent is made by bicycle.⁵ These numbers illustrate the modern reality in California: that driving is often the fastest, most convenient way

to get around. Each household is also driving *more* miles every year, and the increase in miles driven consistently outpaces population growth.⁶

Although driving is the mode of choice, children and youth, the elderly, and the disabled are often dependent on alternative modes of transportation for independent mobility, and these segments of society are steadily growing. Children 17 years and under—a fast-growing segment of the population—made up 27 percent of California’s population in 2000.⁷ The elderly are a growing percentage of the population as well. While California’s overall population is expected to increase nearly 33 percent by 2020, the senior age group is projected to increase about 71 percent.⁸

Those who cannot afford cars or who are unable to drive independently face substantial barriers to mobility today. In 2000–2001, 9.3 percent of California households did not have a car.⁹ Additionally, over 90 percent of former welfare recipients have no access to a car.¹⁰ Without a car, many job opportunities are out of reach for welfare recipients and low-income families. Researchers studying the most recent national travel data conclude, “Clearly, many low-income households are cut off from some destinations they need to reach because they cannot afford the automotive transportation needed to access most parts of metropolitan areas.”¹¹ A study conducted by the Transportation and Land Use Coalition of the Bay Area (TALC) found that poor transit service is a barrier to health for many families. In Contra Costa County, only 20 percent of residents in low-income neighborhoods have transit access to a hospital; 33 percent have transit access to a community clinic, and only 39 percent have a supermarket within walking distance of their homes.¹²

Low-income and minority groups use transit, bike, and walk more often than whites and higher-income groups. Generally, transit ridership declines as income increases, and this drop is particularly stark for bus transit. Low-income households are eight times as likely as wealthy households to take a trip by bus (4 percent vs. 0.5 percent).¹³ In Los Angeles, 48 percent of riders on the county MTA's (Metropolitan Transit Authority) buses have household incomes of less than \$15,000.¹⁴ The most recent national survey shows that African Americans are almost six times more likely than whites to take transit (5.3 percent vs. 0.3 percent), and Latinos are about three times more likely to ride transit than whites (2.4 percent vs. 0.3 percent).¹⁵

Our nation has a legacy of transportation policies and investments that inadequately serve and often isolate low-income and minority communities from jobs, services, education, and housing opportunities essential to escape poverty and fully participate in society. In fact, the civil rights movement began with efforts to fight racism in the transportation system.¹⁶ Shortly after Rosa Parks refused to move to the back of the bus, Martin Luther King, Jr., and others organized the Montgomery, Alabama, bus boycott; and later the "Freedom Riders" risked their lives traveling across the country to exercise their right to ride on desegregated buses.

The modern "transportation equity" movement has grown out of a merging of civil rights and environmental justice efforts. Still in its infancy, the transportation equity (or transportation justice) movement gained national recognition and momentum in the 1990s. The objective of this

movement is to ensure equal access for all people to social and economic opportunities by providing equitable services and equitable levels of access to all places.¹⁷ Clearly, different groups in society have different constraints on their ability to travel, so a one-size-fits-all solution for transportation is not the goal. An equitable transportation system will be flexible and responsive to the needs of different communities and groups.

In California, activists have worked, mainly on the regional and local levels, for equity both in decision making and in transportation outcomes. In terms of decision-making, activists have pursued more meaningful opportunities for public involvement in the development of Regional Transportation Plans (RTPs). These plans are approved by Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) and outline how the majority of federal, state, and local transportation money will be spent in each region. In terms of transportation outcomes, activists have advocated on behalf of disadvantaged communities, largely one project at a time, by fighting for additional bus lines, or for traffic-calming measures on dangerous streets.

The challenge for California's grassroots activists is to translate their local and regional transportation work into successful statewide campaigns to advance transportation equity at the state level. The passage of the Safe Routes to School Act in 1999 was a clear victory for transportation equity in California, providing more than \$25 million a year for bicycle and pedestrian amenities around schools; but this is only a sliver of the \$15 billion that the state spends on transportation each year.

Promising Practices

I. Standards, Measurement, and Assessment

New data collection and public reporting requirements can be used to shed light on inequities and increase government accountability for serving the needs of low-income and disadvantaged communities. The following are some examples of promising practices along these lines:

PRACTICE: Report the geographic distribution of transportation investments.

In 1975 the federal Home Mortgage Disclosure Act required banks to report mortgage lending activity by ethnicity, race, gender, income, and geographic location; this helped identify redlining and other discriminatory practices.¹⁸ The Community Reinvestment Act, enacted in 1977, also seeks to prevent redlining and requires banks to meet the credit needs of the entire community, including low- and moderate-income neighborhoods.¹⁹ Presently, the federal TEA-21 bill requires reporting on an annual “list of projects” for which federal transportation funds are spent. The next step is to break down the project data to the street level, or the census tract, so that social equity advocates have better information about how their communities are faring in terms of the allocation of public investment dollars for transportation. This finer-grain reporting was initially proposed in 2004 during the TEA-21 reauthorization process.²⁰

PRACTICE: Revise transportation planning models and metrics.

Local transportation systems are often designed to maximize the speed and efficiency of car travel, at the expense of other modes of travel. Auto-centric transportation systems become self-fulfilling prophecies because alternative travel modes are so inconvenient or unsafe that most people choose to drive. But low-income and disadvantaged populations have lower auto ownership rates than other groups, so they bear the brunt of poorly designed alternative modes. Transportation models should be revised to maximize the efficiency of multiple travel modes; people who live in dense urban areas and near transit are more likely to take more trips via transit, biking, and walking.

One key problem is the use of traditional “Level of Service” (LOS) standards for cars. LOS standards, which guide the design of streets and roads, measure how quickly motor vehicles can move along a roadway and through intersections and determine space needed for parking. This LOS approach maximizes traffic speeds (which is fine for highways, but not so desirable for neighborhood streets) and creates a bias in street design against special infrastructure and accommodations for bicyclists, walkers, or transit riders because these features might slow the flow of cars.

Dan Burden, a nationally known expert on walkable design and Director of Walkable Communities Inc., has developed new Level of Quality (LOQ) guidelines that are meant to show graphically why some streets work better than others for access, safety, and mobility of all modes of travel.²¹

The **Florida** Department of Transportation has developed new multimodal LOS standards as well as procedures for determining multimodal level of service and concurrency in multimodal transportation districts. In 2000, the Florida legislature created a Multimodal Transportation District (MMTD) alternative to enable local governments to address transportation concurrency through development of high-quality multimodal environment.²² A MMTD is an area designated within the Comprehensive Plan where the first priority is given to encouraging and enhancing non-auto forms of transportation.²³

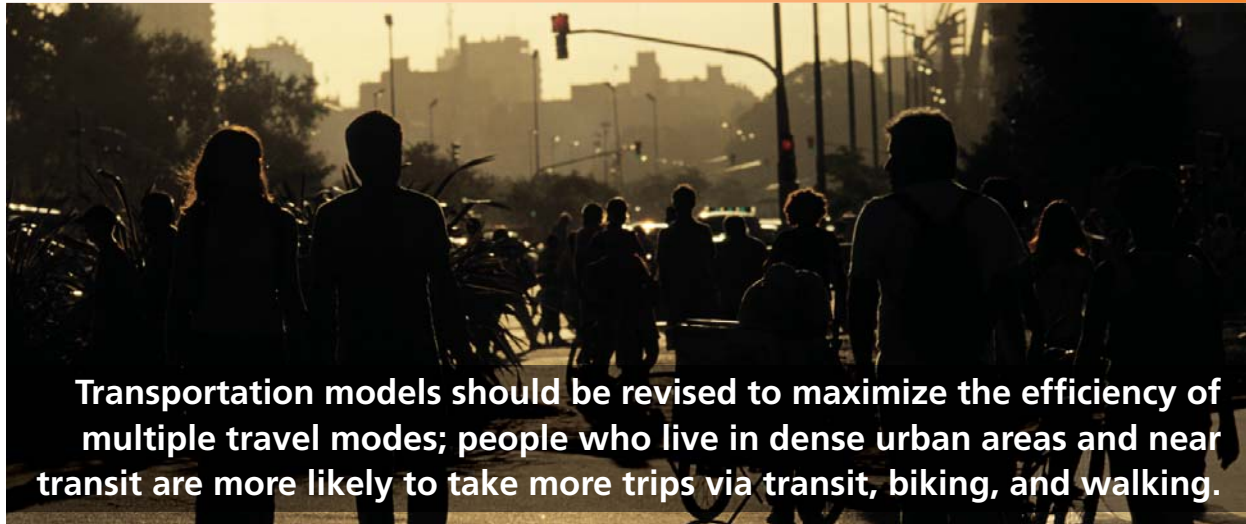
II. Targeting Resources to High-Need Areas

PRACTICE: Increase funding for transit.

Transit is an important lifeline for millions of Americans who cannot afford a car or are not able to drive themselves—disproportionately affecting low-income, the disabled, children and youth, and elderly populations. According to the U.S. Department of Transportation (2002), over 90 percent of welfare recipients do not own a car.²⁴ Additionally, people of color are more dependent on transit than whites are for mobility and job access in metropolitan areas.

(a) Free the gas tax.

The distribution of gas tax revenues within states often penalizes cities and urban areas because restrictions on this funding complicate using these



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revenues to address urban transportation needs. Thirty states restrict their gas tax revenues to be used for highway purposes only.²⁵ This limits the state's ability to finance mass transit, congestion relief, air quality improvement projects, and other options not related to highways. **California** allows gas tax revenues to be used for transit capital, but not for transit operations—the largest ongoing funding need for transit systems. A 1993 U.S. General Accounting Office report emphasized that without access to state gas tax revenues, some transit systems have to rely almost exclusively on funding from local sales taxes, which is inconsistent and often inadequate to meet their needs. Between 1998 and 2001, only four states spent more than 15 percent of their gas tax revenues on transit—New York, Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Maryland. In all four states, statutory provisions set aside substantial portions of net revenues for transit. For example, Maryland spent 37 percent of its gas tax revenues on state highways, 36 percent on local roads, and 23 percent on transit.

(b) Create dedicated revenue sources for transit.

In March 2004, **San Francisco** Bay Area voters approved a \$1 increase in the toll on the Bay Bridge, with all of the revenues dedicated to regional transit projects, including substantial funds for transit operations. Overall, the measure will raise \$125 million annually for transit. The key criterion for projects funded through the bridge toll is that there must be a “bridge nexus,” meaning that the projects reduce congestion on one or more state toll bridges in the region.²⁶

(c) Create a Regional Transit Vision to shift regional investments into transit.

San Diego's regional agencies responsible for transportation and land use jointly created a “Regional Transit Vision” (RTV) to formalize their commitment to public transit as a key to maintaining and improving quality of life in the region. The RTV includes state-of-the-art bus travel, signal priority for transit, a customer-focused system, real-time information, and faster, integrated transit service throughout the region that is competitive with driving. These agencies have jointly pursued new local sales tax funding and also allocated a portion of state and federal transportation dollars to priority projects identified in the RTV.²⁷ In 2004, county voters approved Proposition A, a 40-year extension of TransNet (a half-cent sales tax for transportation improvements). The tax extension garnered approval from 67 percent of the voting public and will generate \$14 billion for transportation improvement projects.

PRACTICE: Invest in bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure.

Pedestrian-vehicle collisions now rank among the leading causes of death and hospitalized injury for children. Minority children and children from low-income households are particularly vulnerable because they make a higher percentage of their trips on foot.²⁸

(a) Design streets for bicyclists and walkers as well as for drivers.

It is much more efficient and effective to integrate planning for bicyclists and pedestrians into the design of streets and roads from the beginning—often called “routine accommodation”—rather than retrofitting streets and intersections later on to address bike

and pedestrian safety. The **U.S. Department of Transportation** has issued design guidelines encouraging state and local transportation agencies to consider bicycle and pedestrian travel as part of all transportation projects. The guidance includes the following policy statement: “Bicycle and pedestrian ways shall be established in new construction and reconstruction projects in all urbanized areas unless one or more of three conditions are met: (1) bicyclists and pedestrians are prohibited by law from using the roadway. In this instance, a greater effort may be necessary to accommodate bicyclists and pedestrians elsewhere within the right of way or within the same transportation corridor; (2) the cost of establishing bikeways or walkways would be excessively disproportionate to the need or probable use. Excessively disproportionate is defined as exceeding 20 percent of the cost of the larger transportation project; or (3) where sparsity of population or other factors indicate an absence of need.” This is strong guidance that could be more aggressively enforced at the state and local levels to improve bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure. For example, the **Florida DOT** has integrated bicycle and pedestrian facility design information into its standard highway design manuals, and the **New Jersey DOT** is in the process of doing so. In **California**, the state Department of Transportation, CalTrans, issued its own guidance for local transportation agencies in “Deputy Directive 64.”²⁹

In the city of **University Place, Washington**, the redevelopment of Bridgeport Way has become a model of best practices in redesigning streets to better accommodate bicycle and foot traffic. Bridgeport Way was a five-lane suburban style roadway, and it was a central spine for a new downtown for the community of University Place. The roadway had a poor safety record, and it was experiencing significant traffic congestion. Walking and bicycling along the roadway was treacherous. Using a highly interactive set of public visioning activities, known as a charrette, the city manager and newly elected officials were able to gain consensus to rebuild the street as a four-lane, median divided road with bike lanes, sidewalks, planter strips, and tree canopy.³⁰

(b) Replicate the Safe Routes to School program. The **California** state legislature enacted the Safe Routes to School program in 1999 and set aside \$20 to \$25 million in federal transportation funds annually for projects that improve traffic safety and pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure near schools. Since its inception, the program has been very popular, with applications from local governments for four or five times more funding than was available in the first few years; there have been proposals to make permanent

California’s program, which is scheduled to expire in 2007.³¹ A number of other states have implemented similar programs in recent years, and the federal government modeled portions of TEA-3 after it.

(c) Emulate the Safe Routes to Transit program.

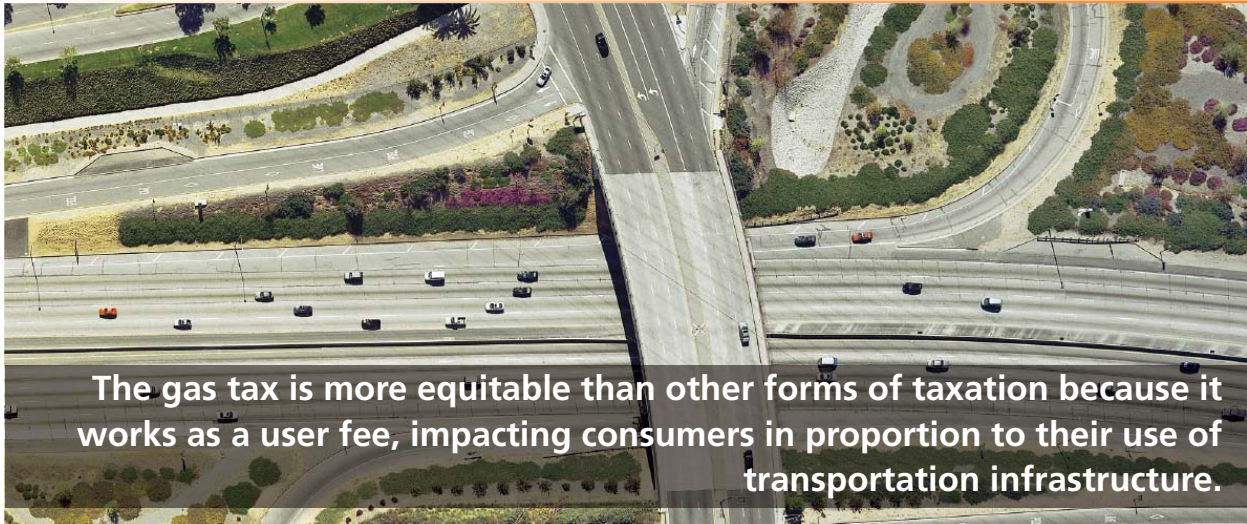
Bicycling and walking are cost-effective and sustainable ways to reach regional transit stations, yet many commuters drive to transit stations instead, citing traffic safety as their main concern.³² In the **San Francisco Bay Area**, the East Bay Bicycle Coalition and the Transportation and Land Use Coalition teamed to propose and win approval for the new Safe Routes to Transit program that will promote bicycling and walking to transit stations by making these connecting trips easier, faster, and safer. The new \$22.5 million Safe Routes to Transit (SR2T) Program received voter approval in March 2004 through Regional Measure 2, a \$1 bridge toll increase for regional transit. SR2T funds can be used for:

- securing bicycle storage at transit stations, stops, city carshare pods;
- safety enhancements for pedestrian and bike access to transit stations, stops, city carshare pods;
- removal of pedestrian and bike barriers on roads and intersections near transit stations; and
- system-wide transit enhancements to accommodate bicyclists or pedestrians.

PRACTICE: Target special funds to disadvantaged communities.

(a) Maintain and expand the JARC program.

The federal Jobs Access Reverse Commute (JARC) program provides special funding for local transportation agencies to help ensure that low-income and disadvantaged citizens have adequate access to jobs that are dispersed across the metropolitan region. Many people have benefited from additional transit service and special routes funded through this program. For example, in **Tennessee**, the Chattanooga Area Regional Transportation Authority (CARTA) is using multi-year JARC funds to expand transit services that connect low-income people with jobs in both rural and urban parts of Hamilton County, which includes the City of Chattanooga and surrounding suburban communities rich with entry-level employment opportunities. CARTA extended neighborhood bus routes and expanded hours of operation up to 19 hours a day to accommodate those working earlier and later shifts and on Saturdays; it improved transit service to employment corridors in suburban areas; and it created new flexible transportation options such as



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vanpools to suburban job sites and paratransit services. Overall, the program improvements reach more than 2,000 employers and 20,000 entry-level jobs, and they reach 65 childcare facilities with capacity for 2,200 children within a quarter mile of new transit stops.³³

(b) Create free student bus pass programs.

To ensure that low-income children have consistent, affordable transportation to school, Alameda County Transit implemented a pilot program offering free and reduced-price bus passes to students in **Alameda** and **Contra Costa counties** during 2002 and 2003. This program helped 24,000 East Bay youth get to and from school. However, budget cutbacks forced Alameda County Transit to terminate the program. Based on the success of the Alameda County Transit pilot, Contra Costa County voters passed Measure J in 2004, which established a \$14.5 million program to expand the subsidy for bus transit fares for low-income students.³⁴

III. Increase Funding Overall

PRACTICE: Raise the gas tax.

User fees such as the gas tax are among the most effective, efficient, and equitable approaches to transportation finance, according to UC Berkeley Professor and transportation finance expert Dr. Martin Wachs. However, the revenues from state and federal gas taxes have declined in recent years to only 35 percent of all roadway spending in 2003. Between 1947 and 1963, the California gas tax increased three times; but after that, it was not raised for more than 20 years. In 1957, the California state gas tax was 6 cents per gallon. If it had risen with inflation, today it would be 32.5 cents per gallon, rather than the current 18 cents per gallon.

Consequently, local governments have resorted to less stable and less equitable sources of revenue for their transportation needs, such as local sales taxes and borrowing. Concerns have been raised that a gas tax hike would disproportionately impact low-income families, but research conducted by MIT economist James Poterba finds that “low-expenditure households devote a smaller share of their budget to gasoline than do their counterparts in the middle of the expenditure distribution.” The gas tax is more equitable than other forms of taxation because it works as a user fee, impacting consumers in proportion to their use of transportation infrastructure. By acting as a price signal to the motorist, the gas tax can also encourage more efficient use of highways and can boost demand for more fuel-efficient vehicles. Both equity and efficiency are better served by increasing the gas tax rather than more regressive local taxes.³⁵

PRACTICE: Support local transportation sales taxes that invest in a balanced mix of transportation modes.

Design local sales tax measures to invest in a balanced mix of transportation modes. In particular, it is critical that local sales taxes provide funding for transit operations, which have very few other sources of funding. (In **California**, gas tax revenues cannot be used for transit operations.) Local sales taxes are also an important funding source for transportation for seniors and the disabled.

In 2000, the Transportation and Land Use Coalition (TALC) of the **San Francisco** Bay Area brought together public interest groups, ranging from homeless advocates to environmentalists, bicyclists, and the League of Women Voters in support of **Alameda County’s** “Measure B” local transportation

sales tax that invested heavily in transit and pedestrian safety. The earlier version of the measure (1998) did not have broad support and had less emphasis on transit. In 1998 only 58 percent of voters approved the earlier measure, failing to clear the two-thirds' majority vote required to pass a sales tax in California. After that failure, TALC's social equity and environmental coalition won some substantial changes in the funding allocations, shifting the majority of the funding to mass transit and other alternatives to driving alone, and allocating only 18 percent of the funding for highways. This broad coalition brought new public support to the ballot measure, and an overwhelming 81 percent of voters approved the revised measure in 2000.³⁶

In November 2004, **San Diego** voters approved the "TransNet" measure, a local sales tax increase for transportation that will generate \$14 billion over 40 years. This balanced transportation measure allocates funding in thirds among transit (including new Bus Rapid Transit), highway, and local road improvements. In addition, \$1 million is earmarked annually for bicycle paths and facilities, and an extensive \$850 million environmental mitigation program is also funded.³⁷

PRACTICE: Support local smart growth sales taxes.

To truly enable smart growth and to make alternatives to driving convenient, investments in transportation, affordable housing, and parks must be done in a coordinated and mutually reinforcing manner. Two state legislators in **California** recently proposed a financing measure that would enable better-coordinated infrastructure investments at the local level. In 2003 Assemblymember Darrell Steinberg (D-Sacramento) and Senator Richard Alarcón (D-Los Angeles) proposed two amendments to the California state constitution (ACA 14 and SCA 11) to provide new financing tools to upgrade local communities. ACA 14 and SCA 11 would have lowered the voter approval threshold from two-thirds to 55 percent for local sales tax and bond measures for communities that want to invest in a mix of community infrastructure and amenities, with a minimum investment of 20 percent in affordable housing, transportation improvements, parks, and other general infrastructure. An analysis by PolicyLink, based on historical data from local school bond measures before and after the passage of Proposition 39 in 2000, concludes that a lower vote threshold for local infrastructure funding measures would prompt local voters to respond to the community infrastructure gap with more local money. Prop 39 lowered the vote threshold for school construction bonds to 55 percent.

Since its passage, 147 school districts in California have approved school bond measures, and of those, 82 districts—more than half—had never succeeded in passing a school bond measure before.³⁸

IV. Efficient Use of Resources: Joint Use and Creative Reuse

One important way to use resources more efficiently in the transportation sector is to promote more compact land uses so that alternatives to driving are convenient to people's homes and jobs.

PRACTICE: Envision the entire region in your planning.

Regional visioning efforts allow community members and other key stakeholders to participate in creating a comprehensive plan for how their region will accommodate growth in future years, while maintaining quality of life. The vision serves as a foundation for local agencies to integrate land use planning, transportation systems, infrastructure projects, and other public investment strategies in the region. For example, in **Oregon** two community groups—1000 Friends of Oregon and Sensible Transportation Options for People—spearheaded an effort to consider alternatives to a highway, and their visioning project gained national acclaim. In 1996, the project "Making the Land Use, Transportation, Air Quality Connection" (a.k.a. LUTRAQ) received national awards for transportation planning from the American Planning Association and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. For the groups that supported this visioning project, the true measure of LUTRAQ's success is that it helped to change the way transportation and land use will develop in a part of the Portland metropolitan area. It also demonstrated that citizens' efforts can generate ideas and analyses that change the way their regions grow.³⁹

PRACTICE: Condition transit funding for local governments on smart growth zoning.

A long-term experiment with compact development around transit stations in **Arlington County, Virginia**, has had great success. For 30 years, Arlington County has focused commercial development and multifamily housing within walking distance of the Rosslyn-Ballston Metro Corridor. More than 22.5 million square feet of office space has been developed in the corridor; more than three million square feet of new retail is within walking distance of the five stations; and the number of households near transit has doubled over 30 years. Office rents in the corridor



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command a premium over other suburban locations, and vacancy rates are lower. New housing starts in the area are booming, but traffic on arterial and neighborhood streets has not increased as much as expected, given the level of development. The focused development pattern has also benefited the transit system. Unlike other Metro lines, where 57 percent of riders arrive by automobile, necessitating the construction of expensive parking, 73 percent of the Rosslyn-Ballston corridor patrons walk to the Metro, with only 13 percent driving. This creates significant savings for the Metro system because pedestrians do not require a parking space or bus service to access the stations.⁴⁰

In 2005 a coalition of environmental, transit, and housing groups in the **San Francisco** Bay Area convinced the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) to condition \$12 billion of new transit investments for local cities (in the 2005 Regional Transportation Plan) on the adoption of city plans and local zoning codes that would allow significant housing and walkable community design around existing and future transit stations. The Transportation and Land Use Coalition led the campaign, in conjunction with the Greenbelt Alliance and the Nonprofit Housing Association. The groups estimate taxpayers and commuters could save \$1.8 billion per year in transportation costs as a result of smarter land use planning and development around transit.⁴¹

PRACTICE: Create incentive programs for transit-oriented and pedestrian friendly development.

One model of best practices comes from the **San Francisco** Bay Area. In 1998, the MTC launched the Transportation for Livable Communities (TLC) program in response to community demands. MTC's intent was to invest in town centers, public transit hubs, and key streets as a way of fostering community vitality and recapturing a small-town atmosphere that has been lost in many Bay Area cities. Initially, the program provided planning grants, technical assistance, and capital grants to help cities and nonprofit agencies develop transportation-related projects fitting the TLC profile. In November 2000, the program was expanded to include a Housing Incentive Program (HIP), which rewards local governments that build housing near transit stops.⁴²

PRACTICE: Attract more transit riders and increase system efficiencies.

The **Los Angeles** Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) System solved many of the problems common to traditional bus systems. By creating dedicated bus lanes, fewer stops, and priority at traffic signals, the Los Angeles Metropolitan Authority has been able to reduce passenger travel times by 29 percent and increase ridership by 40 percent.⁴³ The BRT project began in 1998. Relative to rail, BRT's cost of construction was low and its time to get online was short. For example, TALC reports that the same \$8.2 million that built 42 miles of BRT infrastructure would have bought only 251 feet of Bay Area Rapid Transit rail extension to the San Francisco airport.⁴⁴

V. Community Participation in Policy and Programming: Local Activism, Coalitions, and Litigation

PRACTICE: Foster local activism and coalitions.

In **Massachusetts**, during the development of the state's 25-year transportation plan, which will direct billions in transportation funding, a coalition of more than 20 community-based organizations, the "Action for Regional Equity Alliance," appealed to the state in 2004 for a more open and equity-focused transportation planning process: for broader public participation mechanisms, longer comment periods, a citizen advisory board, and other improvements.⁴⁵

In **New York City**, the Straphangers built coalitions and held neighborhood forums to campaign for the improvement of transit service, safety, and cleanliness and for transit fare affordability. Since 1979, the group has helped to win \$30 billion for transit repairs, led successful campaigns for unlimited ride passes and free subway-to-bus transfers, and issued 30 widely cited reports on the quality of subway and bus service.

California's state transportation department, Caltrans, created two grant programs in early 2000 to support community engagement and planning for transportation improvements in disadvantaged and low-income communities. In 2003, over 250 community groups united to defend the Caltrans grants that Governor Gray Davis cut in his 2003–2004 budget. The protest from community groups helped restore those funds in the budget, and now momentum is rising to make these programs permanent. Following are some examples of projects funded by Caltrans grants:

- The **City of Fresno** is conducting outreach to determine the issues, needs, and barriers faced by low-income and minority community members who use transit as their primary mode of transportation.
- The Asian Health Services in the Chinatown neighborhood of **Oakland** used a Caltrans environmental justice (EJ) grant to address serious pedestrian safety problems around a local health clinic.
- In the **East San Fernando Valley**, an EJ grant will fund a community-based master planning process that will harness recent transportation developments and reduce

congestion by creating a new prototype for mixed-use urban schools as centers of neighborhood and community life.

- In **San Joaquin County**, a grant to the San Joaquin Council of Governments is supporting the county's Welfare to Work Transportation Assistance Program. This program better enables low-income individuals to garner employment by improving their access to, and mobility within, their communities.⁴⁶

PRACTICE: Devolve transportation decision making to the regional level.

Although the federal ISTEA and TEA-21 laws were designed to provide more opportunities for local involvement in transportation decision making, many state DOTs still wield considerable power over state and federal transportation funds. In most states, the DOT receives and manages all the federal transportation money, and in some states, local decisions and needs are simply ignored by the state. **California's** state law SB 45, enacted in 1997, is a national model for devolving decision-making power over state and federal funding to regional governments (RTPAs and MPOs). SB 45 put three-quarters of the transportation funding in the hands of regional governments; in doing so, it aimed to increase funding flexibility, accountability for expenditures, and funding to urbanized regions where congestion typically occurs. Only a few years after the enactment of California's suballocation law, it is clear that greater local control has led to increased investments in public transit. California alone accounted for over half of all federal funding flexed to transit nationwide during the first four years of SB 45 (1998–2002).⁴⁷

PRACTICE: Take advantage of litigation.

(a) Challenge transportation investment decisions.

In **Los Angeles**, the Bus Riders Union successfully sued the LA Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) in the mid-1990s for discrimination—based on its pattern of cutting urban bus service to low-income and minority communities and raising bus fares while investing millions in new light-rail projects to serve higher-income, white communities.⁴⁸

In **Atlanta, Georgia**, the metropolitan transit system, MARTA, has a long history of shortchanging black customers, favoring service improvements and infrastructure investments for the wealthier white suburbs over the black communities. The ongoing activism of community members in the Metropolitan Atlanta Transportation Equity Coalition (MATEC) has

helped low-income black communities fight unfair decisions and win a number of service improvements, with many of the improvements resulting from a federal Title VI and ADA complaint that the group filed in 2000.⁴⁹

(b) Challenge the disproportionate accumulation of negative impacts in communities.

In **West Harlem, New York**, a local environmental justice group, WEACT, filed a Title VI complaint with the U.S. Department of Transportation against the Metropolitan Transportation Authority of Manhattan (MTA) because of the agency's practices in siting diesel bus depots and its plans to use additional land in the community for more bus facilities. Six of the eight depots operated by the MTA were located in West Harlem at the time.⁵⁰

(c) Challenge the certification of Metropolitan Planning Agencies (MPOs).

Across the nation, a number of social equity and environmental justice groups have successfully challenged the federal certification of their local MPO for failing to meet the federal requirements for public involvement in the transportation planning process. These challenges create a strong incentive for MPOs to improve their public engagement practices because losing federal certification puts at risk hundreds of millions of federal transportation dollars. For example:

- The MPO serving **Montgomery, Alabama**, was recently given a conditional re-certification and orders to improve public participation and compliance with civil rights laws. Although the City of Montgomery accounts for 70 percent of the population in the MPO service area and 49 percent of residents are racial minorities, the city has only one-third of the votes on the MPO board, and there is no minority representation. (Battles over urban representation on MPO boards have also been waged in **Denver, Colorado; Detroit, Michigan; and Chicago, Illinois.**)
- In the **San Francisco** Bay Area, a coalition of transportation and environmental justice groups challenged the certification of the Metropolitan Transportation Commission. As a result, the agency has implemented new outreach activities in the community.
- Certification battles were also waged in the late 1990s and early 2000s in a number of cities and counties, including: **Atlanta, Georgia; Miami-Dade, Florida; San Antonio, Texas; and Chicago, Illinois.**⁵¹

Notes

¹"Fueling Transportation Finance: A Primer on the Gas Tax," Brookings Institution, March 2003.

²"California Travels: Financing our Transportation," Legislative Analyst's Office, May 2000.

³"California Transportation Plan 2025," California Department of Transportation, 2004.

⁴Robert Fishman, "The Top Ten Influences on the American Metropolis of the Past 50 Years," Fannie Mae Foundation, 1999.

⁵"2000–2001 California Statewide Household Travel Survey—Final Report," California Department of Transportation, June 2002.

⁶"California Travels," *op. cit.*, p. 6.

⁷"Population Projections with Age, Sex and Race/Ethnic Detail," California Department of Finance, 1998.

⁸"California Transportation Plan 2025," *op. cit.*

⁹"2000–2001 California Statewide Household Travel Survey—Final Report," *op. cit.*

¹⁰"Beyond Gridlock," Surface Transportation Policy Project, 2000. (Note: This statistic is based on a survey of former welfare recipients by a social services agency. Respondents had an incentive to answer "no" when asked if they owned a car, as means-tested benefits can be taken away if their assets are too high; the value of most cars would put them over the asset limit.)

¹¹John Pucher and John Renne, "Socioeconomics of Urban Travel: Evidence from the 2001 NHTS," *Transportation Quarterly* (Summer 2003), vol. 57, no. 3, p. 54.

¹²"Roadblocks to Health: Transportation Barriers to Healthy Communities," Transportation and Land Use Coalition, 2002.

¹³Pucher and Renne, *op. cit.*, pp. 49–77.

¹⁴"Beyond Gridlock," *op. cit.*

¹⁵Pucher and Renne, *op. cit.*

¹⁶Robert D. Bullard, Glenn S. Johnson, and Angel O. Torres, eds., *Highway Robbery: Transportation Racism and New Routes to Equity*, Cambridge: South End Press, 2004.

¹⁷Thomas W. Sanchez, Rich Stolz, and Jacinta S. Ma, "Moving to Equity: Addressing Inequitable Effects of Transportation Policies on Minorities," A Joint Report of Harvard's Civil Rights Project and the Center for Community Change, 2003; available at: http://www.civilrightsproject.harvard.edu/research/transportation/trans_paper03.php.

¹⁸"Home Mortgage Disclosure," Comptroller's Handbook, July 2005; available at: <http://www.occ.treas.gov/handbook/hmda.pdf>.

¹⁹Community Reinvestment Act Information, Comptroller of the Currency; available at: <http://www.occ.treas.gov/crainfo.htm>.

²⁰Note: This type of reporting will need to identify "who" benefits. For example, replacement of the Nimitz freeway in West Oakland would misleadingly show up on a "funds by zip code" map as a huge investment in West Oakland.

²¹For more information about the LOQ guidelines and walkable communities, please visit: <http://www.walkable.org/library.htm>.

²²Florida State Code, Chapter 163.

²³Center for Urban Transportation Research, University of South Florida; <http://www.nctr.usf.edu/projects/Year4/527-07.html>

²⁴"Transportation and Poverty Alleviation," Surface Transportation Policy Project (STPP) Fact Sheet; available at: <http://www.transact.org/library/factsheets/poverty.asp>.

²⁵Robert Puentes and Ryan Prince, "Fueling Transportation Finance: A Primer on the Gas Tax," Brookings Institution, March 2003; available at: <http://www.brookings.edu/es/urban/publications/gastax.htm>; and "Better Tools Needed for Making Decisions on Using ISTEA Funds Flexibly," General Accounting Office Report GAI/RCED-94-25, 1993.

²⁶Transportation and Land Use Coalition; http://transcoalition.org/c/sus_brtoll/btoll_home.html.

²⁷Available at: http://www.sandag.org/uploads/publicationid/publicationid_816_3746.pdf; or see the homepage for the RTV at: <http://www.sandag.org>.

²⁸"Can't Get There From Here: The Declining Independent Mobility of California's Children and Youth," a Joint Project of the Surface Transportation Policy Project, Transportation and Land Use Coalition, and Latino Issues Forum, September 2003; available at: http://www.transact.org/ca/Childrens_Report/Kids_Report.pdf.

²⁹"Design Guidance Accommodating Bicycle and Pedestrian Travel: A Recommended Approach," U.S. Department of Transportation, 1999; available at: <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/bikeped/Design.htm>; and CalTrans Deputy Directive 64; online on the California Bicycle Coalition website at: <http://www.calbike.org/pdfs/caltransdir.pdf>.

³⁰Dan Burden, "Building Communities with Transportation," Distinguished Lecture Presentation at the Transportation Research Board Conference, Monday, January 10, 2001, Washington, DC; Available online at: <http://www.walkable.org/library.htm>.

³¹See <http://www.transact.org/ca/children.htm> and www.calbike.org.

³²See http://www.transcoalition.org/c/bikeped/bikeped_saferoutes.html.

³³See the Community Transportation Association of

America at: <http://www.ctaa.org/ntrc/atj/practices/>; and "Profiles of Success—Chattanooga," Brief no. 2, November 2001.

³⁴See <http://www.mtc.ca.gov/news/transactions/ta0102/pass.htm>; http://www.transact.org/ca/bus_pass.pdf; http://www.actransit.org/pdf/SRTP_chap5.pdf, p. 19; and <http://www.ccta.net/EXTENSION/TEP/TEP.pdf>, p. 20.

³⁵See Martin Wachs "Improving Efficiency and Equity in Transportation Finance," Brookings Institution, April 2003, online at: <http://www.brookings.edu/es/urban/publications/wachstransportation.htm>; and James Poterba, "Is the Gasoline Tax Regressive?," NBER Working Paper No. W3578, 1991, online at: <http://www.ssrn.com/>.

³⁶See http://www.transcoalition.org/archives/msrb/measureb_victory.html and Robert D. Bullard et al., *Highway Robbery*, *op. cit.*

³⁷See <http://www.sandag.cog.ca.us/>; click on the "TransNet" homepage.

³⁸See PolicyLink, *Investing in a Sustainable Future: An Analysis of ACA 14 and SCA 11* at: <http://www.policylink.org/pdfs/ACA14.pdf>; factsheet on ACA 14 at: <http://www.transact.org/ca/aca14.htm>; and factsheet on SCA 11 at: <http://www.transact.org/ca/sca11.htm>.

³⁹Information on Oregon's LUTRAQ effort at <http://friends.org/resources/lutraq.html>.

Other best practices in community visioning from states across the nation: <http://www.transact.org/report.asp?id=231>.

⁴⁰See Hank Dittmar, "Development around transit good for drivers, too," *Washington Business Journal*, 8/25/2003; and Dittmar and Gloria Ohland, eds., *The New Transit Town: Best Practices in Transit-Oriented Development*, Island Press, 2004. See also: <http://www.reconnectingamerica.org/html/RA/book/synopsis.htm>.

⁴¹See "It Takes a Transit Village," Transportation and Land Use Coalition, November 2004; available at: http://www.transcoalition.org/reports/village/village_home.html, and http://transcoalition.org/c/landuse/landuse_home.html.

⁴²See MTC's TLC program at: http://www.mtc.ca.gov/planning/smart_growth/tlc_grants.htm and MTC's HIP program at http://www.mtc.ca.gov/planning/smart_growth/hip.htm.

⁴³See http://www.mta.net/projects_programs/rapid/overview.htm.

⁴⁴See http://www.transcoalition.org/reports/revt/case_study.html.

⁴⁵See <http://www.policylink.org/BostonAction/>.

⁴⁶See Caltrans's homepage for CBTP grants: <http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/tpp/offices/ocp/cbtpg.htm>; the Caltrans homepage for EJ grants: <http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/tpp/grants.htm> and click on "EJ grants." For a factsheet on these grants by the California Alliance

for Transportation Choices visit: <http://www.transact.org/ca/initiative%202003%202004%20attachments/EJ-CBTP%20grants%20fact%20sheet.pdf>.

⁴⁷See Robert Puentes and Linda Bailey, "Improving Metropolitan Decision Making in Transportation: Greater Funding and Devolution for Greater Accountability," Brookings Institution Series on Transportation Reform, October 2003, online at: www.brookings.edu/urban/; and STPP *Progress Newsletter*, March 2003, online at: http://www.transact.org/progress/pdfs/March_2003.pdf.

⁴⁸See Bullard, *op. cit.*, and <http://www.busridersunion.org/engli/WhoWeAre/overview.htm>.

⁴⁹Bullard, *op. cit.*

⁵⁰Retrieved from: <http://www.weact.org/programs/index.html>.

⁵¹Bruce McDowell, "Improving Regional Transportation Decisions: MPOs and Certification," Brookings Institution, September 1999; online at <http://www.brookings.edu/metro/mcdowelllexsum.htm>; and conversation with Rich Stolz of the Transportation Equity Network (TEN), online at <http://www.transportationequity.org/index.shtml>.



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