



PolicyLink is a national research and action institute advancing economic and social equity by Lifting Up What Works®

Profile Donate Now Contact Press

Career & Internship Opportunities

HOME ABOUT US FOCUS AREAS PUBLICATIONS EQUITABLE DEVELOPMENT TOOLKIT GET INVOLVED

LIGHT RAIL BRINGS HOPE AND CHALLENGES TO LOW-INCOME PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES OF COLOR

KEEP ME INFORMED

For Immediate Release

Contact:

Milly Hawk Daniel (212) 502-6492 milly@policylink.org

Search input field with magnifying glass icon

Light Rail Brings Hope and Challenges to Low-income People and Communities of Color

New study finds new rail line leaves many St. Paul (Minn.) communities vulnerable on housing, jobs, and development

For Immediate Release

January 5, 2012 -- St. Paul, Minn -- A new report released today by PolicyLink, ISAIAH and TakeAction Minnesota takes a deep look at the benefits and challenges that low-income communities and communities of color face when light rail comes to their communities and ties these benefits and challenges to people's health.

The report, "Healthy Corridor for All: A Community Health Impact Assessment of Transit-Oriented Development Policy in Saint Paul, Minnesota," reveals stark obstacles such as high unemployment, large housing-cost burdens, and a speculative market faced by residents in the Central Corridor of St. Paul.

A new \$1 billion light rail line is being constructed through several neighborhoods to connect the downtown of Minneapolis with the downtown of St. Paul. The study shows that new transit-oriented land use policies may not bring in industries that could employ the many residents with lower educational attainment, while potentially gentrifying neighborhoods and possibly leading to displacement. The report also discusses how such issues influence the health outcomes of the community.

During the next 20 years, the Central Corridor Light Rail Transit (CCLRT) line is estimated to spur as much as \$6.78 billion in public and private investment in local development.

"We are not opposed to light rail coming through," said Eve Swan of the Save Our Homes Coalition. "We welcome the light rail. We just want to make sure that we have benefits to this light rail as well."

In St. Paul, the transit line passes through some of the region's most diverse and lowest-income communities, including the nation's second largest Hmong population, a large Somali refugee population, and Rondo, a historic African American community that was devastated after Interstate-94 was built straight through the neighborhood in the 1950s. The interstate split the community in two, demolished homes and businesses, and destroyed the community's growth and economic prospects.

While many residents are looking forward to benefiting from the new transit line and the increased public and private investment, they are also concerned that they may ultimately be involuntarily displaced due to increased housing and business costs, and that large-scale community changes may lead to cultural and social disruption.

The Healthy Corridor for All Health Impact Assessment has been a community action research project—carefully studying the concerns of current low-income residents and residents of color. A Community Steering Committee guided the project and identified the focus areas of the analysis: healthy economy, affordable housing, and access to transportation. The committee commented on draft analyses and prioritized recommendations. To share the findings of the research the Community Steering Committee met with planning commissioners and city council members, testified at city hearings, held two town hall meetings, and a prayer vigil outside of City Hall.

"Creating equitable transit-oriented development is critical AND possible in the Central Corridor. But it takes creative thinking and working closely with the community," said Angela Glover Blackwell, Founder and CEO of PolicyLink. "This report provides policy recommendations to support equitable development. Low-income people and communities of color cannot be left behind as new opportunities enter their communities."

PolicyLink in the News

"Fred Blackwell Speaks On Blacks Being Left Out of Urban Development," The Loop 21

"HUD Awards Grant to Oakland to Create Better Community," San Francisco Chronicle

"Innovative Policies Are Essential to Save Men Who Are at Risk," The Sacramento Bee

"On Jobs and Safety Net, Lawmakers Must Focus on Hard-Hit Minorities," CNN.com

all News and Events

vie

"The Twin Cities has a choice to make. There is an opportunity before us to re-imagine Minnesota's growing diversity as a tremendous asset," said Doran Schrantz, Executive Director of ISAIAH. "The key is to prepare for a prosperous economic future by investing deeply in equity. Together, we can make the Central Corridor a shining example of equitable transit-oriented development."

Some of the report's findings:

- The majority of neighborhoods in the corridor are considered at risk for gentrification right now. In addition, 59 percent of corridor residents spend an unaffordable percentage of income on housing (over 30 percent). As redevelopment occurs in the corridor, rents are likely to rise, which can tax already tight budgets putting residents at risk for involuntary displacement.
- Property values within a quarter-mile of the planned transit stations on the corridor have risen 8 percent, while values in the rest of the city have dropped 8 percent (a 16 percent difference). Higher property value means higher rents, putting people at risk for displacement.
- New jobs will be created in the Central Corridor. Yet, the majority of these jobs will likely require higher education. Existing residents have lower educational attainment than the rest of the city and county—meaning they will be less competitive for these new jobs without job training programs.
- Currently, 83 percent of all businesses along the corridor are small businesses, and 12 percent are minority-owned. More than one-third of these small businesses and nearly one-quarter of minority-owned businesses are on parcels of land that have a "high or medium potential" for redevelopment, which can put them at risk for displacement.

The community-engaged research highlighted the importance of, 1) careful planning to ensure low-income people and people of color are not displaced, 2) thorough analyses of community concerns before decision-making, and 3) consideration of health impacts in transit-oriented development in the Central Corridor.

Community leaders and residents said smart affordable housing strategies—such as density bonus programs and targeted, market-sensitive inclusionary zoning policies—are critical to ensuring they can benefit from the new transit line. The St. Paul City Council is looking closely at these two proposals.

The study also identified that the rezoning proposal did not go far enough and was not creative enough to maximize a vision of a healthy, equitable Central Corridor. The zoning focused on enabling transit-oriented development (TOD) whereas in the Central Corridor it is particularly important to lay a foundation for equitable transit-oriented development in order to support existing communities.

"We can do this together," said Chong Vang, a small business owner on University Ave. "We can build it better for our children."

The health impact assessment on the zoning decisions around the light rail was funded by the Health Impact Project, a collaboration of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and The Pew Charitable Trusts, as well as the Blue Cross Blue Shield Center for Prevention. The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Health Impact Project, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, The Pew Charitable Trusts, or Blue Cross Blue Shield Center for Prevention.

#####

**PolicyLink** is a national research and advocacy institute advancing economic and social equity. Founded in 1999, PolicyLink helps create sustainable communities of opportunity that offer access to quality jobs, affordable housing, good schools, transportation, and the benefits of healthy food and physical activity. The organization is based in Oakland (Calif.), with offices in New York City, Los Angeles, and Washington DC. [www.policylink.org](http://www.policylink.org)