

# SPOTLIGHT: EQUITY



**Residents of the Bay Area, much like the United States as a whole, have dramatically different household incomes, educational attainment and health outcomes depending on race. These differences reflect generations of exploitative and discriminatory policies that denied Black, Indigenous and other people of color the opportunities afforded to white Americans. COVID-19 further exacerbated America's long-standing disparities: the disease spread more easily in under-resourced areas and imposed greater risk on low-income, transit dependent and low-wage essential workers who often had to work in less safe conditions.**

While a significant number of Bay Area workers shifted to remote work overnight, a disproportionate share of people of color did not have this option, working as essential or low-wage workers in settings where they were at higher risk of exposure to COVID-19. As shelter-in-place orders took hold, only those with no other choice remained on transit, and were especially impacted by cutbacks in service and social distancing rules that placed limits on passenger capacity.

The Blue Ribbon Transit Recovery Task Force recognized these harsh and unfair consequences, and sought to address equity in its work. At the core of transit equity is the notion that transit is a fundamental public good – equitable and inclusive – that everyone benefits from, regardless of age, race, gender identity, disability, or class.

An equitable transportation system is one that is safe, affordable, and reliable in meeting the needs of all residents, but especially those with the fewest options. Equity also means thoughtful consideration of who benefits from a transportation investment when prioritizing projects. Quality service should be affordable and accessible.

One of the Task Force's four Plan Goals (see *Appendix I*) called for the inclusion of input from underserved populations, transit-dependent riders, and persons with disabilities to inform this Action Plan.

## Blue Ribbon Transit Recovery Task Force Equity Principles

(adopted January 25, 2021)

### INVEST EQUITABLY

Prioritize equitable planning, policies, decision-making and implementation through proportionally greater investments in communities of color and low-income communities to address transit disparities and reflect needed mobility options.

### INCREASE ACCESSIBILITY

Increase transit access, prioritize service investments, and improve travel experiences for seniors and riders with disabilities and/or low incomes by increasing fare affordability and service connectivity.

### BE INCLUSIVE

Pursue anti-racist strategies as a core element of transit's mission and actions. Ensure full participation of underserved residents to co-create strategies and solutions by engaging meaningfully and directly, in partnership with culturally specific, community-trusted local organizations.

### USE DATA TO INFORM DECISIONS

Make people-centered and transparent transit investment and strategy decisions by collecting and using race, gender identity, disability, age and income data. Routinely monitor data to ensure equitable investments for underserved communities.

### ADVANCE HEALTH & SAFETY

Incorporate public health and safety measures for transit riders and staff in the day-to-day operations of the transit system. Partner with social service and public health agencies to improve personal health and safety of riders and staff.

**“TRUE INCLUSION, AUTHENTIC INCLUSION, IS [WHEN] THE PEOPLE WHO WE SAY WE WANT TO FEEL WELCOME ACTUALLY HAVE SOME DECISION-MAKING POWER.”**

**“WE MUST LOOK BACK AT THE INJUSTICES IN THE POLICIES AND DESIGNS WHICH WERE ACTIVELY RACIST IN ORDER TO BE INTENTIONALLY ANTI-RACIST. HOW DO YOU LOOK AT THE PAST, THE PRESENT, AND THE FUTURE ALTOGETHER TO INFORM DECISIONS, SO YOU DO NOT REPEAT RACIST ACTIONS MOVING FORWARD?”**

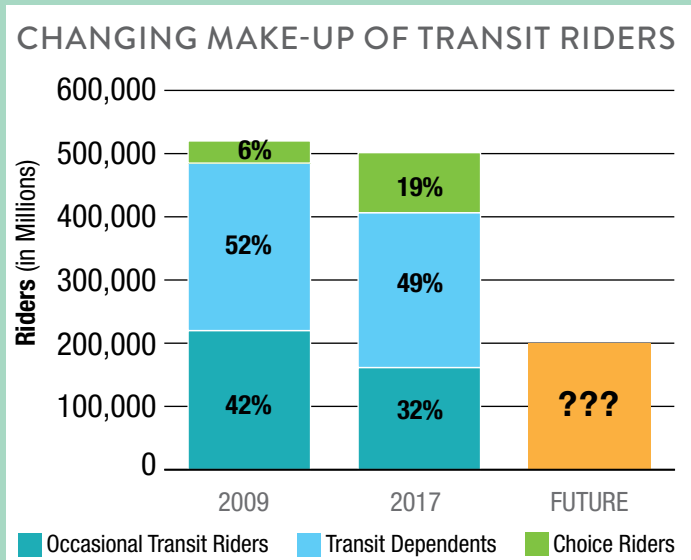
– Insights heard during Blue Ribbon listening session with Bay Area CBO leaders, January 14, 2021

The Task Force also adopted five Equity Principles central to planning and operations (*see previous page*), based on input directly from disadvantaged riders and community leaders. These principles can serve as a compass to continually point leaders, public agencies, advocates, and communities toward an equitable and lasting recovery.

The Task Force’s adopted Problem Statement (*see Appendix II*) acknowledges historic disparities facing persons of color due to failed housing and lending practices, and cites the lack of a unified plan in the region to address the legacy of disenfranchisement and marginalization.

As our transit system starts to rebuild, this Action Plan seeks to achieve specific, near-term actions that advance equity, including addressing customer experience through more integrated fares that reward frequent riders; faster, more frequent service to improve travel speeds for those who rely on transit; and improvements to paratransit.

In partnership with transit agencies, community-based and non-profit organizations, and equity-priority communities, MTC has an opportunity to accelerate progress toward equity goals. This Action Plan also calls for MTC to adopt Transit Equity Principles and develop a process for applying them, an endeavor that could help address enduring injustices and have wider-reaching impacts for transit equity. The expanded use of equity analyses and inclusive decision-making, for example, could shape transit investments by prioritizing funding for projects that expand access to opportunity to underserved residents and those with lower incomes.



*Who is riding transit now? How can we meet the needs of current riders, and what other data do we need in the future?*

(2009 & 2017 Data Source: UCLA Institute of Transportation Studies, “What’s Behind Recent Transit Ridership Trends in the Bay Area?” February 2020 )