

**Metropolitan Transportation Commission
Policy Advisory Council Equity and Access Subcommittee**

May 20, 2022

Agenda Item 6

Next Generation Freeways Study: Equity and Engagement

Subject:

Overview of the equity framework and planned community engagement for the Next Generation Bay Area Freeways Study.

Background:

In April 2022, staff introduced the Next Generation Freeways Study to the Policy Advisory Council. During this meeting, Council members raised multiple concerns regarding the goals of the study, how equity will be evaluated and the planned engagement — specifically who and how focused population groups and the larger public will be engaged. This item is a follow up to clarify some of these concerns and seek feedback on the equity framework and engagement plan.

Clarifying Goals of the Study:

Plan Bay Area 2050 found immense potential in freeway pricing strategies. The freeway pricing strategy (T5), which includes means-based discounts for low-income drivers, was forecasted to prevent a 20% to 30% rise in travel times on freeways. Further, it had a greater impact on reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions than all of the plan's transit projects combined. Such findings are in line with what a handful of regions have experienced with road pricing strategies such as London, Stockholm and Milan (see [case studies](#)). However, the plan acknowledges that there are various challenges with implementing such a strategy, especially around equity and traffic diversion to local streets, and hence recommended a more detailed study as an early implementation action.

Recognizing the potential of pricing strategies and that the status quo is neither sustainable nor equitable, the Next Generation Freeways Study seeks to explore pricing strategies as a tool to reimagine our freeways for the next generation. Freeways, historically and currently, are associated with a range of inequities – communities of color divided by freeway barriers have faced historical disinvestment and must continue to live with unsightly and noisy barriers; transit access to opportunity is significantly lower than driving access; the gas tax penalizes lower-income drivers who are more likely to drive older vehicles; and today's freeway peak-period

users are skewed toward higher-income users. It is a firm goal of the study that any pathways developed for the region must advance an affirmative and equitable vision — one that stakeholders and communities shape together. Staff’s aim is to understand whether pricing can be used as a tool to bring about outcomes fairer than they are today, because just as pricing roadways may challenge equity, so does the status quo with “free” roadways. Charging residents to drive is in no way a finalized decision, but rather a potential option with demonstrated benefits in other parts of the world that deserves further study, to understand whether it could be equitably implemented in the Bay Area.

At the April 2022 Council meeting, potential outcomes of the study were expressed as pathways and corridors prioritized in the region for further studies and/or pilot initiatives. Staff emphasizes that such outcomes are potential and contingent on the current study determining that there is an equitable path forward that includes pricing. Staff is looking to this subcommittee to help shape the equity framework and engagement plan for this study, described briefly below and in more detail in the attachments.

Equity Framework:

Staff is committed to prioritizing racial and social equity in the Next Generation Bay Area Freeways Study. It is a firm goal of the study that any recommendations must advance an affirmative and equitable vision for freeway users and those impacted by freeways, including virtually all residents of the Bay Area and commuters from outside the region. Based on review of existing frameworks, staff proposes a set of five principles to guide the study process:

1. Identify priority populations.
2. Articulate clear goals, measurable outcomes and metrics that affirmatively address racial and social inequities.
3. Co-create pathways toward goals that a) avoid/redress past harms, and b) proactively address potential burdens of pricing strategies.
4. Determine benefits and burdens with criteria/guiding questions, including consideration of unintended consequences.
5. Recommend pathways that advance equitable outcomes.

Further details on these principles and their implementation can be found in **Attachment A**.

Community and Stakeholder Engagement Plan — Summer 2022 and Beyond:

Staff's near-term approach to engagement is to focus on deep dialogue and meaningful conversations with the priority populations identified for the study and organizations that represent the broader Bay Area population. This early focus on more nuanced, one-on-one conversations aims to elevate the voices of those who have historically been left out of the decision-making process. The goals of the engagement are to: 1) understand the communities' vision of a next generation of our freeways; 2) gain a more nuanced understanding of the perceptions and concerns with road pricing; and 3) learn about complementary strategies that can make pricing more equitable. Beyond the first round of focused engagement, staff acknowledges that general public engagement is important and valuable, and as such, will incorporate this into future engagement once staff develops more substantive policy ideas with the Next Generation Freeways Study Advisory Group ("Advisory Group"). Further details on this engagement plan can be found in **Attachment B**.

Feedback Requested

Equity Framework: Staff seeks the Subcommittee's feedback on 1) principles – do they resonate with the subcommittee members; 2) missing elements that should be identified for implementation of the principles.

Engagement Plan: Staff seeks the Subcommittee's feedback on 1) timing and nature of planned activities; 2) defining and measuring success for the study's engagement.

Timeline and Next Steps:

Equity Framework: Staff will incorporate feedback from this Subcommittee and the Advisory Group to codify the framework and post it to the study webpage. Staff will then work closely with the Advisory Group to advance the study in line with the framework. If desired by the Subcommittee members, staff is willing to return and gather input at each step of the framework.

Engagement Plan: Staff is in the process of onboarding an experienced consultant to help conduct engagement activities. Engagement will be conducted through the summer and staff will bring findings to the Advisory Group and this subcommittee, if desired.

Attachments:

- Attachment A: Proposed Equity Framework
- Attachment B: Proposed Community and Stakeholder Engagement Plan
- Attachment C: Presentation



Attachment A

Next Generation Freeways Study: Draft Equity Framework

[Initial DRAFT to be refined with input from Next Gen Freeways Study Advisory Group and Policy Advisory Council Equity and Access Subcommittee in May/June 2022]

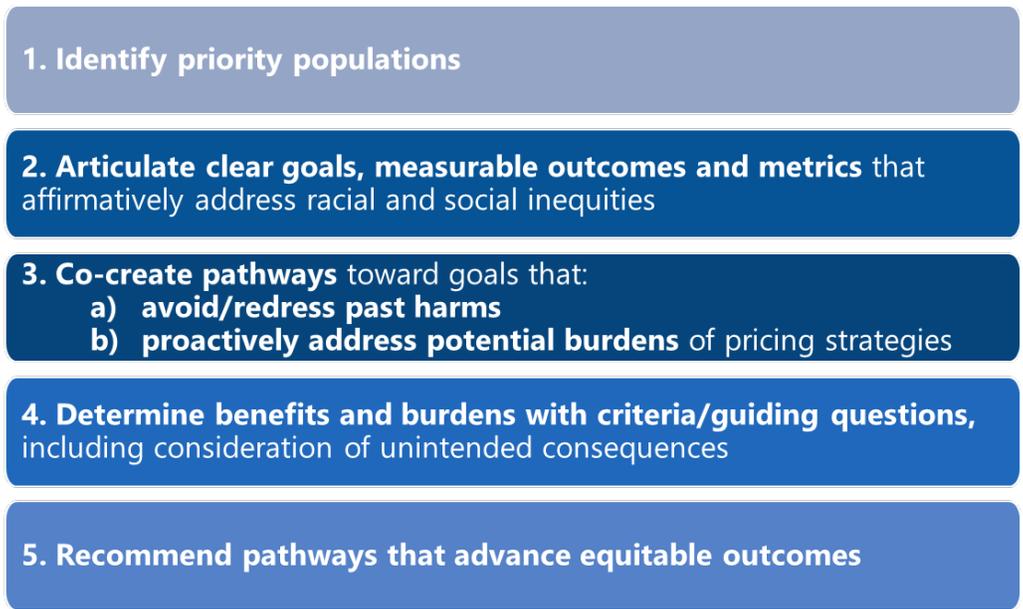
Background

Staff is committed to prioritizing racial and social equity in the Next Generation Bay Area Freeways Study. It is a firm goal of the study that any recommendations must advance an affirmative and equitable vision for freeway users and those impacted by freeways, including virtually all residents of the Bay Area and commuters from outside the region. The study recognizes that there are a range of existing inequities that render the status quo unfair, and that roadway pricing strategies have potential to exacerbate inequities and impose adverse unintended consequences on various population groups. Staff’s intent is to address these issues head-on, in part through stakeholder and community engagement that will guide development of fair proposals and identify strategies for advancing equitable outcomes.

Proposed Equity Framework Principles

Suggested principles for the equity framework to guide the study are shown in the Figure 1 and described in further detail below.

Figure 1: Proposed Equity Framework Principles



1. Identify priority populations: Staff has identified a preliminary set of population groups based on MTC’s existing Equity Priority Communities framework, as well as some specifically identified groups staff heard as recurring concerns in past meetings and saw identified in similar studies across other locations such as Oregon, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. The initial list of



priority populations can be found in Figure 2. The geographic scope of these populations is residents across the entire region and those commuting from outside the region. Further phases of the study will narrow the geographic scope based on corridors prioritized in the study.

Figure 2 Initial List of Priority Populations

- MTC Equity Priority Communities
- Workers with low incomes (janitorial, retail, food service, domestic services, other)
- Middle-income workers (construction/building service workers with vans/trucks, teachers who commute, health service workers, other)
- Super commuters/commuters from outside the region
- Working parents with school-aged children, with a focus on single mothers
- Students who commute via automobile
- Small business owners
- Rural residents

Implementation of Principle: This principle of the framework helps identify who should be the focus of the public engagement plan and partnerships for developing an equitable program. The list of priority populations may expand as staff identifies further groups. Staff will prioritize engagement with these communities and seek to understand their travel patterns to help understand benefits and burdens of policies being shaped in this study.

2. Articulate clear goals, measurable outcomes and metrics that affirmatively address racial and social inequities: The vision of a next generation freeway network must have clear goals that the success of pathways can be measured against. Goals must be Specific Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-Bound – Inclusive Equitable (SMART-IE) and advance the Plan Bay Area 2050 vision – *An Affordable, Connected, Diverse, Healthy and Vibrant Bay Area for all residents* as well as the California Transportation Plan 2050 vision – *California’s safe, resilient, and universally accessible transportation system supports vibrant communities, advances racial and economic justice, and improves public and environmental health*. Each goal should be associated with outcomes and relevant metrics, forecasted for year 2035.

Implementation of Principle: Staff will discuss a preliminary vision with the Advisory Group in spring 2022. This dialogue will be enhanced by community and stakeholder input during the first round of engagement in summer 2022. Staff will synthesize input received and share revised goals for further discussion with the Advisory Group and other advisory bodies in fall 2022. Once finalized, staff will work with the Advisory Group to define outcomes and relevant metrics for each goal.

3. Co-create pathways toward goals that a) avoid/redress past harms and b) proactively address potential burdens of pricing strategies: This principle seeks to frame the pathways being studied and ensure that they seek to address historical, existing, and potential future



inequities from the start. Pathways are defined as packages of pricing strategies and complementary strategies that enable win-win outcomes across communities and stakeholders.

Implementation of Principle: Staff will begin the conversation about pricing concepts and complementary strategies in spring 2022. The engagement with communities can help us learn about concerns with pricing and strategies that might be part of these pathways. In fall 2022, staff and the Advisory Group will collectively define a few pathways for analysis, including one that does not include pricing strategies for comparative analysis. These pathways will be refined as the study advances further through analysis and the second round of engagement.

4. Determine benefits and burdens with criteria/guiding questions, including

consideration of unintended consequences: Impacts of pathways will be forecasted through quantitative analysis using MTC’s transportation demand models as well as analyzed with qualitative analysis where necessary given that the models have limitations. Examples of benefits and burdens to consider include the availability and affordability of transportation alternatives, travel-time savings experienced by different users, and the impacts on freeway adjacent communities due to traffic diversion. These impacts would be compared among all the pathways to consider how they might help or hurt priority populations as well as the population at large.

Implementation of Principle: The first round of analysis is planned for winter 2022/23. Staff will work with the Advisory Group to determine the criteria to guide the analysis. Based on findings, criteria would be further refined for the second round of analysis – planned for spring/summer 2023.

5. Recommend pathways that advance equitable outcomes: Based on metrics and the analysis of benefits and burdens, the study will recommend pathways that advance equitable outcomes and the defined goals for the next generation freeway network.

Implementation of Principle: This step will involve iteration over the two rounds of analysis. With findings from the first round of analysis in winter 2023, staff will work with the Advisory Group and other advisory bodies to prioritize pathways for the second round of engagement and analysis at a corridor scale.

Attachment B

Next Generation Freeways Study: Draft Engagement Plan

Background

This memorandum proposes an engagement plan for the Next Generation Bay Area Freeways Study. The plan highlights 1) ongoing engagement with advisory groups created for the study and community organizations at large; 2) planned activities for Round 1 of engagement during the first year of the study; and 3) a vision for Round 2 of engagement during the second year of the study.

The concept of roadway pricing often generates immediate opposition due to concerns about equity impacts, making discussions about it challenging. Therefore, staff’s initial approach to engagement on the topic is to facilitate nuanced, one-on-one conversations and small group discussions focused on the communities most affected. With this approach, staff is seeking to elevate the voices of those who have historically been left out of the decision-making process. At the same time, staff acknowledges that general public engagement is important and valuable, and as such, will incorporate this into the study’s engagement strategy after the initial focused phase. The overall timeline for this engagement is shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Overall Engagement Timeline



Ongoing Engagement

A. Advisory Groups

Staff has convened a diverse Advisory Group with nineteen governmental and non-governmental stakeholders, including four appointees from the Policy Advisory Council (two regular members and two alternates), and is looking to engage this group regularly throughout the study. Playing a multi-faceted role of defining policy, advising on equity and engagement, advising on technical inputs and evaluating and developing recommendations, this group will serve as the primary stakeholder group for the study.

Staff is also in the process of creating an Ad-Hoc Executive Group as well, which will be convened at 4-5 key decision points during the study. Staff will share findings from the rest of the engagement activities with both of these groups.



B. One-on-One Meetings

While the advisory groups are diverse in their composition, staff would like to engage with additional community organizations interested in the topic of this study. These one-on-one meetings will give staff the opportunity to engage directly with community leaders, community-based organizations and other relevant stakeholders. The first set of meetings will be held starting in mid-May through August. Staff will seek to engage organizations on an ongoing basis throughout the study based on their desire for involvement. A list of potential organizations to engage is included in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Preliminary List of Organizations for One-on-One Meetings

6 Wins Coalition	Amigos de Guadalupe Center for Justice & Empowerment	Bay Area Council	East Bay Leadership Council	Greenbelt Alliance
League of Women Voters of the Bay Area	Lighthouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired	North Bay Leadership Council	Oakland Chinatown Coalition	Planting Justice
Prescott Community Council	Sacred Heart Community Service	SEIU 1021	South Hayward Parish	The Hayward Collective
TOGETHER Bay Area	Union City Family Center	West Oakland Environmental Indicators Project	West Oakland Neighbors	

C. Tribal Engagement and Government-to-government Consultation

To engage the Bay Area’s six federally recognized Tribes, staff will invite the Tribes to initial one-on-one meetings to determine how they would like to stay involved in the study’s process. Opportunity for government-to-government consultation also will be extended to each of the Tribes after the initial meetings. Staff also will organize small group discussions and/or one-on-one meetings with interested non-federally recognized Tribes. The first set of these meetings will be conducted starting in June through August 2022.

D. Policy Advisory Council and Equity and Access Subcommittee

Staff presented to the Council in February and to the Equity and Access Subcommittee in May and intends to return to both bodies at appropriate intervals. Staff will work with Council leadership to determine the appropriate times to provide updates and seek feedback from both bodies.



Community Engagement: Round 1

Round 1A — Focused (Summer 2022)

Through this initial round of community engagement, staff seeks to 1) understand the communities' vision of a next generation of our freeways; 2) gain a more nuanced understanding of the perceptions and concerns with road pricing; and 3) learn about complementary strategies that can make pricing more equitable. This round will utilize a more focused approach that will gradually phase in broader public engagement in Round 1B.

A. Small Group Discussions

Staff is engaging a consultant to identify trusted community leaders and relevant groups and organizations to help organize and conduct a series of small group discussions starting in June. The audiences for these discussions are the priority communities identified as part of the Equity Framework for the study, listed in Table 2 below.

In addition, staff will work with the consultant to build relationships and develop a network of Community Liaisons for additional ongoing community engagement to be defined in Round 2 of engagement. The goal is to identify these Community Liaisons from small group discussion participants.

B. Survey

In order to better understand travel patterns of the priority communities and develop pathways that take into account their needs and challenges, staff will conduct a brief travel survey with participants of small group discussions. This survey is intended to add color to discussions in formulating strategy ideas and is not meant to be a statistically valid survey of preferences — which is a potential activity in Round 2 of engagement.

Table 2: Preliminary List of Communities for Focused Engagement Phase

People of color with low/middle incomes
Seniors
Persons with disabilities
Workers with low incomes (janitors, retail, food service, domestic services, etc.)
Workers with middle incomes (construction workers, teachers, health service workers, etc.)
Super commuters/commuters from outside the region
Working parents with school-aged children
Single parents of color
College students who commute via automobile to school
Small business owners
Rural residents



Round 1B — General (Fall/Winter 2022)

This round of engagement will seek to gather input from the broader public. Equipped with a better understanding of the concerns with pricing strategies and the potential strategies to complement pricing from Round 1A, staff will develop more substantive policy ideas with the Advisory Group. Staff feels that this approach of sharing more focused and structured policy proposals would enable more constructive feedback from a broader audience. The input from this round of engagement will help refine pathway definitions for further analysis.

A. Webinars

Webinars allow for live, interactive presentations to remote participants. This process will allow participation from a broad array of audiences, including participants with more specialized knowledge and the general public.

B. Pop-up Workshops

This format consists of meeting people “where they are” at public events/venues (e.g., farmers markets, art festivals, libraries and transit centers). Over the fall/winter — and depending on public health conditions — staff will attend public events throughout the region focusing on Equity Priority Communities to introduce the general public to the study and engage participants in meaningful conversations.

C. Digital Promotion

Staff will work with MTC’s social media team to develop a strategy to digitally promote relevant engagement opportunities to the general public.

Community Engagement: Round 2

With findings from the first round of analysis, staff will seek to prioritize pathways and corridors with the advisory groups for the second round of engagement — planned during the second year of the study. The objective of this round of engagement is to gather input to further refine *pathways* that will be evaluated during the second round of analysis.

The engagement strategy for this round will be developed with consultant support. This phase of engagement could utilize targeted outreach similar to Round 1 of engagement, along with videos to help visualize the pathways. Engagement will be focused along the prioritized corridors and include more local governmental and non-governmental partners. Staff also envisions conducting longer workshops with these partners and community members with engaging activities to refine pathways. In addition, staff has requested budget to conduct statistically valid public opinion polls with the general public.

Engagement Evaluation

Guided by MTC’s Public Participation Plan and Equity Platform, staff seeks to continually evaluate the study’s public engagement strategy to ensure historically underrepresented communities can meaningfully influence decision-making and ensure an open and transparent process with ample opportunity for engagement.



Staff is working to define “success” as it relates to the study’s engagement strategy and seeks the subcommittee’s feedback in developing this definition. The evaluation will seek to answer the following preliminary questions,

- Are the **right stakeholders at the table** and is anyone missing?
- Does the process and structure of activities **allow for all voices to be heard** and be equally valued?
- Does the process **increase opportunity for those most affected**?
- Does the process **shift decision-making power to those who are affected** by policies and solutions?
- Do the policies and solutions **address the needs of the affected communities**?

Additionally, staff is developing metrics to measure success. Metrics will be designed to focus on the following issues:

1. **Demographics.** Who is at the table? Who is missing? Do the demographics of participants roughly mirror the demographics of the Bay Area’s population?
2. **Content and materials.** Are the materials and content user-friendly and written in plain language? Do the materials explain the purpose of the work; the significance or impact; the opportunities for input; and the decision-making roles?
3. **Engagement activities.** Where and how are stakeholders involved in developing policies and solutions?
4. **Access.** Are events and activities linguistically accessible to 100% of participants? Are all meetings accessible under the requirements of the ADA?
5. **Participation.** Who is engaged/submitted comments? Do participants help conceptualize the project, establish project goals, and develop policies and solutions?

Staff is committed to ensuring an open, transparent and inclusive process. As such, staff seeks the subcommittee’s input in defining success as we work to identify appropriate metrics.