

Equity Priority Communities Refresh Phase One Evaluation: Internal Engagement Findings

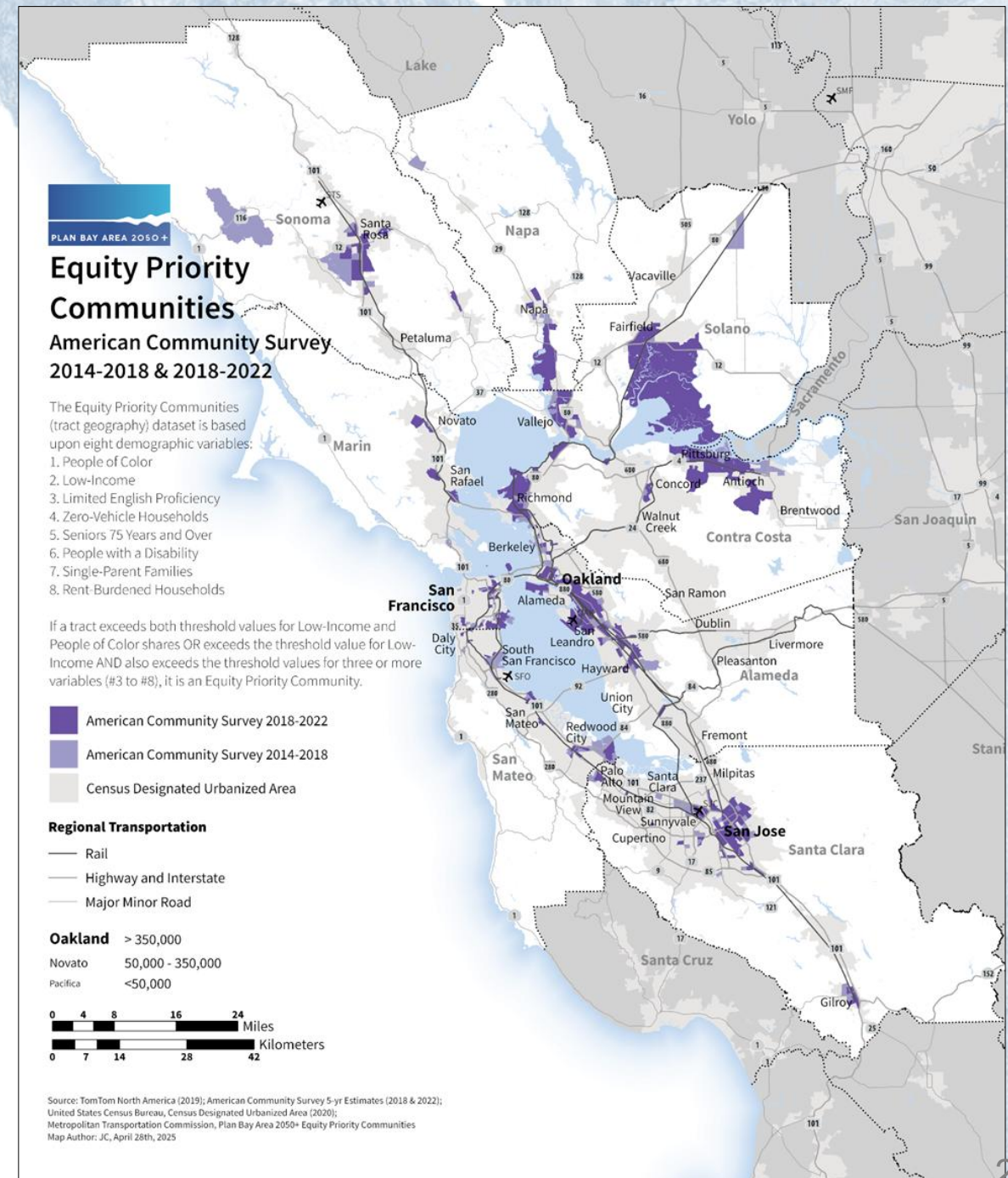
Natasha Opfell, Regional Planning Program
August 7, 2026



ASSOCIATION OF BAY AREA GOVERNMENTS
METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

What are Equity Priority Communities (EPCs)?

- EPCs are place-based designations (census tracts), developed by MTC to identify socially and economically disadvantaged populations.
- EPCs have concentrations of **both people of color and low-income residents**, or low-income residents plus three or more of the following variables:
 - Limited English Proficiency
 - Zero-Vehicle Households
 - Seniors 75+
 - People with Disabilities
 - Single-Parent Families
 - Severely Rent Burdened Families



How Have EPCs Supported Equity Analyses over the Past 25+ Years?

- **Identify concentrated need:** EPCs are ~20% of the region's population but hold a far larger share of its people of color (82% vs. 63%) and low-income residents (36% vs. 18%).
- **Align investment across the region:** One shared regional standard concentrates attention and resources on disadvantaged communities across all nine counties.
- **Consistent and defensible:** A stable, regionally vetted definition, refined across Plan Bay Area cycles, that partners can draw on as a regional resource.



Photo: Rails to Trails Conservancy



Why a Refresh, Why Now?

The EPC framework was last updated in 2016. The project asks not just what needs updating, but what it could become for the decade ahead.

How we got here:

- The EPC Refresh delivers on a commitment made in Plan Bay Area 2050 and reinforced by the agency's Equity Platform and updated Mission, Vision, and Values.

A two-phase effort:

- Phase One (spring 2026 through mid-2027)
- Phase Two (multi-year, scope informed by Phase One)



Plan Bay Area 2050 Workshop (2019), Photo: Karl Nielsen



Internal Listening Sessions

Between March and May 2026, **14 internal listening sessions** were conducted with staff across multiple MTC-ABAG departments.

The core questions covered three main topics:

- How is the framework is used today?
- Who and what might the framework be missing?
- How could the EPC framework evolve?

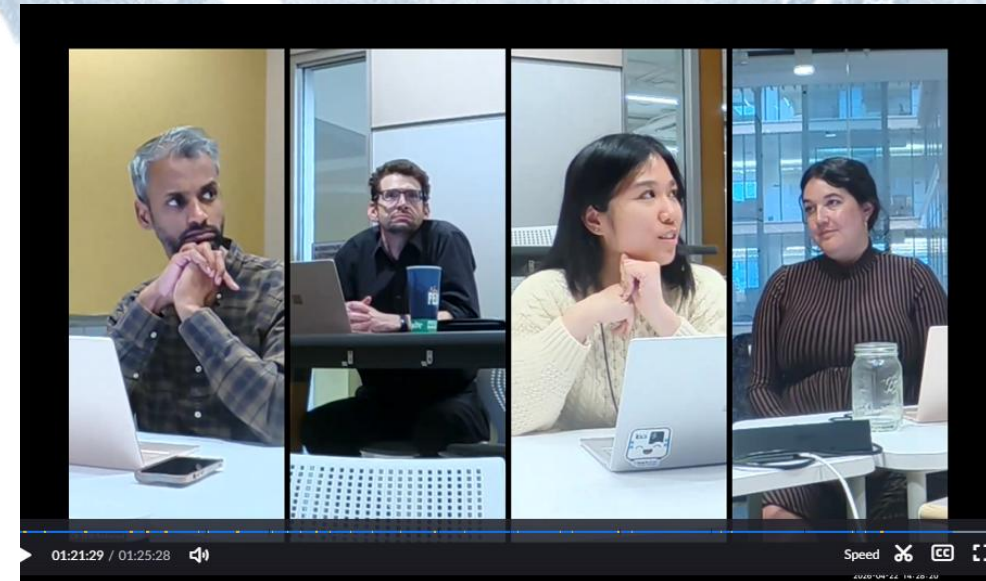


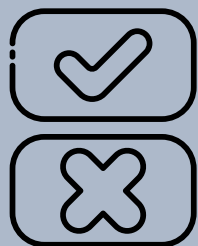
Photo: Zoom Capture from Major Plans 4/22 Listening Session



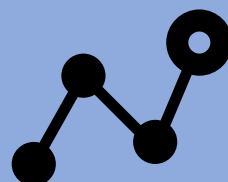
Key Theme 1: A Methodology Built for an Earlier Moment

Unchanged since 2016, the methodology's data and design can be strengthened for the decade ahead.

Constraints of Binary Designation



Retrospective by Design



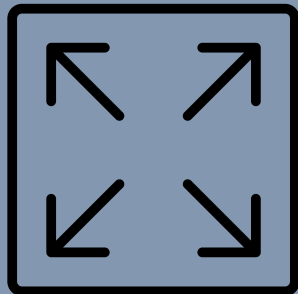
Stability of Data and Thresholds



Key Theme 2: A Widely Adopted, Widely Adapted Tool

Built for one specific purpose, the framework now supports grant scoring, outreach, project siting and program assessments, raising the question of how it can best support this diverse array of uses.

**Applications Outside
the Original Use Case**



**Variation in Application
Across Programs**



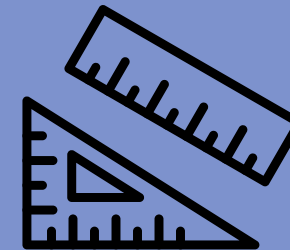
Key Theme 3: Limits of Place-Based Designation

Because the framework identifies geographically-concentrated need, an open question for the EPC Refresh is how to account for disadvantage that is dispersed, displaced or hidden by surrounding affluence.

Populations Outside of Current Factors



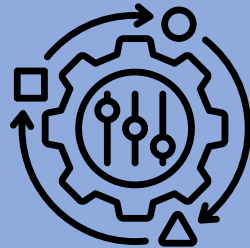
Additional Equity Policy Considerations



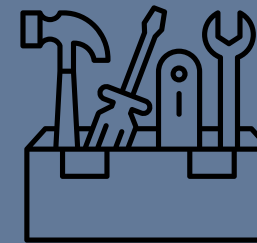
Key Theme 4: Beyond the Map

Staff envision the EPC Refresh as an opportunity to create a more dynamic and accountable equity tool.

**A More Responsive,
Multidimensional Tool**



**Positioned Within A
Broader Toolkit**



Internal Listening Sessions:

Unresolved Questions

The listening sessions surfaced three unresolved questions where internal perspectives genuinely diverged. Each will require further engagement before the EPC Refresh proceeds.

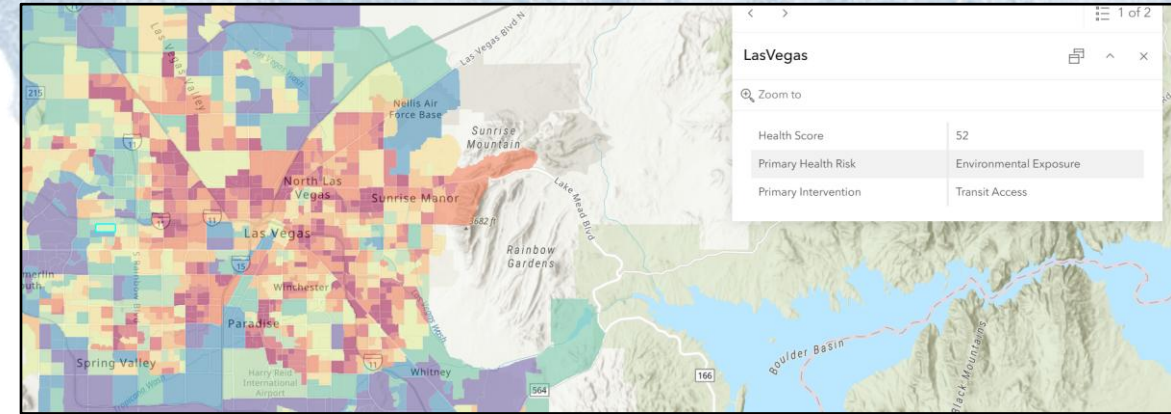
- **Regional thresholds vs. local realities**
- **Comprehensiveness vs. legibility**
- **Measurement vs. action-oriented intent**



Examples of Equity Tools from Peer Regions

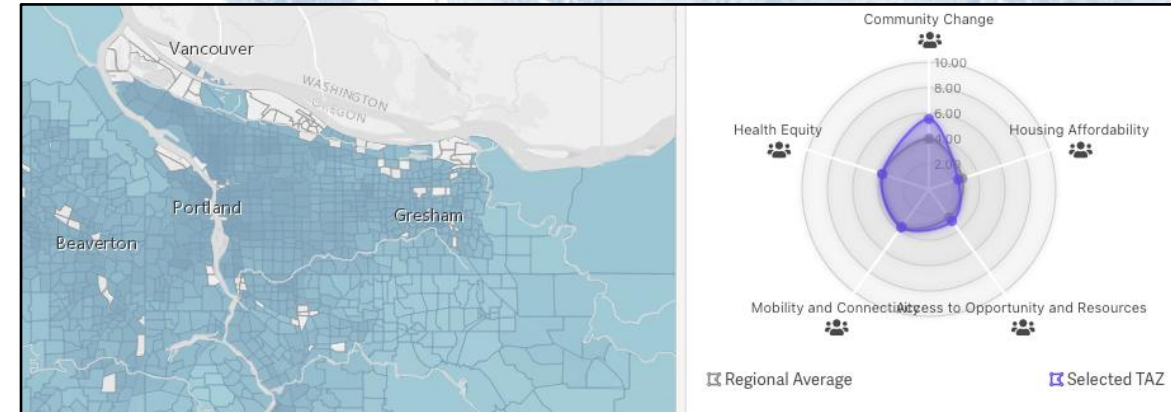
Community Health Scores – Las Vegas (RTC)

Beyond the binary. RTC uses continuous scores from 0 to 100, shown as a color gradient.



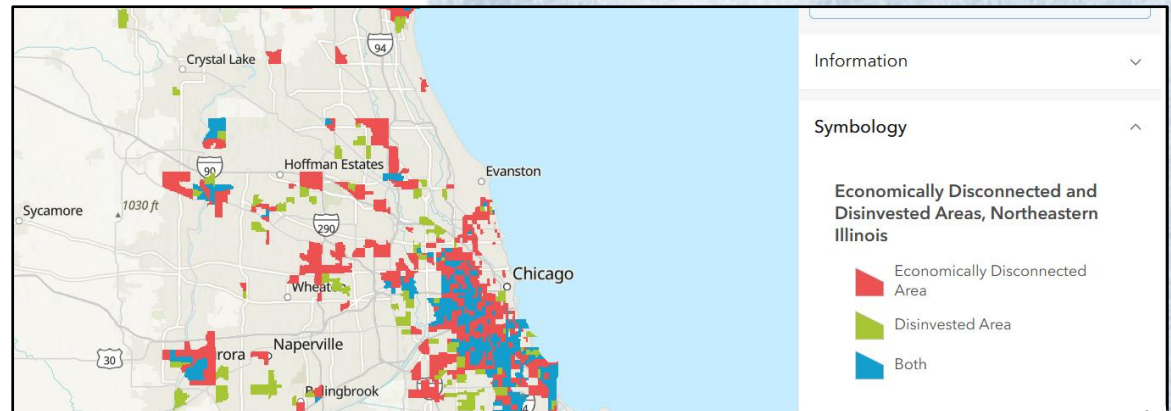
Equitable Development Index – Portland Metro

Analyzes the movement. Metro tracks how variables like income and population of color change over time.



Economically Disconnected and Disinvested Areas – Chicago (CMAP)

A more responsive, multidimensional tool. CMAP keeps the federally required areas of concentrated disadvantage but lets users add additional data layers.



Timeline: Next Steps on EPC Refresh Phase One



MTC-ABAG Community Advisory Council



MTC-ABAG Joint Planning/Admin Committees



ASSOCIATION OF BAY AREA GOVERNMENTS
METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

**Phase 1 is the first of two planned phases. Contingent on the opportunities identified in Phase 1, Phase 2 will seek to focus on technical methodology and tool development, turning the conceptual framework into a final, usable product.*

External Engagement: From Initial Findings to Setting Direction

- **Approach:** Begin near-term with existing established partners while procuring a consultant to inform deeper engagement with newer stakeholders.
- **Goal:** Equitable engagement grounded in co-creation, centering the communities and partners most affected by the framework to help shape its future.
 - Build stakeholder capacity
 - Limit engagement fatigue
 - Be clear about what input can and cannot shape

External Stakeholders:

- State/Regional Partners
- County Transportation Agencies
- City Agencies
- Non-Profits and Community Based Organizations
- Labor Organizations
- Academia
- Tribal Partners
- City & County Equity Departments



Discussion Questions

- Which themes or findings resonate most with you?
- Which themes or findings are most important to strengthen the framework as an equity tool?

Thank You!

Natasha Opfell, EPC Refresh Project Manager
nopfell@bayareametro.gov

