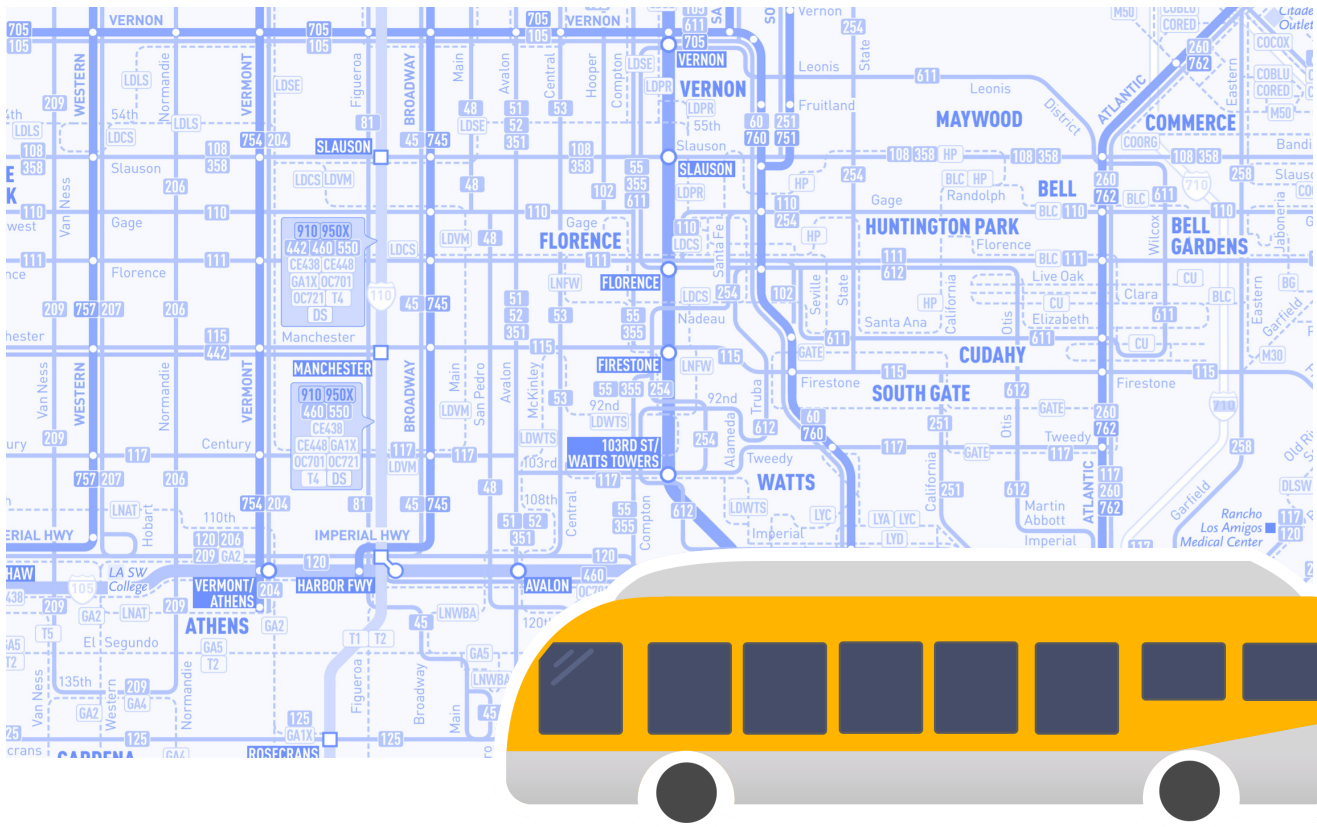


# MOVING SOUTHEAST LA

Ensuring Equitable Transit



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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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A big thank you to all who supported me with my research. Professors Matsuoka, Shamasunder, & Cha, thank you for your guidance. To all my interviewees in city government, at CBE & EYCEJ, & the Gateway COG, thank you for sharing your knowledge with me. This work couldn't have been possible without the voice of people in the Southeast cities. I'd also like to thank Dr. Wilma Franco at the SELA Collaborative and Jessica Meaney for their wealth of knowledge.

To my friends & family, thank you for keeping me sane throughout this process. **Amá, gracias por tu apoyo. Dedico todo mi esfuerzo a ti.** 💜

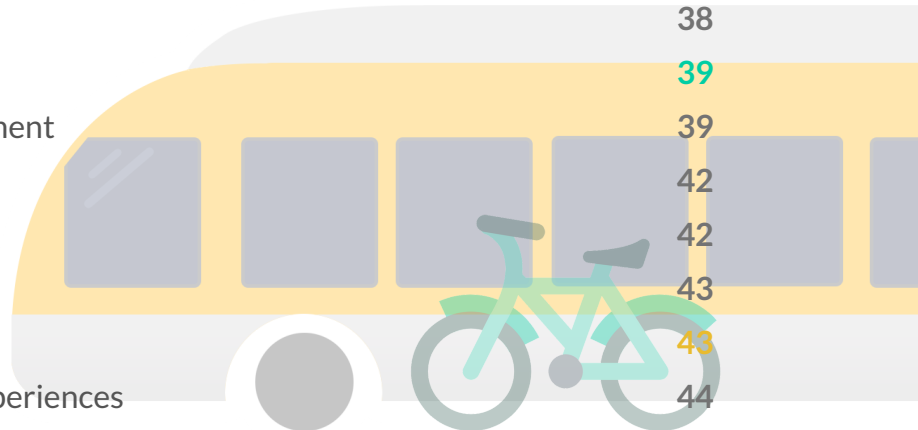


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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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This research examines Southeast Los Angeles' public transportation through a perspective of equity. These cities are some of Los Angeles County's densest, also representing an overwhelmingly low-income, foreign-born Latino population. As such, the area remains in a cycle of disinvestment, including a dated, disconnected transit system that doesn't match contemporary needs. The Southeast Cities also demonstrate a history of exclusion in major transportation policy until very recently with the passage of Measure M. Accordingly, this research provides a tailored equity framework based on current transit equity discourse. Through interviews, field observations, and a funding analysis, this paper finds three overarching patterns: 1) (dis)investment propels inequity, which is the basis of a fragmented system, 2) accessibility, though commonly depicted through physical disconnect, is social in nature as well, especially evident through anxieties over displacement, environmental injustice, and other social safety concerns. and 3) outreach efforts are unequal. Thus, equity in Southeast LA contains three key elements: 1) Funding models must shift to repair histories of disinvestment, 2) accessibility must be understood through its physical and social aspects, especially as new interest begins to enter the region, and 3) Traditional methods of outreach must be replaced by authentic engagement.

## INTRODUCTION

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Just 15 minutes outside of a global city, people play, live, and work in areas deprived of immense cultural, technological, and creative innovation concerning mobility. Southeast Los Angeles, encompassing cities such as South Gate, Huntington Park, and Bell, demonstrates some of the highest population densities, poverty levels, and public transportation usage outside of Los Angeles, yet stagnate.<sup>1</sup> Despite recognition as a disadvantaged community, very few significant changes have been made to the region's public transit system. The Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Agency, shortened to Metro for this paper, is a key entity as the County's leading transportation agency, funder, and developer leading Los Angeles towards a new future of connectivity. However, the Southeast cities hold contrasting narratives about connectivity in comparison to Metro's. While the Southeast contends with insufficient and baseline service,<sup>2</sup> Metro has pushed new projects to boost mass transit, but concentrating these projects within the central city area and western portion of the county. Meanwhile, big cities have long engaged in an evolving discussion about transportation planning centered on social equity and restoring agency to the pedestrian, existing at odds with Metro as a sprawling County agency. Essentially all focus is diverted to areas with resources, political power, and prestige, all of which the Southeast does not possess, which deepens the cycle of inequity and restricted mobility. Consequently, this paper offers suggestions for the sustainable and equitable implementation of transportation policy, broadly examining Metro's active ordinances (Measures R, Propositions A & C), including the recently passed Measure M, in Southeast Los Angeles. This is accomplished through analyses of stakeholder interviews, Metro-sponsored meetings, and city finances, which elucidate not only the physical and social/structural gaps in the community's existing system, but also the state of relationship building between the planning domain and grassroots

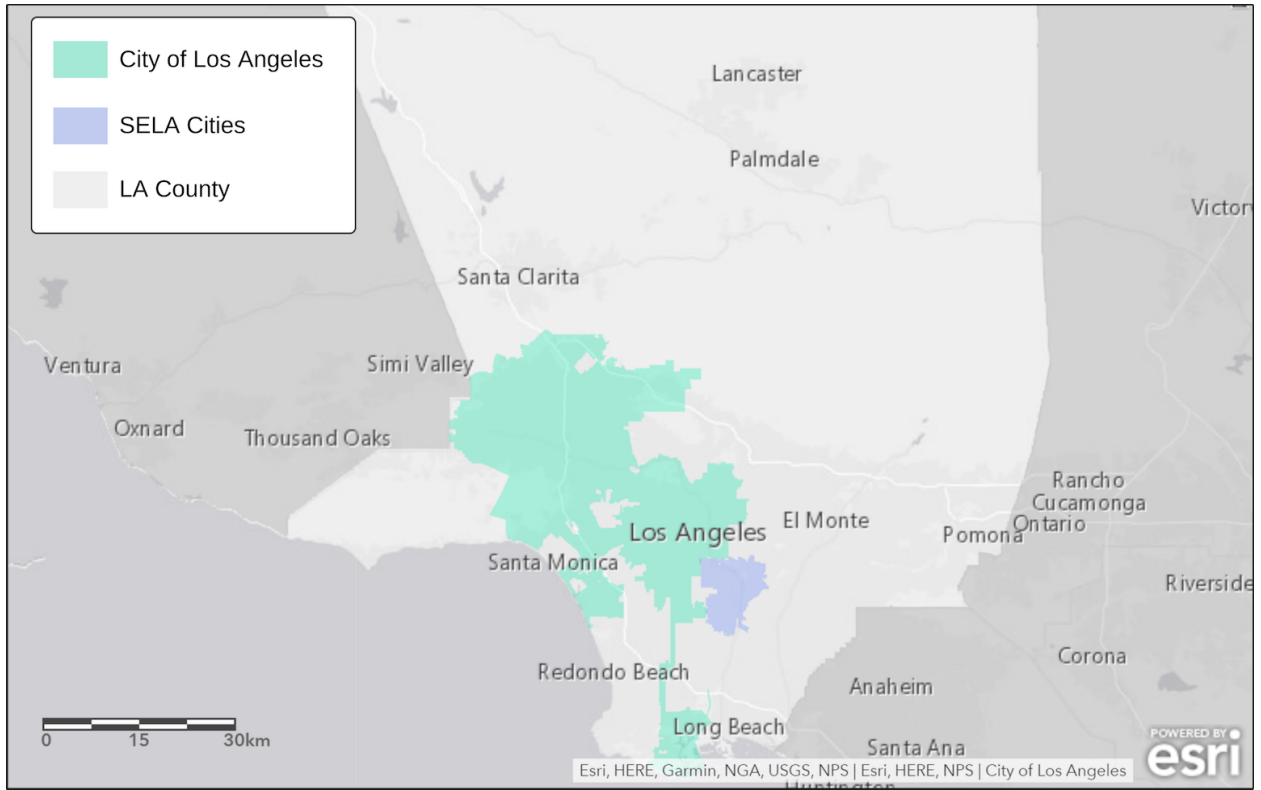
domain with the goal to tailor a transportation equity framework in this underserved, under-researched region.

## BACKGROUND

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Before proceeding with the literature, this paper supplies definitions for a clearer understanding of the focus area and subject matter. This research focuses on the **Southeast cities** comprised of Huntington Park, Maywood, Bell Gardens, Bell, Cudahy, South Gate, Lynwood, Commerce, and Vernon, which are emblematic transit-deficient cities. This paper will utilize the shortened **Southeast, Southeast Los Angeles**, or the abbreviated **SELA** to refer to the above cities. These cities were selected for their likeness in demographics, socioeconomic factors, and transit patterns, which is elaborated upon on page 6. This smaller area is situated within the larger **Gateway Region/Gateway Cities**, the Southeastern portion of the LA County bridging Los Angeles and the ports, representing a total of 27 cities. The **Gateway Council of Governments (COG)**, also referred to as the **Gateway COG**, is a voluntary governing body important in Metro's decision-making. Though they do not provision funds, but assist cities with funding, interpreting documents, and so forth. Metro assigns projects and identifies them according to region, thus making the COG a key player for any project concerning the Gateway Cities. Lastly, **Central City** or **City** refers to the **City of Los Angeles**. Any mention of transit, transportation, or mass transit hereafter refers to public transportation unless stated otherwise. **Figure 1** is a map situating SELA within the county and **Figure 2** details the study area.

**Figure 1** City of Los Angeles and Southeast LA



**Figure 2** Southeast LA Cities





## Metro & Funding

As the leading agency for all of Los Angeles County's transportation, the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transportation Authority (LACMTA), also called Metro, is tasked with re-shaping its growing network into a multimodal system. Though its name conjures up images of buses and rail, Metro is responsible for a majority of all transportation work, including highway projects, in the County. For a sprawling city dominated by cars and notoriously congested freeways, Metro's public transit goal is ambitious. Their plans portray a vision of an efficient and connected network, spearheaded primarily by rail construction and other high-quality transit options, which reflects in their latest policies. For example, a hot topic since its passage in 2016, Metro's Measure M ordinance lists aggressive goals to combat traffic congestion via rail and the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Program.<sup>3</sup> As it stands, many of these improvements target the core of the City of Los Angeles since it serves as both a major hub for the County and a terminus for all, except one, rail lines. The 88 cities in the County share 16% of Measure M's budget for municipal transportation projects and amenities under the Local Return Program, all aside from major projects already planned within the ordinance.

Measure M is not the sole funding source, however. Metro generates its funding through sales taxes. The first of these, Proposition A, passed in 1980 and raised retail taxes by half a cent, with 25% of the funds going to the county for transportation projects, 35% for rail projects, and 40% for mostly bus services including municipal buses.<sup>4</sup> Proposition C followed in 1990, increasing taxes by another half cent. Metro divides it as follows: 40% for bus and rail construction and operations, 10% for commuter rail (Metrolink/Amtrak) and transit amenities, and 25% for freeways. The funds from these propositions can no longer fund new subway as voted in 1998. In 2008, voters passed Measure R for another half-cent tax raise that will continue to generate funds for about another 20 years.<sup>5</sup> Measure R also contains a

Local Return Program (LR) like Measure M in which funds are distributed to cities for transportation needs complying with Metro stipulations and federal laws. It's important to note that though sustainable development is encouraged, it is not mandated. The ordinance's definition of sustainability does not specify racial or socioeconomic issues, but instead focuses on environmental impacts.<sup>6</sup> As with Measure M, money from LR can essentially be used at the city's discretion, so long as it fits within Metro's guidelines. Because of this, LR funds are a boon to the county's cities. Lastly, voters passed Measure M in 2016, extending another half-cent tax for 40 years. Metro utilizes a population-based formula to distribute the funds on a monthly basis to cities. While the Gateway Cities receive a substantial amount of money, not much reaches Southeast LA since these cities have smaller populations. The City of Los Angeles greatly outmatches every region, starting at yearly \$56 million under Measure M. The Unincorporated County Areas come in second with about \$15 million in yearly funds.<sup>7</sup> In third, Long Beach receives a projected \$6 million. SELA receives a collective \$5,277,200. Cudahy receives the lowest per year at \$344,800, while South Gate receives the highest at \$1,371,600.<sup>8</sup> Cities also use supplemental funds from federal and state sources, also filtered through Metro, much of which is utilized by SELA cities for street repairs and traffic/pedestrian safety.

## Southeast Los Angeles: A Region of Change

Southeast Los Angeles built its identity on working class suburban values, attracting Eastern and Midwestern impoverished families with its cheap land. Its open-shop attitude towards land use meant people could, albeit hardly, sustain themselves in an increasingly unstable economy.<sup>9,10</sup> The 1920s marked a period of several changes for the mostly racially homogenous, lower class residents. First, it became a site for massive development, marking a social shift from shantytown to suburbia. Second, race began to take on a central role in local policy. Though the area housed some Southern

and Eastern European minorities, many of the new families were America-born, making whiteness the preferred identifier and emboldening white nationalism.<sup>11</sup> Third, which is tied to the second point, migration repeatedly caused friction in SELA, resulting in dramatic demographic changes. Black Americans migrated to Los Angeles in the SELA-adjacent South Los Angeles, particularly Watts, further pushing residents to weaponize their whiteness.<sup>12</sup> The Southeast also played a critical role in the war economy and in pushing autopia, shown through the large presence of auto and aerospace manufacturing.<sup>13</sup>

The white suburban Southeast rippled in the 60s. Up until then, SELA residents worked hard to maintain the white integrity of their neighborhoods with federal assistance. The Home Owners Loan Corporation swept into the area with restrictive covenants and redlining during the 40s.<sup>14</sup> Black migrants and other ethnic minorities continued to be concentrated west of Alameda Street, which acted as a physical racial divide.<sup>15</sup> The 1965 Watts Riots in 1965 triggered an initial wave of white flight. Concurrently, industry declined in the 60s and wages dipped, subsequently driving out larger numbers of the white working class. Cities on the fringes of SELA, such as Boyle Heights and East Los Angeles, already had a large foreign-born, Latinx population, and this pattern spread to the Southeast.<sup>16</sup> As whites left, Latinx immigrants moved into the area and sought the abandoned jobs.<sup>17</sup> By the 90s, Southeast Los Angeles completely changed. Though its working class identity remains, the cities now consist primarily of Latinx families, several of them with only Spanish speakers. **Table 1** depicts population densities and percentage identifying as Latinx by Census Designated Place (CDP) relative to LA County and the City of Los Angeles. SELA fares significantly higher in all subcategories in comparison to the County and City. **Table 2** depicts economic standing across SELA cities, whose residents tend to have lower incomes relative to those in the City and County. Vernon differs due to its large industrial presence.

**Table 1:** SELA Population Densities & Percent Population Latino/x, Foreign-Born, Non-Citizen

City/Region	Tot. Pop	Pop. Density (per sq. mi)	% Latino	% Foreign born	% Not Citizen
Bell	35,927	14,367.90	92.6%	41.9%	25.9%
Bell Gardens	42,805	17,410.60	95.5%	43.1%	31.3%
Commerce	12,997	1,988.30	95.5%	32.7%	16.6%
Cudahy	24,106	20,515.40	96.1%	45.4%	33.7%
Huntington Park	58,921	19,558.60	97.1%	48.3%	33.2%
Lynwood	71,233	14,717.50	88.0%	39.2%	26.0%
Maywood	27,672	23,482.50	97.9%	46.1%	32.0%
South Gate	95,219	13,158.70	95.4%	43.1%	24.7%
Vernon	76	20.3	45.6%	18.8%	2.0%
LA County	10,057,155	2,478.20	48.3%	34.6%	17.3%
City of LA	3,918,872	8,361.70	48.6%	37.9%	20.8%

American Community Survey, "2016 5-Year Estimates." Social Explorer.

**Table 2:** SELA Median Family Income

City/Region	Median Family Income (In 2016 Inflation Adjusted Dollars)
Bell	\$39,335
Bell Gardens	\$36,816
Commerce	\$46,151
Cudahy	\$37,275
Huntington Park	\$37,022
Lynwood	\$44,023
Maywood	\$37,924
South Gate	\$46,836
Vernon	\$35,000
Los Angeles	\$51,538
LA County	\$57,952

American Community Survey, "2016 5-Year Estimates: Median Income." Social Explorer.

SELA's heavy industry remains evident in manufacturing cities such as nearby Vernon and Commerce. Rapid industrial decline has resulted in a series of land issues: a scarcity of developable land and a hotbed of environmental toxics.<sup>18</sup> The lack of land and high population densities cause overcrowding shown through exceptionally high rental rates and informal housing, such as garage homes.<sup>19</sup> Vernon, Maywood, Cudahy and Bell Gardens have among the highest rental rates in the County, only matched by the City of Industry, West Hollywood, and Marina Del Rey.<sup>20</sup> However, community activism has changed the region into an Environmental Justice (EJ) area contending with the presence of large manufacturing facilities, power plants, toxic waste facilities, and intrusive freeways. In the last several years, local EJ organizations such as Communities for a Better Environment and East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice have been battling freeway expansions, namely the Metro and Caltrans I-710 project, which is presently a major freight corridor. Goods movement and manufacturing have replaced auto & aerospace manufacturing as the dominant industries, bringing trucks, congestion, and pollution into the area. The project has spanned almost a decade in discussion with goals to modernize the freeway, primarily to ease congestion especially because the corridor, which connects the ports to commercial areas, is at the heart of the county's goods movement. Though the project no longer proposes an extension, lane expansions are still included. Moreover, freeway projects have continually and historically usurped large proportions of funding in the Gateway Region since maintenance is costly. Mass transit, by contrast, stays relatively unchanged. Of the three major Measure M projects near SELA, two are freeway improvements. These figures and documented history distinguish the Southeast cities as a high need area. Transit, while not a cure-all, can ameliorate some of area's spatial problems and reshape the landscape for improved mobility.

The Southeast's previous transportation system sets the tone for its present-day system. Originally built by private enterprises, the County's main mode of transportation was an expansive rail system serviced by Pacific Electric's interurban Red Cars and the Los Angeles Railway's (LARy) streetcars.<sup>21,22</sup> However, the rail system's primary objective had little to do with increasing people's personal freedom, but instead to encourage sprawl through land speculation around station stops. Los Angeles, the center of leisure and entertainment, was, of course, a primary destination for the residents living in the sleepy and calm Southeast. The Pacific Electric's Red Cars and LARy's Yellow Cars, each brought lines into the Southeast, the Red more costly and the Yellow cheaper, though inconvenient. However, some SELA residents couldn't afford the Pacific Electric's Red Cars, especially during the war, while the Yellow hardly breached the Southeast, forcing families to become creative in their traveling.<sup>23</sup> Sprawl ultimately gave rise to the automobile as the premier transportation method and SELA was no exception to the allure of automobile freedom. In 1924, about an equal amount of people in the County used cars as those that used rail. To put this into perspective, LA County residents had 1 car for every 3.6 people whereas the nation averaged 1 for every 13 people.<sup>24</sup>

The area's transit history and patterns indicate that SELA residents have always been active travelers even when transit networks weren't in their favor. Since the abandonment of the streetcar, alternative forms of transit have since been reduced to busing. But much has changed demographically, and mass transit is now understood differently, particularly who rides transit. Nationwide transit trends demonstrate that transit riders tend to have lower incomes and identify as non-white.<sup>25,26</sup> This certainly rings true with Metro's ridership. According to their 2017 Customer Satisfaction Survey results, 66% of bus riders reported as Latino with African Americans creating the second largest ethnic group at 15%. On rail, 46% identified as Latino.<sup>27</sup> The second largest ethnic/racial group was White at 18%, African Americans following closely behind at 17% of rail riders.<sup>28</sup> Incomes

between bus and rail ridership varied substantially with 61% of bus patrons and 39% of rail patrons living below the poverty line.<sup>29</sup>

The Southeast significantly differs from the City and County in terms of ethnic/racial make up.

**Table 3** shows a breakdown of public transit riders in the study area, LA County, and Los Angeles. Some cities meet or exceed the County’s transit usage average, especially Huntington Park (which also exceeds the City of Los Angeles’ averages). Other cities dip below the county average, perhaps due to the inaccessibility and quality of transit. Vernon and Commerce, both primarily industrial cities, show little public transportation usage, for example. The nonprofit organization SELA Collaborative found that reliability (which Metro defines as no more than 1 minute early and 5 minutes late) and on-time performance resulted poorly. Buses countywide showed a reliability of 75-80%, but on just 3 bus lines in SELA, 40% of buses were late.<sup>30</sup> The collaborative also found significantly longer wait times in comparison to the county.<sup>31</sup> Ridership also exhibits a decline across all regions, except for Bell. **Figures 3, 3, and 5** depict SELA’s current transit network, a widespread network of buses, but difficult access to rail and little active transportation corridors.

**Table 3:** Public Transit Usage by Percent

<b>% Public Transit Usage (2013 - 2017)</b>					
<b>City/Region</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>
<b>Bell</b>	6.8	7.0	7.6	6.5	8.1
<b>Bell Gardens</b>	8.1	6.5	5.4	6.4	6.0
<b>Commerce</b>	3.4	2.3	2.6	2.9	2.7
<b>Cudahy</b>	7.1	5.3	6.3	6.4	6.0
<b>Huntington Park</b>	13.2	13.4	12.3	11.1	10.9
<b>Los Angeles</b>	11.0	10.9	10.6	10.1	9.8
<b>LA County</b>	7.1	7.0	6.8	6.5	6.3
<b>Lynwood</b>	5.7	6.2	6.1	5.8	5.6

<b>Maywood</b>	7.5	7.3	8.1	8.0	8.4
<b>South Gate</b>	6.9	7.8	7.8	7.7	7.1
<b>Vernon</b>	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

American Community Survey, "2013-17 5-Year Estimates - Public Transportation (Excluding Taxicab)."

**Figure 3: SELA Bus Network Map**

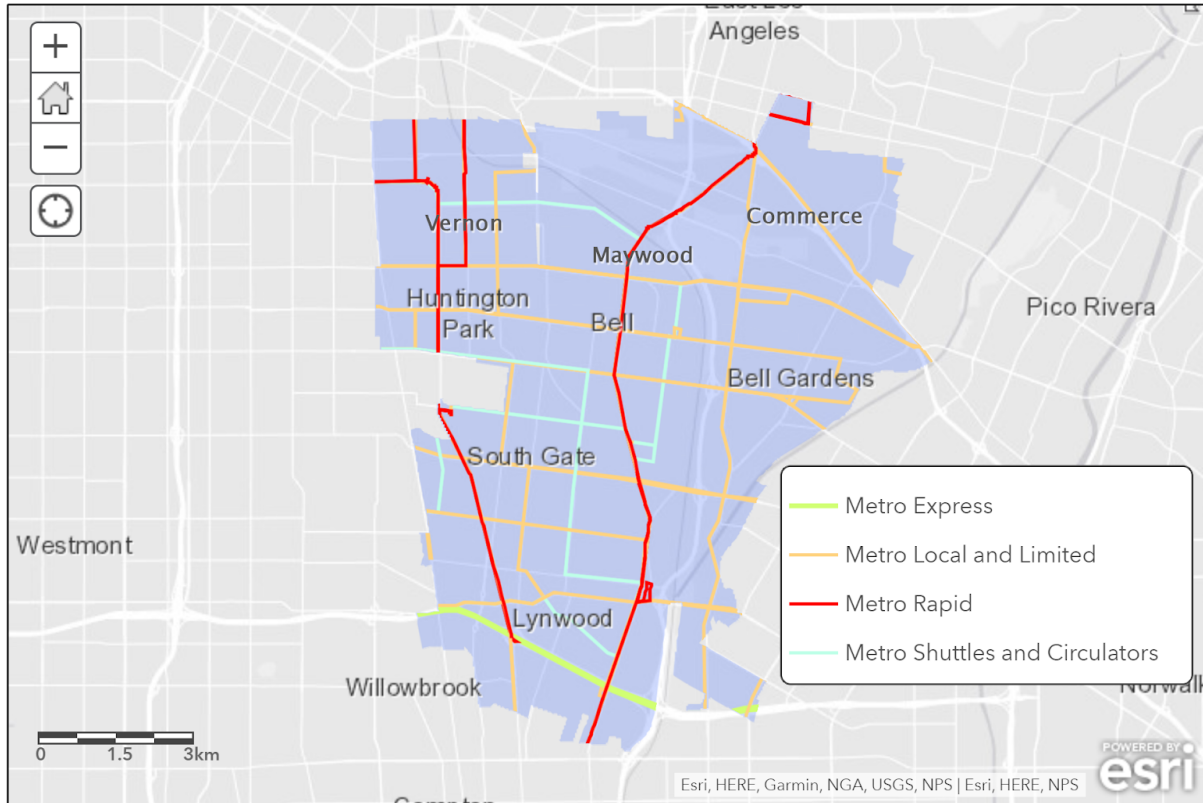




Figure 4: SELA Rail Network

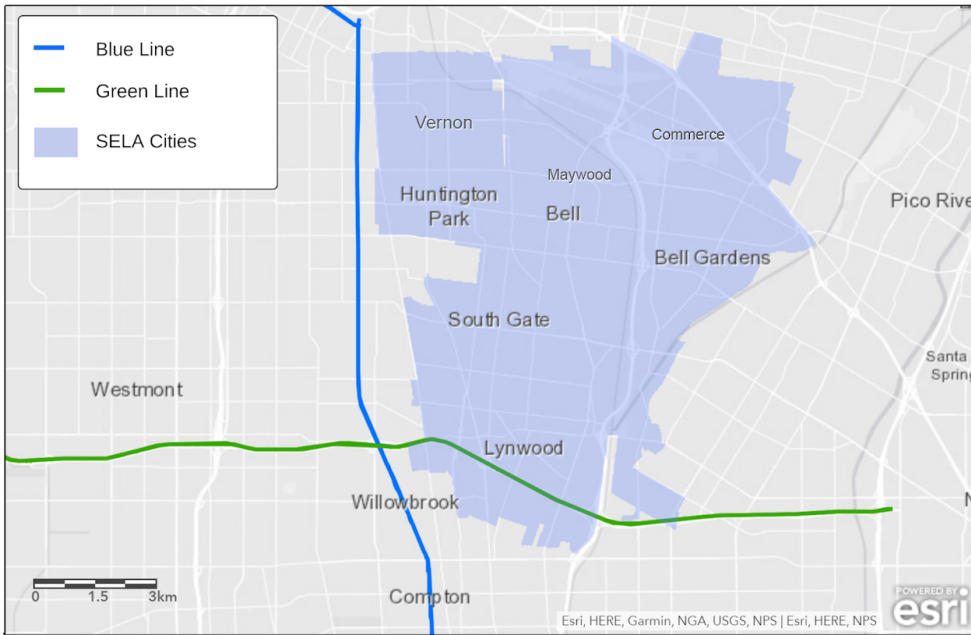


Figure 5: SELA Bike Network



Most importantly, Southeast Los Angeles feels a disconnect to the City rooted in transit planning and the misguided decision to consistently funnel resources to other parts of the county. Instead of rail, Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), and amenities that facilitate and improve the transit experience such as bike lanes, transit-oriented development, and active transport initiatives, residents rely on buses and limited BRT in a system with minimal amenities. Commuting from Los Angeles to the southeastern neighborhoods is not easily achievable by rail alone, especially considering that only two light rails, the Blue and Green Lines, hardly reach the Southeast as shown in **Figure 3**. Riders may transfer from bus to bus for hours, not at all the connected future Metro envisions for the County. The region is evolving, however. Under Measure M, SELA will receive its first high quality transit, the West Santa Ana Branch Corridor, a light rail crossing through much of the Gateway Region slated for construction in 2022. Michael Kodama, Executive Director of the Joint Power Authority leading this rail project, acknowledged the need for increased mobility in the Gateway Cities, stating, “This project goes smack through areas that are underserved...Huntington Park, for one, has some of the most crowded and heavily used bus lines in the entire system”.<sup>32</sup> While Metro regards the West Santa Ana rail as a necessary addition to the system and a boon to the transit-dependent Southeast, it’s worth questioning why large scale projects and improvements have been pushed behind for so long.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

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### Transportation Equity & Definitions

Equity lies at the crux of many agency versus community battles. Moreover, literature has not always perceived social and/or racial issues as essential to transit equity. Transit equity takes root in the Civil Rights era inspired by the Montgomery Bus Boycott and Freedom Riders.<sup>33</sup> The Civil Rights Act of

1964 prohibited discrimination on the basis of race, color, creed, national origin, and sex, but was hardly enforced transit-wise. For the next 30 years, federal, state, and local agencies largely overlooked transportation inequities.<sup>34</sup> The 90s marked a change as transit equity started to gain traction as a subset of Environmental Justice (EJ). In 1991, the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act shifted funding favoritism towards highways to include public transit, also mandating planners to conduct impact analyses based on civil rights.<sup>23</sup> Then in 1998, the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century mandated that all recipients of federal dollars must be used in a non-discriminatory manner.<sup>34</sup> An additional policy that cemented transit equity as an EJ issue was Executive Order 12898, signed by President Bill Clinton, to prioritize low-income, communities of color in public programs and public participation with the goal of achieving equalized environmental protection.<sup>35</sup> However, the history of American transportation policy favors the commuter, resulting in “urban renewal” slum clearance highway projects and commuter rail expansions that continue today. When money finally began expanding public transit, White commuters on rail disproportionately benefited as buses continued to decline.<sup>36,37</sup> These two issues pushed transit towards a more horizontal meaning of equity in which the most burdened riders benefit. Though literature typically refrains from defining transit equity, recent research displays a pattern of the following characteristics:

CHARACTERISTIC	SOURCE
Extensive community involvement through each phase of a project or policy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="253 1514 948 1545">• E.g: partnerships with CBOs, local public hearings</li> </ul>	Carter et al. 2018 Pollack et al 2010
Greater proximity to transit stations and stops to increase reliability	Soja 2010
Greater geographic spread for increased accessibility	Soja 2010 Giuliano 2005

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• E.g.: addressing and preventing spatial mismatch</li> </ul>	Carter et al. 2018
<p>Services or infrastructure facilitating first-mile/last-mile trips and/or active transportation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• E.g.: bicycle lanes, ADA compliant features</li> </ul>	<p>East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice 2017</p> <p>LACMTA “First Mile/Last Mile.”</p>
<p>Horizontal or vertical allocation of tax dollars and services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Horizontal describes a distribution in which all receive equal treatment (funds/resources/services) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ May include a progressive distribution of money/services</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Vertical describes a distribution in which the top contributors reap the greatest benefit of a given service</li> </ul>	<p>Soja 2010</p> <p>East Yard 2017</p> <p>Welch &amp; Sabyasachee 2013</p>
<p>Expanded bus fleet and/or BRT fleet as opposed to rail expansion</p>	<p>Grengs 2002</p> <p>Garret &amp; Taylor 1999</p> <p>Giuliano 2005</p> <p>Reynolds 2012</p>
<p>Cessation of freeway expansion projects</p>	<p>East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice 2017</p>

Of late, extensive frameworks that include equity indicators have emerged as public transportation continues to attract funding and become desirable. Community-based organizations supplement transit equity literature, but tend to define equity as what it is not. These frameworks also tend to generalize suggestions for the County, while others subtly focus on the City of Los Angeles because of the conflation between it and Los Angeles County. Literature, consequently, misses the narratives outside the big city that are necessary to consider in an agency serving 88 cities.

Carter, Pastor, and Wander's report posits equity as a common interest wherein all members of society can reap the benefits of diverse, efficient services. They define equitable implementation through 3 key points: 1) PAST: closing historic racialized gaps by prioritizing these vulnerable areas 2) PRESENT: authentic partnership and shared decision-making with community 3) FUTURE: preventing disparities through continuous evaluation. Equity, therefore, represents an entire process that acknowledges competing definitions of equity instead of a singular definition. They purposely offer guidelines as opposed to a definition because its definition will hinge on context. Instead, they argue that equity is not achieved if detached from community and not achieved if disparities emerge and/or deepen. The process of equity entails 8 components. The first involves establishing a definition for equity involving community input before discussing policy. Seeking grassroots collaborations comes second. Though agencies may hesitate for fear of conflict, the authors assert that CBOs have the best knowledge on engaging community. The third entails the collaboration of community, agencies, and cities in decision-making. This ensures that the problems of one city do not migrate to another, but also prioritizes the sharing of information. Fourth is to provide technical assistance where necessary. Cities, particularly underserved cities, may be understaffed, unequipped, or unexperienced in the field of transportation and therefore require assistance. Next is to ensure that funding specifies equity through incentives, penalties, and baselines. Sixth, create policy to encourage economic growth and health which reflects the region's concerns such as employment, small-business impacts, and environmental hazards. The seventh advises to foster collaboration across other transportation agencies and departments by sharing frameworks, finding different funding sources, or creating councils. Lastly, as in their third component of equitable implementation, is continuous evaluation and adjustment with ongoing community engagement.<sup>38</sup> Similarly, Metro's recently adopted Equity Platform takes this holistic approach through an updated framework to address past disparities. They exclude a

preliminary definition of equity since the agency felt it counterintuitive “to begin a truly inclusive conversation with a pre-determined definition of ‘equity.’”<sup>39</sup> However, the agency does define inequity as “fundamental differences in access to opportunity.” Metro specifies opportunity through employment, health, safety, education, and housing.

Likewise, Investing in Place, an advocacy organization focused on equitable transit policy, continues to develop guidelines for the equitable implementation of Measure M. They define equity based on the idea of “Just Growth” that Carter, Pastor, and Wander’s also share: transportation, a common interest, becomes economically efficient, socially responsible, and sustainable when it prioritizes the most marginalized.<sup>40</sup> They succinctly define transportation equity through three points: 1) equitable, accessible, and affordable transportation options 2) shared benefits and investments across the County 3) community involvement through each step of decision-making.<sup>41</sup> Investing in Place emphasizes the importance of adopting a shared definition of transportation equity and pushes Metro towards this goal.<sup>42</sup>

### Why Equity? Why SELA? Why Now?

Edward Soja, in his book *Seeking Spatial Justice*, brings forth a concept of oppressive geographies and the manipulation of space in upholding discriminatory practices.<sup>43</sup> Likewise, Carter, Pastor, and Wander assert that the concept of equity has becoming seemingly so far-fetched that the public and political consciousness have internalized these inequitable practices as an unavoidable side-effect of policy. The advent of sprawl, prominence of the automobile, and suburbanization of poverty make it easy to dismiss communities on the fringes of Los Angeles. If the geography is not ripe for complete streets, biking infrastructure, and so forth, why attempt to re-shape it for better mobility? Policy has historically unraveled in this manner in the name of efficiency and driving segregated

outcomes across LA County. Fortunately, many scholars and organizations are re-thinking standard practices for transportation via spatial equity. The solutions equity scholarship has trended towards aren't to solely increase transportation projects everywhere, but to create culturally- and socially-receptive transit options. Closer to the Southeast, a few CBOs have also been changing the conversation of transit equity, primarily by fighting freeways and demanding pedestrian-friendly, multimodal transit that Los Angeles has already begun to enjoy. CBOs such as East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice (EYCEJ) and Communities for a Better Environment (CBE) most stress equity as a moral imperative to address years of exclusion. EYCEJ's Measure M report, for example, suggests that transportation equity contains projects built at a human-scale and a progressive distribution of funds to low-income cities, with a focus on community engagement and public education.<sup>44</sup> Both organizations also draw direct ties between Environmental Justice and transit in a system that not only encourages people out of their cars, but also a vital source of mobility for the low-income communities of color they serve.<sup>45</sup> Giving better access and options to those most limited creates a profound impact. Vehicles are used for just about everything, but mass transit is as well. The ability to move affects everything from employment to education. A better system allows those who, due to their status and identity, have had to make significant trade-offs to access that extra bit of time, money, and social capital.

### Los Angeles' Inequitable Transit History

All of this is not to say that the City of Los Angeles hasn't experienced its fair share of transit obstacles. In fact, Metro's track record of longtime injustices has given the Southeast and CBOs much reason to approach new policy with caution. In 1994, the Bus Riders Union filed a landmark class-action suit against Metro that brought transit justice to the forefront of transportation planning and successfully included bus patrons into the decision making process.<sup>46 47</sup> Moreover, the lawsuit

highlighted the racialized aspect of transportation inequity. The Bus Riders Union, represented by the Labor/Community Strategy Center, denounced Metro for inequitable service that discriminated against its predominantly low income, non-white transit riders, a violation of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The Labor/Community Strategy Center found that Metro allocated its funds in a manner that favored rail expansion, whose riders were more likely to earn higher incomes and be white. Buses received smaller subsidies and a drastic slash in service, whose ridership overwhelmingly identified as persons of color and low income.<sup>48</sup> Though Metro agreed to support its bus fleet, transit justice remains a matter of political willpower.

## Bus Versus Rail

Research and agencies contend with the age old question: which mode best transports riders: bus or rail? Transit equity discussions frequently cite the drawbacks of rail construction. Displacement, for example, is not only pervading Los Angeles' rail system, but urban regions across the country.<sup>49 50 51</sup> Except for the Blue and Green Lines that bisect Black and Latino communities, virtually all other lines have experienced some form of urban renewal with far-reaching neighborhood changes such as displacement or cultural erosion.<sup>52 53 54 55</sup> The Red Line between Downtown LA and North Hollywood best exemplifies these impacts. The Community Redevelopment Agency of the City of Los Angeles undertook several projects concentrated around Red Line stations while working with tenant unions and CBOs to induce positive change in Hollywood. CBOs such as the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy (LAANE), negotiated Community Benefits Agreements with the CRA to guarantee affordable housing and community input. Despite heavy community involvement since the inception of the Red Line, low-income and transit-dependent tenants increasingly received eviction notices after Hollywood's revitalization.<sup>56</sup>



By comparison, buses carry a majority of Metro's ridership according to their frequently updated ridership statistics.<sup>57</sup> In areas similar to Southeast LA that don't have easy access to rail, these figures likely result disproportionately higher. Metro's latest satisfaction survey also reveals that bus riders are more likely to be long-term riders, long-term defined as patrons riding Metro for 5 or more years. Buses do not enjoy the same prestige that rail does, and as Metro overshadows its bus service by promoting rail to capture new riders, inequities may emerge. But for the first time in 25 years, Metro plans to overhaul its bus fleet. Metro is currently conducting its NextGen Bus Survey to shape the future of busing in the county. Meanwhile, the agency has collected data from former and current patrons on satisfaction (this is aside from their yearly Customer Satisfaction survey discussed in the Background of this paper). The agency found deep dissatisfaction: 73% and 80% of regular and infrequent riders respectively described buses as unreliable. In addition, 73% of past riders expressed irritation with slow bus speeds due to traffic.<sup>58</sup> As Taylor & Morris assert, agencies often overlook buses and implement poor public policy to replace them, further marginalizing their most vulnerable riders. Though Metro's rail ridership also reveals a disproportionate (albeit less compared to buses) amount of low-income, non-white riders, the same does not apply for the Southeast side. Low-income, transit-dependent riders in the Central City enjoy greater mobility and speeds that naturally come with rail. Regardless, neither transit mode alone can solve all of the County's problems.

In addressing the bus versus rail battle, some scholars propose Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) as an alternative or a complement to a synergistic transportation system.<sup>59 60</sup> BRT, first introduced in Curitiba, Brazil, is usually a traditionally bus service that operates on a designated lane. LA Metro's equivalent is the Rapid Transit Program implemented in 2009 to remedy congestion issues and boost bus speeds. Since then, Metro has expanded the program along with opening the Orange Line, a full BRT operating on a designated lane, and the Silver Line, a BRT functioning partially on designated lanes. In analyzing

BRT's compatibility, Cervero et al.'s system-wide evaluation yielded positive results such as increased bus frequency, increased BRT ridership, and even greater ridership gains with additional feeder services and dedicated-lane BRT. Still, BRT remains unpopular for 1) the stigma against buses<sup>61</sup> and 2) difficulty with procuring rights-of-way. Considering the County's sprawl, it's increasingly difficult to negotiate with cities, hence the mixed route system Metro utilizes for its BRT.<sup>62</sup> Los Angeles County is a formidable foe for transit-dependent users and the Agency. Evidently, the City of Los Angeles grapples over best practices and solutions, but is also supported by a large body of research and grassroots organizing. One can imagine the state of affairs in the Southeast where this is not the norm and where historic disinvestment encroaches upon the quality of life.

### **Multi-modal Transit, TODs, and Active Transportation**

Following the current wave of discourse surrounding pedestrian movements and inclusivity, Metro has already implemented some changes to create its multi-modal vision, in part as a response to social inequities from past decisions and in part due to escalating congestion. As Pollack et al. share, transit agencies across the county have mistakenly divided their ridership into two categories: "captive" riders, which I have substituted with the term transit-dependent in this paper, and "choice" riders, or those who use public transit despite having other mobility options.<sup>63</sup> This terminology assumes that captive riders will remain filial riders forever, therefore leading agencies to target choice riders with attractive transit. As of late, Metro has experienced declines in ridership by transit-dependent riders, an especially troubling phenomenon since these riders usually represent multiple trips a day.<sup>64</sup> If Metro's core is finding better alternatives to public transit, what are some strategies to retain core ridership and attract new riders?

This conversation mirrors the rise and change of Transit-Oriented Development (TODs). Transit-oriented development capitalizes upon transit nodes by affixing development to or near the node.<sup>65 66</sup> TODs weren't originally conceptualized to combat equity issues, but rather as real estate projects. However, its contemporary benefits include creating density, increasing walkability, and discouraging car use.<sup>67</sup> In its earliest uses, private interests successfully decentralized Los Angeles by building suburbs around the streetcar.<sup>68</sup> As such, TODs also result in undesirable effects, namely gentrification and displacement around nodes. While research hasn't found conclusive evidence on changing racial and ethnic demographics due to transit on a national level, studies suggest that transit has pronounced changes in housing affordability.<sup>69</sup> Pollock also states that high-quality transit also tends to transform new TOD regions, indicative of gentrification. Consequently, TODs have shifted to address these tensions. In *The New Transit Town* Dittmar, Belzer, and Autler state that adequate TODs are: "Mixed-use, walkable, location efficient development that balances the need for sufficient density to support convenient transit service with the scale of the adjacent community,"<sup>70</sup> They also express the necessity of mixed-income development. Speck adds that enforcement is key: affordable units must be required and permanent in new developments rather than voluntary.<sup>71</sup> Though Metro has no jurisdiction over land uses, they have developed a framework for transit-oriented communities (TOCs) to replace the TOD model. They state, "TOCs promote equity and sustainable living by offering a mix of uses close to transit to support households at all income levels, as well as building densities, parking policies, urban design elements, and first/last mile facilities that support ridership and reduce auto dependency."<sup>72</sup>

Another element of equity literature, also one of Metro's proposed areas of improvement, is first mile/last mile (FMLM). Though much transit literature has traditionally examined the trip portion in isolation, the methods and ease in which patrons can reach their bus stop or station have become

equally important. First mile/last mile describes the before and after of riding public transit, which can present obstacles for several neighborhoods, particularly if they are disinvested low-income, communities of color. Therefore, FMLM concerns itself with primarily with active transportation, amenities for the differently-abled, wayfinding, and, recently, interfaces for vehicle sharing (Uber, Lyft, bike share, scooter share).<sup>73</sup> EYCEJ's Measure M report shares that zero dollars were allocated towards active transport in the SELA, therefore calling for 100% of Local Return funds to develop active transportation.<sup>74</sup> However, some Southeast cities have developed master plans to re-envision the state of walking and cycling. SELA still falls short in terms of being multimodal given aesthetically-pleasing and safe active transportation options available in the City and other well off suburban neighborhoods.

## CBOs and Participatory Planning

Actualizing equitable transit is a layered and complicated effort not completely attainable by a transit agency alone. Equity is understood as a greater good; the mechanism through which society can advance social change by focusing on those most disadvantaged. As USC PERE's and Investing in Place suggest, community-based organizations are invaluable players in transportation equity as they can act as a bridge between planners and community. Urban planning history has had its own tumultuous history with public participation in the United States, not always valuing or seeking guidance from the average resident. Sittig describes public participation through two historical stages: 1) rational planning, in which policy is enacted by professionals and public officials, in this case transportation engineers, the Metro board, city halls, etc; 2) advocacy planning, which brings public voice into planning processes.<sup>75</sup>

Urban planning in the States rose as a response to ameliorate widespread urban crises, such as unsanitary housing, traffic congestion, and soaring densities.<sup>76</sup> The late 1800s to mid 1900s saw hosts

elite urban movements aiming to rectify cities. Policy resulted from those with influence, therefore reflecting elite qualities such as aesthetic beauty and, later, unforgiving efficiency. City Beautiful planners, for example, found a moral calling in architecture and slum clearance, but was also detached from the social schisms of common urbanites.<sup>77</sup> The “City Efficient” Planners were no better and regarded the city as an economic machine, eventually leading to overdevelopment and more slum clearance.<sup>78</sup> Grassroots efforts eventually pressed urban planning into advocacy planning, finally granting agency to the public who were left out of planning processes. For this reason, community-based organizations are especially critical in multiple levels of power. Public engagement, if left entirely up to agencies or developers, might look like the basic, federally-mandated public hearing. Including other community actors, such as CBOs, increases and maintains the private-public relationship through:

**Interpretation:** They can convey each side’s needs in a simple manner without complicated jargon. This is especially important for SELA residents as these are Latinx communities, many of them immigrants and/or non-English speaking.

**Professional capacity & resources:** CBOs have more resources and knowledge on their specialized fields and can provide education on policies for its membership

**Support:** Because of their expertise in relationship building, they can generate support for specific projects and facilitate the planning process.

**Perspective:** The membership themselves are stakeholders; they are living anecdotes that can inform policy

**Data collection:** CBOs can distribute surveys or collect data for themselves or on behalf of the agency/department/planner

Advocacy planning, too, has its share of issues. As Sittig states, advocacy planning doesn't give full agency to public participants. It operates within preset rules often set by the elite to perpetuate benefits to this select privileged. Advocacy planning may also create an othering effect that can hinder surrounding communities or shift problems to its neighbors depending on the community served and their motives.<sup>79</sup> When several organizations and cities pushed to pass Measure M, the Gateway cities, SELA included, opposed because the original ordinance essentially left the area bereft of transportation benefits. But, as Pomeroy cites Henry Holmes, "participatory democracy demands more than just community 'input'... This is the fundamental principle of building sustainable communities,"<sup>80</sup> To achieve this, PERE's and Investing in Place's frameworks call for an agreed-upon definition of equity and collaborations between agencies, developers, communities, and CBOs for the region at large. With this basis for equity, SELA can begin to craft a context-specific definition in tandem, not to cause conflict of interest, but to highlight its specific challenges in relation to the county. The tendency to generalize solutions for imagined urban spaces or only the most prominent cities is a central problem in this research. These solutions for Los Angeles may not map cleanly for a county-wide agency, especially for a sprawling Los Angeles County where urban and suburban isn't cleanly visible. The pattern across literature shows malleability in equity, meaning it will likely appear differently in the transit-dependent Southeast, which this research intends to uncover.

## RESEARCH QUESTION

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How can Metro and the Southeast LA cities implement equitable transportation policies, practices, and projects, particularly as neighborhood change begins to emerge? What

particular transit challenges and social differences must be considered about SELA and why is this work meaningful?

## METHODOLOGY

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This research engages a variety of stakeholders, both those with public transportation related positions and those without. Moreover, literature highlights that equitable outcomes must involve extensive participation from community members and CBOs. Accordingly, interviews include SELA stakeholders in a snowball sampling method starting with CBO memberships, CBO leadership, public servants, and transportation experts in a semi-structured format. The interviewees are split into two categories: government/planning (6 interviewees) and residents/organizing (6 interviewees). The government/planning group consists of public service workers from the following cities/entities: City of Bell (3), City of Huntington Park (1), City of South Gate (1), and the Gateway Cities Council of Governments (1). The residents/organizing side consists of: Communities for a Better Environment (2, organizers) East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice (3, two organizers and one member), and 1 outside expert from USC's Program for Environmental and Regional Equity. Those associated with a CBO identified as longtime residents of Southeast LA. The outside expert is placed into this category for their ample experience with transportation planning through a grassroots organizing perspective. **Appendix II** contains the full list of participants. **Figure 5** lists the participants and data analysis process. Interview questions differed depending on interview types. Questions about transit perceptions, conditions, and collaboration experiences are geared towards residents, whereas additional funding-related questions fall within the domain of city governance since these figures are not widely known by SELA residents. Interviews intend to clarify transit investments at the local level, questioning the schism between public need and transit policy. In total, 12 individuals participated in 45 - 75 minute interviews, mostly held in person at public locations, but some completed through video

call or phone call. All participants consented to audio recording for note-taking purposes. The sample did not include Metro staff, so this research includes 2 field observations of meetings conducted by Metro. These events were utilized as opportunities to speak with different staff about community engagement, Local Return funds, and sustainability. The first meeting concerned the NEXTGEN Bus Study, an re-envisioning of Metro’s bus system held in a workshop format, located in the city of Bell. The second meeting was an update on the West Santa Ana Branch, the light rail expected for completion in 2028, and held in the city of South Gate. Detailed notes, as well as photos of meeting resources and visuals, were also analyzed for major themes. In total, this research produced 11 data documents using Google Docs: 9 interview documents and 2 field note documents (originally written field notes). Two of the interviews were held in a group interview format, one containing 2 people and the other 3.

**Figure 5: Data Analysis Process**



\*CBOs and residents refer to the same group of people. All staff interviewed were longterm Southeast LA residents.



The coding process remained the same for both methods. The interview audio was reduced into notes, and these notes subsequently coded for thematic elements. **Appendix III** contains a full list of codes and definitions used to guide the process. Because the field notes were already in note format, these went immediately into a close read and coding. All preliminary codes were reduced into 3 root codes/top-level codes: investment, accessibility, and outreach. The notes were then re-coded and re-categorized for personal clarification and better specificity. Some preliminary sub-codes essentially had equal meaning, thus merged during this re-coding. Other sub-codes, originally placed into one category, moved to a better-suited category during this process as well. To produce the visualizations in the **Findings** section, each passage spoken by the interviewee (marked by a transition between the researcher asking a question to the interviewee responding) and each section of field note text was coded for consistency using Dedoose. The visualization for frequency was produced with Tableau, and the presence with Raw Graphs. Coding frequency refers to how often a code is repeated. Coding presence refers to the presence of a code amongst all documents. Unlike frequency, which purely counts repetition, presence analyzes whether or not a code appears in a document.

Data analysis on funding is a secondary method, mostly used to illustrate the flow of transit dollars from active ordinances into the SELA cities. This data is extracted from adopted budgets from each city in the study, ranging from Fiscal Years 2014 - 2018. Cities have their financial information for public display on their websites. Propositions A and C are distributed according to a Formula Allocation Procedure, weighted by “50% of operators’ vehicle service miles and 50% Of operators’ fare units.”<sup>81</sup> Measures R and M are distributed on a per capita basis, using population projections from the California Department of Finance.<sup>82</sup> For the purposes of this research, the totals from the 4 funding streams have been aggregated, then calculated on a per capita basis using the Department of Finance’s projections. The average population was taken between two consecutive years in the Department’s

database and represents one Fiscal Year for these estimates. First, I isolated each city's Prop A, C, Measure R, & M revenues, balances, and expenditures onto a spreadsheet. **Table 4: Aggregate Funding Available** refers to the summation of all funds per person. A fund consists of a funding stream's existing balances in a city's budget plus revenues (amount received from Metro). So, if a city received \$100 in revenue for Prop A in FY 2014-15 with a balance of \$50, its total Prop A fund for that fiscal year totals to \$150. **Table 5: Aggregate Spending** estimates the summation of each fund's projected expenditures (per person) for its corresponding fiscal year. **Table 6: Aggregate Revenue and Percent Expenditure** approximates the summation of each fund's revenues (per person) and percent of this revenue utilized for the corresponding fiscal year. For clarification, this research makes light use of GIS, only to demonstrate a visual distribution of transit projects and to better express spatial gaps in transit service, but is not in itself method.

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## LIMITATIONS

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Los Angeles County is amongst the biggest and most populous counties in the nation. For this reason, and due to proximity, I narrowed the focus to priority SELA cities. According to the COG, the Gateway Region represents a total of 27 cities plus the Ports of Long Beach/Los Angeles, which surpasses the scope and timeline of this project. While cities across the county deserve improved transit service, the Southeast areas were chosen as an example of inequity and selected for its unique challenges outlined in the Background. Equity standards resulting from this study do not intend to wholly represent the county, but to continue the conversation on transit equity that usually prioritizes the City of Los Angeles.

Also important to note is budgetary constraints. Cities usually make their budgets public, but there were some cases in which cities did not display a budget for certain years. In this case, financial statements replaced adopted budgets and are noted by “\*” in the final listed amounts. Data that could not be accessed is denoted by a ‘-’. Originally, this research intended to analyze budgets with actual budgeted amounts, which show the real amount spent, set aside, and received per fiscal year, but very few cities had this information available. Given more time, I would like to expand on this research and compare funds across several data sources and track expenditures.

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## FINDINGS

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### Differences in Defining Equity

One significant finding of this research, but aside from the three key categories, adds to the overall consensus on transit equity research: equity is often an assumed concept across all participants and entities, each definition with competing and overlapping characteristics. All but one participant, who works closely on these issues in Los Angeles as a transportation planner, did not have a definition for equity, much less transportation equity. Public servants pointed to federal regulations and conventional notions of equality as interpretations of equity. Because they serve underserved regions, public servants bear socioeconomic factors in mind, citing services for their vulnerable populations, such as Dial-A-Ride for seniors or reduced-fare bus passes and low cost, flat rate fares on municipal buses for their low-income residents. Through this framing, everyone receives a share, be it of funds, mobility, or projects. Although transit equity is somewhat of a niche topic, participating CBOs and residents also lacked uniform definition. However, they showed a exhibited a more nuanced understanding of equity, likely because they’ve engaged in similar discussions with their organizations

around other issues such as environmental justice. Equity, aside from abiding by federal regulations, represented a prioritization of underserved areas, shown through a well-connected, non-displacing, environmentally-sound, safe, and multimodal transit system. Public officials also expressed desires for a multimodal, efficient system, though they also stated that insufficient funding, expensive land, and a lack of demand make these goals difficult.

## Key Findings

Scholarship on transportation equity has a flexible quality, but at its core necessitates an ability to critically view past policy to not only mend inequities arising from discriminatory practices and to prevent inequities from emerging through continual critical assessment. Years of disinvestment in the Southeast created fragmentation within the system, and its status as a working class, Latino region has compounded specific problems that complicate equity discussions. Thus, the goal of transit equity is to close the physical gaps in mobility, which so often result in anecdotes of Southeast riders requiring multiple buses to get to work, in a manner that also closes social fissures, such as racial discrimination and economic disinvestment. Interviewees emphasized three key areas with heavy inequities:

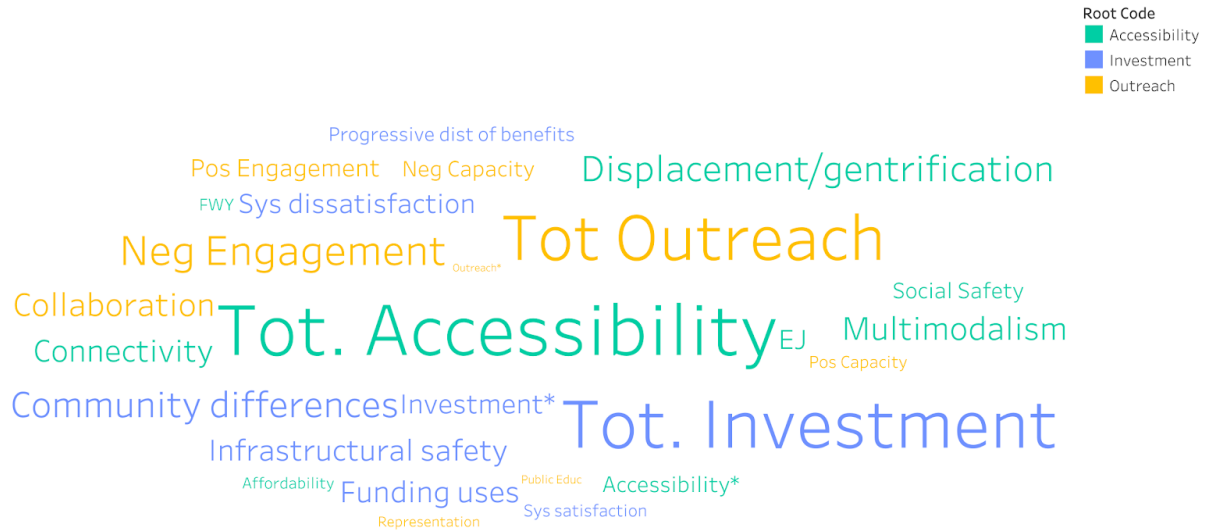
**investment, accessibility, and outreach.** Moreover, interviewees focused the discussions on two main Metro projects: the West Santa Ana Branch Corridor and the 710 Freeway Improvement Project.

Participants also mentioned the Rail-to-River Project, a proposed Class I (dedicated) bike lane running through Huntington Park, Bell, and Maywood, though they mentioned this to a lesser degree, not a focal point of the interviews at large. **Figure 6** demonstrates code frequency, referring to the amount of times a code repeats. **Figure 7** depicts total code presence, meaning that a code appeared at least once in a document. For example, the code **community differences** appeared in all 11 documents and environmental justice in 6. Codes are color-coded by their root code: **investment**, **accessibility**, &

**outreach**. All in all, the codes are discussed by order of individual frequency and/or presence within their respective root categories.

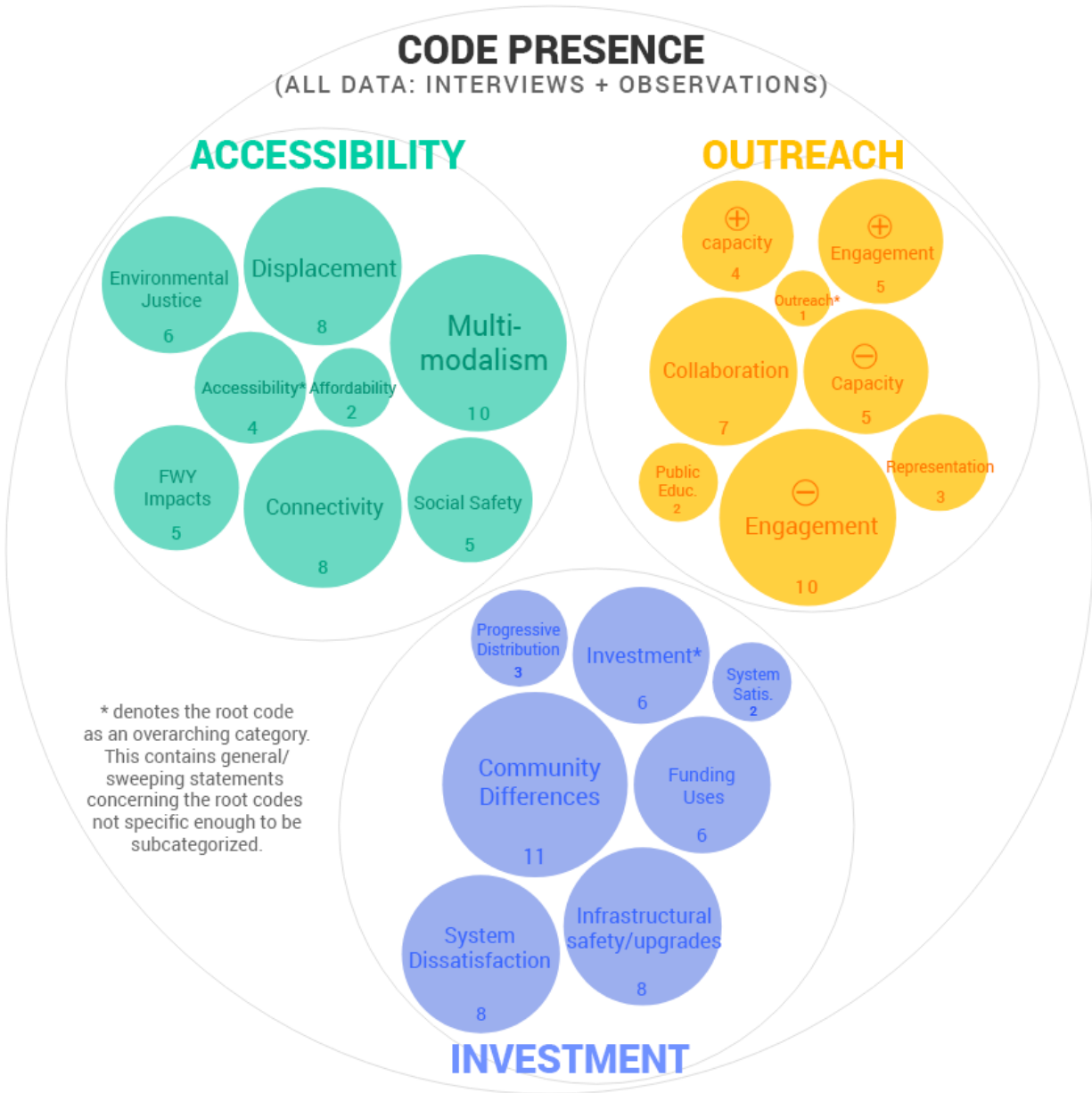
### Figure 6: Total Code Frequency

Following each question, each of the interviewees' responses were subcoded for uniformity. Then, each code was categorized under a root code (see the legend). This visualization reflects how often an individual code appeared across all data sets (11 total, 9 interview documents [2 of which were group interviews] and 2 field observation note sheets). See <https://tabsoft.co/2KIPO5c> for an interactive version.



### Figure 7: Total Code Presence

This figure depicts how consistently a code appeared in all documents. The code Positive (+) Engagement, for example, may have been repeated multiple times, but only appeared in 5 of the 11 documents.





## Investment

### ■ Funding Analysis

Interviewees attributed SELA’s poorly connected system to limited investment. As staff from Bell shared, lower income cities have had to make do with their resources because funding inherently creates a system of winners and losers. Based on each city’s budget and interviews, most funds from Props A & C and Measures R & M are used for street & traffic improvements, bus shelter improvements, transit operations, and services such as Dial-A-Ride and municipal buses. Cities, furthermore, described these services as ways in which they advance transportation equity. [Table 5](#) shows a breakdown of aggregate funds per fiscal year across each city. [Table 6](#) demonstrates spending by fiscal year, and [Table 7](#) shows revenue, which is the amount they estimate that Metro will allocate to each city for the corresponding fiscal year. The percentages indicate how much of this yearly revenue the cities anticipated to expend.

**Table 5: Aggregate Available Funding (Revenues + Balances) by Fiscal Year, Per Capita** (Props A + C + Measures R + M). Data derived from respective adopted budgets & financial statements.

City/Region	FY 14/15	FY 15/16	FY 16/17	FY 17/18
Bell	\$113	\$103	\$114	\$132
Bell Gardens	\$62	\$73	\$73	\$96
Commerce	\$94	\$77	\$109	\$71
Cudahy	\$84	\$99	\$126	\$114
Huntington Park	-	\$113	\$105	\$52
Los Angeles	\$99	\$114	\$89	\$111
Lynwood	\$71	-	\$224	\$189
Maywood	\$104	\$109	\$137	\$158
South Gate	\$89	\$122	\$135	\$153
Vernon	\$22*	\$17*	14*	\$20*

**Table 6: Aggregate Spending by Fiscal Year, Per Capita** (Props A + C + Measures R + M)

City	FY 14/15	FY 15/16	FY 16/17	FY 17/18
Bell	\$64	\$49	\$49	\$92
Bell Gardens	\$54	\$52	\$64	\$78
Commerce	\$94	\$77	\$109	\$10
Cudahy	\$30	\$43	\$44	\$40
Huntington Park	-	\$90	\$103	\$49
Los Angeles	\$97	\$114	\$89	\$111
Lynwood	\$11	-	\$113	\$218
Maywood	\$27	\$17	\$71	\$85
South Gate	\$69	\$36	\$46	\$34
Vernon	-	-	-	-

**Table 7: Aggregate Revenues and Percent Expenditure by Fiscal Year, Per Capita** (Props A, C, Measures R, M)

City	FY 14/15		FY 15/16		FY 16/17		FY 17/18	
Bell	\$42	152%	\$45	109%	\$84	58%	\$57	161%
Bell Gardens	\$47	115%	\$49	106%	\$50	128%	\$62	126%
Commerce	\$94	100%	\$77	100%	\$109	100%	\$71	14%
Cudahy	\$42	71%	\$44	98%	\$45	98%	\$49	82%
Huntington Park	-	-%	\$113	80%	\$105	98%	\$52	94%
Los Angeles	\$67	145%	\$69	165%	\$66	135%	\$67	166%
Lynwood	\$38	29%	-	-%	\$46	246%	\$57	382%
Maywood	\$27	100%	\$45	38%	\$45	158%	\$59	144%
South Gate	\$49	141%	\$51	71%	\$49	94%	\$52	65%
Vernon	\$22*	100%	\$17*	100%	\$14*	100%	\$20*	100%



As one can see in [Table 5](#), the Southeast cities typically plan to expend their yearly funds, also usually tapping into their balances for that specific fund to cover the costs of their projects. What's most apparent from these data, however, is the inconsistencies, which might be explained on the financial health of city government at those specific points in time. Some cities choose to preserve their revenues for the year, which then indicates less spending per person (not necessarily a negative since Metro requires them to be used within 3 years of receipt). For example, the city of Lynwood spent very little in FY 14/15, which amassed to the following years' balances and allowed them to spend more at a time in FY 16/17 and 17/18. Los Angeles differed in that its revenue hardly fluctuated and that it expended each of its funds, balances included, across the board. Therefore, while some SELA cities may have a greater accumulation of funds per person during particular years, the residents don't see a maximum return like Angelenos do. In conversation with public officials, they explained that SELA leadership often struggle to discern where funds might be most beneficial, further complicated by the limits of their budgets. Rather than adding street amenities, wayfinding, and active transportation options - all largely absent from the SELA cities - cities have been stymied. Consequently, an insufficient network is the norm; it's all the residents know. "If you've never had it," said a staff member at the City of Bell, "you don't know what to ask for... Most of the community does not know what they can have." Bell public servants stated that a large portion of their funding prioritizes street repairs and traffic improvements, as well as critical services for their elderly, such as Dial-A-Ride. Vice Mayor Macias also shared Huntington Park's funding constraints when deciding to keep Dial-A-Ride in their budget despite escalating costs, thinking of their seniors who depend on the program in mind. Fernando Rodriguez at the City of South Gate explained that their funding largely covered municipal shuttle costs, maintenance, and street repairs, but unable to bring real-time information to its residents. Still, there's

optimism amongst city officials sparked by new interest due to the rail and a boost in funding due to Measure M.

## ■ Qualitative Findings

Public servants and Metro did not offer solutions or suggestions to encourage financial equity across cities, but did echo the idea of the Southeast as disadvantaged. City officials also described the infrastructural gaps through the idea of small cities (Southeast) versus big cities (Los Angeles). This research assigns this idea as **community differences**, referring to responses where participants highlight the specific demography, history, and politics of SELA as running cyclically with disinvestment, often the cited as a cause of such disparity in the transit network. Most public officials left out specifics concerning funding troubles, but Huntington Park Vice Mayor Macias, who sits on the Eco Rapid board, a board dedicated to the participating WSAB cities, highlighted her city's personal issues despite being one of the bigger SELA cities. Metro has requested that each station produce a 3% share to return to Metro, which totals to roughly \$9 million for Huntington Park. Accordingly, WSAB cities have strategized methods to generate the funds, but Macias also suggested that Metro be more sensible towards cities with historic disinvestment. Debt and corruption pose another problem, "Whatever decision we make now, we wanna make sure that down the line it's a positive one," Macias said, "We're still dealing with bond debt from 1994, 2004."

The resident and organizing perspective, although agreeing that disinvestment is indeed an issue, also added that social factors perpetuate inequity. They tended to support a more **progressive distribution** of funds; a system wherein disadvantaged communities receive a concentration of funding and projects. Madeline Wander from USC PERE and co-author of *Measures Matter* supports this view. "[The] transportation investment model right now should be making up for past mistakes," she said,

these mistakes representing Metro’s historical decisions such as slashing bus lines and favoring wealthy commuters in reference to the Bus Riders Union. Given that the average rider is not wealthy and not white, these decisions have overwhelmingly placed the burden of limited mobility on systematically disjointed regions like SELA, and CBOs are very conscious of existing at these intersections. "There's a certain political input that we don't have," said EYCEJ organizer Laura Cortez.

A smaller subset of former riders also drew comparisons to show disparities in cross county mobility. For example, student commuters depicted the Westside as multi-modal and intuitive, wishing that this ease would come to the Southeast as well. Their observations made for a myriad of improvements, such as better active transportation infrastructure, improved bus shelters, and more. Underlying these comparisons, however, is still the idea that the Southeast is not as mobile as others areas. As Laura shared, cities with prestige and money can and will divert attention and projects to themselves, which was the central problem during the Measure M debates. Interviewees described SELA as being overlooked during significant policy pieces like Measure M, ultimately a consequence of long time disenfranchisement. Even now that Metro has demonstrated a willingness to promote equity, the SELA cities approach with apprehension. When Metro announced its Equity Platform, for example, Karen Heit at the Gateway COG stated, "It's kind of [an] after the fact willingness to say, 'Well, let's do a little better with future activities.'" Investment is undeniably a foundational component that impedes growth, which the next section explores more deeply through accessibility.

## Accessibility

### ■ Dissatisfaction, Rail, & Displacement

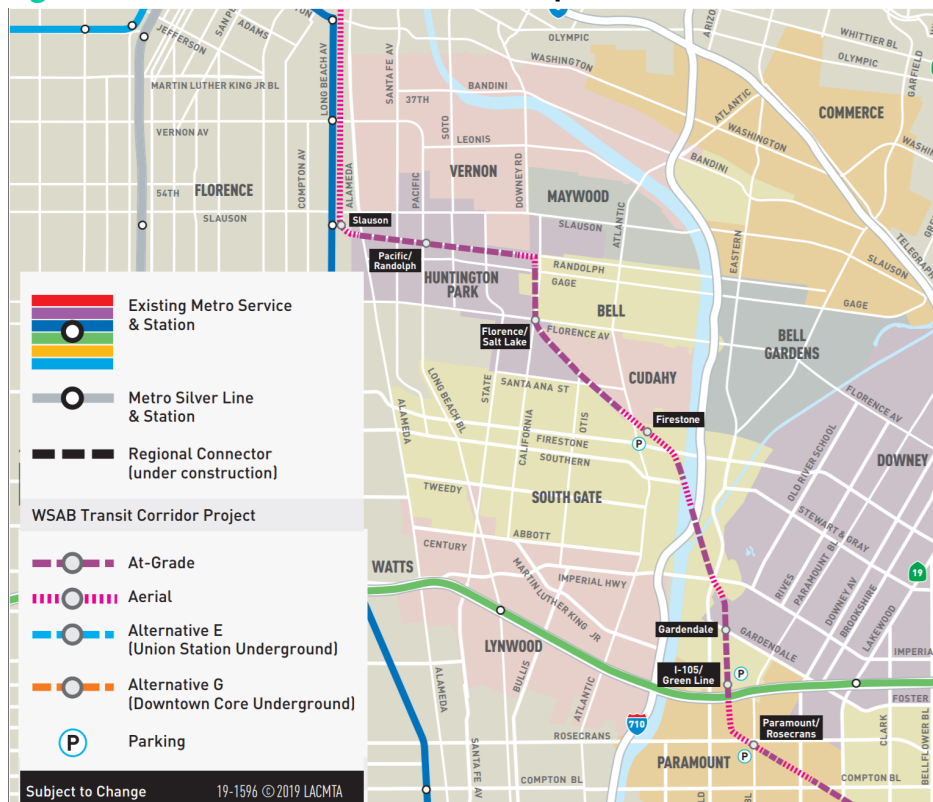
“These residents have been forgotten and they feel it,” said Vice Mayor Macias. For residents and public servants alike, the feeling of being repeatedly placed behind is most apparent in the

present-day network. Public servants tended to describe these systems as typical for the region and well-serviced when considered in conjunction with local services, like the municipal fixed-route systems (largely financed by Metro funds or grants), but the select few (5 of 11) who have had prior experience on Metro buses weren't positive. Residents who were active riders (4 of the 6) ultimately switched to the car because public transportation was no longer feasible. As a former rider, CBE organizer Kayleigh Wade stated, "At most, [it's] competent. It works, but I do feel like we very much get the bare minimum here." Metro does deserve recognition for its extensive bus fleet and county-wide coverage, but this alone does not create good mobility. These interviews underscore the need for a critical examination of accessibility. A look at **Figure 4** may seem depict SELA as well-connected at first glance, but this says nothing of the experiences or how people move. "We've got 2.5 million people who live in the Gateway Cities and a third of them live in those, what we call our core cities: HP, Bell, Bell Gardens, Cudahy... They have very, very dense populations, and they're not really served by anything but freeways and arterials," said Karen Heit, "We have a glaring need for high quality transit."

Consequently, the light rail will become a significant opportunity for mobility. **Figure 8** shows the most updated map of the WSAB light rail through the Southeast. But for all its many benefits, such as local economic development, increased job opportunities, and the obvious enhanced connectivity, the project has raised significant troubles about *who* can access the rail once it arrives. The WSAB has also spurred offers by outside developers, introducing something new to the region: attention. CBE organizer Kayleigh Wade said, "People have never paid attention to Southeast LA before. Living in Lynwood, I knew that we weren't on anybody's to-do list or anything.... It's interesting because once you've grown in a community that has historically not been paid attention to, it turns into a situation where as soon as somebody does you're like 'Whoa, what the hell is this?' It's easy to be suspicious of it - I mean, I'm suspicious of it." Residents learn from examples of similar underserved regions that

received rail and subsequently gentrified, such as Boyle Heights, East Los Angeles, and Highland Park. USC PERE’s Madeline Wander also brought **displacement and gentrification** to the forefront in transit equity issues for the county. Though debates on whether green infrastructure spur displacement and gentrification remain contested and inconclusive both in literature and on the ground, the worry is still palpable since the Southeast consists of vulnerable renters, low-income families, and immigrants. At the WSAB update meeting, gentrification and displacement emerged as one of the biggest topics during public commentary. Residents urged Metro to consider the social costs of the rail. In between each comment, however, Metro staff mentioned that the agency holds no jurisdiction over land, instead falls under the city’s domain. Instead, they referenced a developing displacement framework in conjunction with their Equity Framework, as well as working with cities to develop non-disruptive transit-oriented communities.

**Figure 8: The West Santa Ana Branch & Proposed Stations**



LACMTA. *Updated Corridor Map (Winter 2019)*. 2019, <https://www.metro.net/projects/west-santa-ana/maps/>.

## ■ Physical & Social Mobility

Even with displacement and gentrification aside, the enduring question remains about access. SELA still very much remains in a liminal phase and still must overcome an inadequate system while it waits for the WSAB to arrive in 9 years. The interviewees depicted a seamless system of options through bus infrastructure, active transportation, and complete streets. In essence, this represents a **multimodal**, environmentally- and socially-sound system that addresses network **connectivity**, within and outside the cities.

A popular choice amongst the participants was active transportation, especially critical yet simultaneously difficult, for cities on the fringes like SELA because the current landscape isn't conducive to carless mobility. Interestingly enough, most interviewees described active transportation as a separate category from public transportation as opposed to one *with* public transportation, which further shows the cultural impact of the vehicle. Participants frequently alluded to bike paths and characteristics of first mile/last mile improvements, such as pedestrian safety, bus shelter improvements, and lighting. Karen Heit and EYCEJ gave worrisome accounts about workers in the industrial cities of Vernon and Commerce who bike next to freight trucks. By contrast, public servants said the cities weren't quite ready for these infrastructural improvements due to funding issues and expensive land.

## ■ I-710 Freeway Concerns

Cities cut by the I-710, such as Commerce and Bell, are more preoccupied by displacement and environmental hazards caused by the widening lanes on the I-710 Corridor Project. Dilia Ortega, an organizer at CBE, mentioned that residents do in fact recognize the importance of the project and the

role of goods movement in the Southeast, but cannot ignore the likelihood of increased pollution along the corridor. The current proposal, Alternative 5C, still proposes expansions along the freeway. As first and foremost environmental justice organizations, CBE and EYCEJ vehemently oppose the 710 project due to the depth of existing environmental injustice and financial insecurity in the area. Although most participants discussed a desire for sustainability, the organizational participants directly insisted that transit cannot be equitable without considering **environmental justice**. Interviewees had specific demands: electric buses & zero emissions infrastructure, along with greening projects infused into active transportation.

## ■ Social Safety

Aside from infrastructural improvements, organizations spoke of smaller but persistent themes: women's safety and policing (**social safety**). Interviewees who have previously used Metro were predominantly women, either experiencing this harrassment personally or through family/resident experiences. On a similar note, residents brought attention to immigrant safety. They shared that their organizational members noticed increased police presence, particularly on the Blue Line. Theoretically, police and security should embody increased safety on transit, but the large foreign-born population in Southeast interprets them in fear instead. How Metro will reconcile these contradictions as they work on the WSAB is topic for future convenings.

## Outreach

Interviewees reported varying levels of contact between Metro, local government, and residents. Some cities expressed poor engagement from residents, and others had solid but conflicting relationships with their constituents. Likewise, residents and community-based organizations reported

poor engagement from cities and Metro. From the community perspective, interviewees indicated a sense of frustration as a result of being unheard and uninformed. Meanwhile, public servants and Metro officials shared that they were engaging with community to the best of their abilities. All in all, there are great inequities in how those in seats of power interact with each other versus their interaction with residents and community-based organizations.

### ■ Community-Based Outreach Experiences

All interviewees discussed an unsteady relationship both with their local government and Metro. Participants from CBE spoke of a closer bond with their base city, Huntington Park, though the city council's decision of returning funds intended for biking infrastructure back to the state raised some questions amongst members. These participants also stated that Metro's attention varied upon project. The bigger the scale of the project, the more controversy, thus the less likely it is for Metro to be receptive. For local improvements, such as a bike path project called Rail-to-River, which links the cities of Maywood, Huntington Park, and Bell to the Los Angeles River, CBE members stated that collaboration was significantly better, chiefly because the project was smaller-scale and faced little to no opposition from local community. **Positive community outreach** was essentially limited to these types of projects. SELA has very few of these small-scale projects however, so their experiences with Metro are stained by ongoing tensions, namely the I-710 Corridor Project, a particular sore point for EYCEJ and CBE. Likewise, EYCEJ members shared frustration at the inauthentic and minimal attempts to bridge connections with CBOs. The organizations have mobilized their members to represent SELA at meetings, but then are met halfway, sometimes not at all, by local government and Metro. In one instance, EYCEJ was approached by public servants from Bell Gardens for a walking tour for potential bike paths, but have since never seen the fruits of those discussions. **Negative capacity** also affects



these relationships. CBOs observed a lack of transit experts and organizations in the Southeast. Transportation isn't their specialty, but because they take a holistic approach to community organizing, they undertake more issues. Consequently, members can fully immerse in one development, like the Rail-to-River, but be tangentially involved in others, like the WSAB.

## ■ Conflicts in Community-Based Outreach

On the other hand, cities split in their responses towards community outreach. Three of the six on the governmental half expressed dissatisfaction with low community turn-out, but the group at large indicated general conflicts of interests. The West Santa Ana Branch update meeting, for example, was replete with these grievances. A number of resident speakers commented on **negative community outreach**, to which a South Gate city official responded that cities engage to the best of their abilities. Frequent tactics included e-mails and social media posts to advertise upcoming Metro meetings and transportation workshops, which residents then criticized as bare-minimum attempts because several residents are disconnected. Residents, moreover, likened engagement to marking off a checkbox; a process with little meaning and not entirely accessible. For example, the WSAB update meeting was held in English, which wasn't necessarily a problem since Metro offers translations by request. However, some of the technical jargon wasn't immediately easy to comprehend. As residents lined up to give their comments, some of the Metro staff's responses weren't exactly helpful, sensible, or related as well. When a resident advised Metro to bridge connections between the WSAB and Blue Line, Metro staff spoke about their Joint Powers Authority and timely completion of the rail, to which the public expressed confusion since the topic was unrelated.

From these conversations and interactions, it became unclear how Metro exactly navigates community outreach in the Southeast. Only one interviewee from CBE stated that Metro has directly

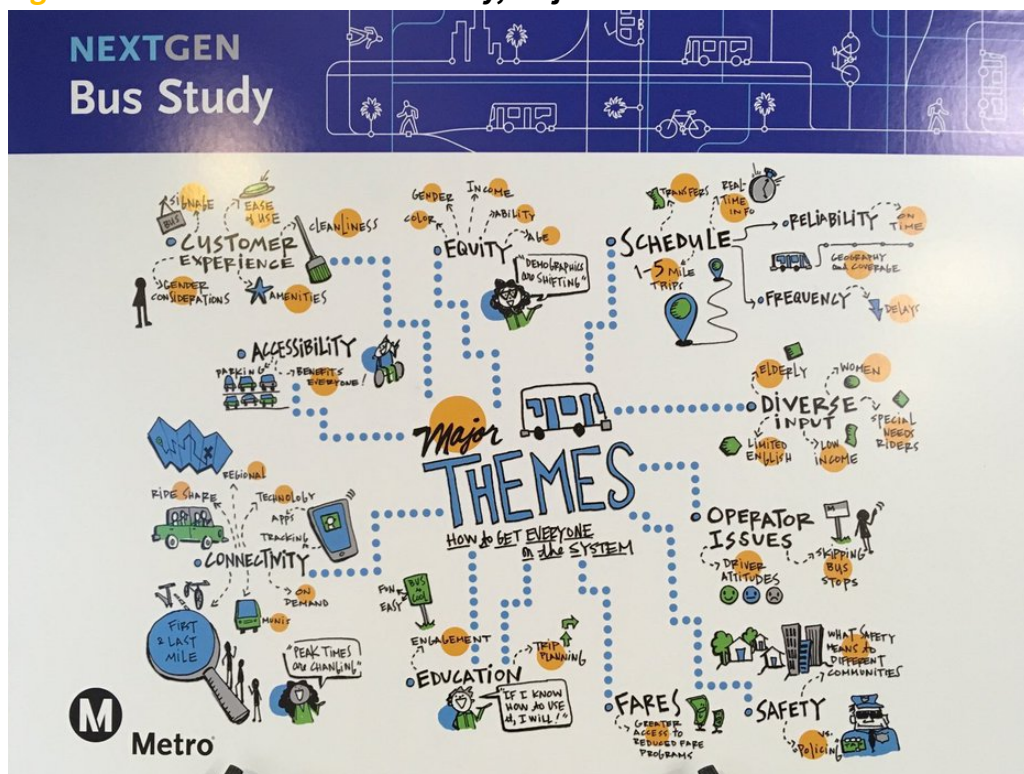
approached them for collaborations, but all other resident interviewees spoke of little interaction outside of meetings. Instead, it seems outreach is funneled through local government first, a hands-off approach of sorts, who then has the task of relaying this information to the public. Regardless, some public service interviewees (3) attributed this disconnect and lack of engagement to human nature, reasoning that despite promoting Metro or transit related meetings, most residents won't attend because they perceive such projects to have negligible effects on them as car users. By contrast, two other public servants shared examples of lively community meetings, though the effectiveness of these outreach efforts also remains unclear. This is a very different experience from conversations happening in Los Angeles. Even though relationships aren't equal across the board, the convergence of organizers, Metro, and other stakeholders occurs at a level not obvious in SELA. Madeline Wander stated, "There's kind of a level of organization among transportation equity advocates that I haven't seen before... and I'm really heartened by alliances among folks working on these issues; people really seem to be coming together across issue area and across neighborhood. And then also the sophistication of strategy. It's not the outside organizing model... but those groups working with policy advocates, working with researchers."

### ■ Metro's Current Community-Based Outreach Efforts

Metro isn't blind to these demands. In fact, their Equity Framework states that their project roadmap, the Long Range Transportation Plan, is committed to equity and includes a clause on improving relationships, connecting with CBOs, and providing extra capacity for local government. Metro also expressed interest in developing a CBO public engagement program as part of their public outreach process. Their goals for equity clear came across in the NEXTGEN Bus Study, a re-thinking of the agency's bus system. Metro held three NEXTGEN meetings in the Gateway Cities region, the closest

to the study area held in the city of Bell. Unlike the West Santa Ana Branch meeting, divided into a presentation and then public commentary, the meeting contained stations with Metro staff to answer questions. Metro made public engagement the running theme of the workshop, emphasizing that an overhaul of the bus system requires community outreach. Each station based itself on this theme of outreach as well, containing interactive maps and surveys to reflect the transit patterns and wishes of the attendees. Contrary to the narrative many public officials expressed, both the NEXTGEN and WSAB demonstrated a solid turn out, a mix of residents, community organizers, and professionals, despite the heavy rain on both days. **Figure 9** displays an infographic of major themes that Metro identified for NEXTGEN. While many of these topics fall under mobility and accessibility, it's evident that Metro is centering its riders through themes like 'diverse input', 'equity', and 'education'.

**Figure 9: Metro NEXTGEN Bus Study, Major Themes**



When asked about methods to improve these relationships, the cities' responses were split once again. Difficulty gathering community input caused reluctance in some, but others approached outreach as an opportunity for interaction. Fernando Rodriguez stated, "Pursuant to Federal requirements, we host several townhall meetings in order to receive input as to implementations, revisions, or full changes to existing routes, services, or programs. We do this in order to have efficient services and programs that people will actually use." Karina Macias stated, "You have to understand there's a lot of passion here," explaining that simply listening is usually the best tool stakeholders can utilize when working with underserved cities.

### ■ Top-down Outreach Experiences

Local governments and Metro, on the other hand, tended to have much more positive relationships, at worst developing relationships. Metro's primary role in this relationship is as an overseer and funder, with varying levels of support or contact. Fernando Rodriguez, working for the city of South Gate's transit services, and three public service workers at the City of Bell, stated that Metro often provides trainings and technical assistance to the cities (**positive capacity**), in addition to transportation workshops open to residents. This technical assistance is greatly beneficial to the cities as they often have very limited staff and resources. Yet, historically looking at the lack of transit infrastructure in the Southeast and even the Gateway region, there are also definite gaps. Other participants stated that the cities have had to extensively advocate for projects and coordinate amongst themselves to push for change, which is evident in the Measure M tensions. A host of cities in the Gateway, SELA included, initially opposed the measure because they feared Metro would sideline the area again, just as had occurred under Measure R. In fact, the WSAB was initially postponed in Measure M's beginning stages, causing some tension between Measure M advocates in the central city

and the dissenting Southeast (Macias, Personal communication; Heit, Personal communication).

"They're used to checking in boxes like 'we did this whole outreach, we're good,'" said Vice Mayor Macias of Huntington Park to illustrate this tension. "You just can't come in and be dry about it, it has to be an ongoing conversation. And you have to be okay with council members coming in... and criticizing a couple things. We're not doing it because we want to be a pain to Metro, we're doing it because we're caring for our residents."

Still, city to agency partnerships seem significantly better and at least present compared to community engagement, especially because Metro pushed the WSAB forward for completion in 2028 and the cities now have a stake in something significant. In ripe instances like Measure M or a major transit project, cities cited the importance of the Gateway COG for further capacity building and advocacy. Karen Heit from the COG stated that they provide each city a seat at the table with the goal of fostering collaboration and sharing benefits amongst cities (**collaboration**). Likewise, the cities near the WSAB are represented through the Joint Powers Authority (JPA) Eco-Rapid. Through these intercity networks, they can more effectively hold Metro accountable.

## ANALYSIS & RECOMMENDATIONS

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Given the extent of the responses and observations, how then can SELA stakeholders create an equitable system, particularly given this transitional stage marked by hesitance & tension? As outlined above, interviewees cited specific problems related to investment, accessibility, and outreach, thus providing a blueprint for an equitable framework.

 **Investment**

To echo the work of USC PERE, Investing in Place, and of scholars informing this research, an equitable transportation system lifts underserved regions that disproportionately ride transit. Accordingly, this necessitates a change to funding distribution, therefore allowing disadvantaged cities to obtain an accessible, socio-culturally sensitive transit system. Public servants did not directly express a change to the funding formula, but did share a desire to accomplish more outside the limits of their funds. Residents, however, directly stated that funding should prioritize underserved cities instead of on a per-capita basis as practice currently stands. As with many cities with high non-citizen populations, the Southeast deals with undercounting in national surveys like the Census and the American Community Survey, mostly for fear of legal consequences.<sup>84</sup> As such, formula-based funding is likely to produce inequities. A difficult process within this is coordinating the 88 cities in the county to approve to a change in funding since funding is already competitive. The funding formula aims to split funding equally, meaning that those who struggle maximize those revenues by making difficult trade-offs. Equitable funding, then, reverses this history of limitation. But, as shown in **Table 6** in the **Findings** section, many SELA cities receive comparable or higher amounts than the City of Los Angeles, particularly as of FY 2016. Reversing disinvestment is an ongoing process and collaborating with cities to see equitable distribution as a worthwhile cause is challenging, but this work is imperative for the mobility of Southeast residents and similar underinvested regions. Several interviewees support the notion of a multimodal network. The data at large indicate, however, that programs like Dial-a-Ride and municipal shuttles, also vital programs, largely consume each city's LR funds. This, too, pushes towards a change in the funding model because so much of each city's revenue is expended on very few transit modes, whereas Los Angeles can afford to expand and connect with different transit methods. Therefore, cities should continue to invest in active transportation where possible while focusing their

current network around the WSAB, but also dedicate funding to community engagement which can potentially be accomplished through supplemental Measure M funding. The **Accessibility & Outreach** sections detail more specific funding uses.

### RE-CAP

- Coordinate cities to discuss alternative funding formulas that prioritize disadvantaged communities
- Identify immediate and feasible active transportation projects in the area
- Dedicate funding to community outreach on public transit related issues

## Accessibility

### Infrastructural Changes

To be accessible means to promote the physical and social mobility of all Southeast LA residents in a diversified system. This also means that the current population can enjoy its new mobility without hindrance or consequence. Just as participants expressed dissatisfaction with the current system, they also shared visions for improved experiences. Participants demonstrated this through **multimodal** transit with an emphasis on the pedestrian and intermodal/local connections. But, priming the Southeast for multimodalism and the rail reveals two key problems: combating sprawl and displacement/gentrification. Los Angeles is just now learning the consequences of its sprawl and has, henceforth, struggles to produce a successful transit system tantamount to older, highly dense cities like New York and Chicago.<sup>85</sup> For this reason, as well as evidence that rail disproportionately benefits higher income patrons,<sup>86 87</sup> expanding on rail in a region that lacks density captures only a subset of people. In any case, the West Santa Ana Branch will come to Southeast Los Angeles whether

the cities are prepared or not, making conversations about a cohesive system even more necessary, especially considering this moment in the planning phase where cities are negotiating each station's features. In these conversations, it's not only imperative that accessibility, by considering both sprawl and displacement, are not only key action items, but also don't fall into traditional top-down planning approaches.

Thus, the first mile/last mile component should be a priority for all cities. But, in reference to the investment section, the necessary infrastructure for active transportation cannot be completed without funds, which is beyond the capacity of local government. Interviewees stated that a shuttle-like system might answer some of these connectivity woes. Cities are likely already thinking about re-routing their shuttle services around the rail, but also must think about scaling their services up to handle the load of high-quality transit. This means reliable, timely, and more frequent service.

For the long-term, cities can work towards investing in active transportation infrastructure. Public servants state that as of now, active transportation remains a problem due to lack of demand and funding. This does not mean that cities aren't considering active transportation. In fact, all public servants expressed an interest. The City of South Gate, for example, held a biking pilot program at the time of this research (Rodriguez, personal communication). CicLAvia, held in 2016 for the first time, successfully pulled SELA residents onto the streets and influenced South Gate to stay proactive on biking even if the demand does not necessarily exist yet. Huntington Park's 2014 bike report,<sup>88</sup> for example, lists of a plethora of funding streams at the federal, state, and local levels that can finance active transportation. In order to push SELA towards a pedestrian-friendly future, however, the cities undoubtedly require more capacity, not only from Metro but from outside transportation partners. A few interviewees, in addition to many residents at the WSAB update meeting, mentioned increased connectivity via feeder connections as well. As Cervero et al demonstrate in their study on BRT, transit



nodes that provide intermodal transfers create a complementary relationship and boost riderships.<sup>89</sup> Specifically, residents highlighted accommodations for shorter trips or more circuitous routes since many of the bus lines run too far past the region's bounds. Existing municipal buses offer these circuit-like connections, but these specific programs were only mentioned by the governmental/planning participants, suggesting that residents might not commonly utilize or know of these services to complete their first mile/last mile or for everyday convenience. Metro very much has a stronghold on public transportation users in the area and perhaps can provide increased short line bus service running through the Southeast cities to ease accessibility while active transportation develops.

### ■ A Focus on Displacement

The second half of the greater connectivity problem comes as a consequence of addressing sprawl: displacement and gentrification. The common remedy to improve user experience and FM/LM is to build more densely, namely through transit-oriented development. At the WSAB meeting, local activists expressed concerns over limited renter protections. Though Metro was within their right to inform the residents that housing is out of their purview, this fact does little to dissuade the anxieties of residents. Metro and other decision-making stakeholders must be careful about the terminology they utilize to describe their plans around the Southeast cities. Dilia Ortega, CBE Youth Organizer, describe one of the initial light rail meetings in which some comments arose about making Huntington Park marketable as a soccer hub. Others distrusted local government and planners with SELA's transition to mobility. Laura Cortez at EYCEJ stated, "So what's gonna happen now is as they're gentrifying our communities, active transportation is gonna be a priority. And we're gonna have that [political] influence, but for what? ... we're not the be the community living here." One concrete way cities can preserve their residents is by willingly collaborating with Metro to discuss affordable housing and

tenant protections along the rail and other future high-quality transit corridors. Most importantly, local government and Metro must keep residents in the process of drafting an affordable housing plan. In fact, Madeline Wander shares, “making public transportation work in LA and in other areas has just as much to do with our housing development plans as it does our transportation provision.”

To further enforce socially-sustainable development, Metro can attach equity stipulations to LR funds with specifics to displacement and monitor the progress of the Southeast cities as they accumulate more funding. These can range from developing and maintaining joint transportation committees with residents, starting research that further explores FM/LM in this unique setting (like some SELA cities that have already developed bike reports), to tangible upgrades such as wayfinding, pilot projects, and transit fairs (like CicLAVia). Lastly, identifying new funding streams is necessary cities to cover the costs of bringing the WSAB to SELA without increasing their debt. These changes would ultimately give credibility to Metro’s Equity Framework and to Metro as an agency by putting a stop to the sidelining of Southeast LA communities.

### ■ **Prioritizing Environmental Justice**

Another critical aspect to consider is environmental injustice. While active transportation sounds clean and green, stakeholders must tackle methods to decrease pollution in conjunction with expanding transportation. Unintended health impacts from increased pedestrian activity in a region intersected by freeways, railyards, and industrial presence may arise. To offset this, Metro should prioritize EJ areas, especially now that the California Air Resources board has called for agencies to gradually replace their fleet with zero emissions buses by 2040.

## RE-CAP

- Highlight sprawl-induced connectivity issues and displacement as key list items at West Santa Ana Branch meetings
- Re-route and improve shuttle performance for rail
  - Seek shuttle support from Metro
- Identify funding streams to explore/implement active transportation & first mile/last mile improvements
- Weigh policy options to prevent displacement
  - Ex: renter protections, housing requirements
- Building trust & strengthening alliances with residents
  - What is SELA's role by opening up to the rail? How can stakeholders capture and maintain the essence of SELA without polarizing its residents?
- Incentivize equity by attaching equity stipulations to LR funds\*
- Prioritize EJ areas while transitioning to cleaner technologies\*

\*Metro-specific suggestions

## Outreach

Outreach provoked diverging opinions and reflected a strain most noticeably between people and those in elevated positions. Among local government and Metro, communication appeared generally satisfactory with room for improvement. On the other hand, residents exhibited greater distrust, especially the greater the magnitude of the project.

Metro has demonstrated a great willingness to reverse traditional planning methods by thoroughly consulting communities with the NEXTGEN Bus Study. This marked a significant step away from typical townhall meetings and connected residents to the issue by making themselves accessible. The next logical step is working with organizations local to SELA, but a piece of what makes the

Southeast uniquely challenged lies in its nonprofit capacity. Its nearest neighbors, such as Boyle Heights, East Los Angeles, and South Los Angeles are aided by the presence of established activism. The Southeast is afflicted with a shortage of research, resources, and community leaders that can bridge the gap between the private and public sectors.<sup>90</sup> This has evidently complicated matters for existing CBOs who cannot divide their attention equally across all community matters. Cities can luckily depend on the COG and Metro for increased capacity, but the same cannot be said for CBOs. Interviewees on the organizing side identified an absence of transit-focused leadership within the community, but also exhibited limited knowledge on different transit issues, instead having specific knowledge on one issue at a time. These factors place SELA in a problematic situation, raising questions as to how engagement may or may not shape future policy especially as Metro vows to examine inequity and engage with cities more effectively. Therefore, this research suggests the following to Metro & local government for authentic engagement in Southeast Los Angeles:

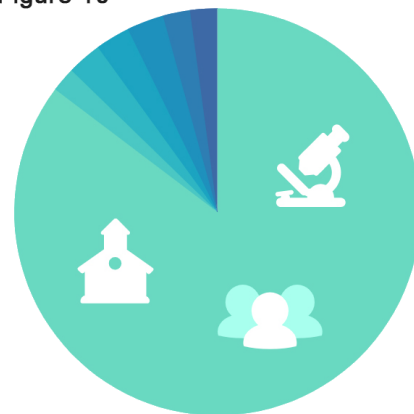
**1. Connect with religious organizations**

A majority of tax-exempt organizations in the study area are registered as California exempt classification D, also known as Federal 501(c)(3) non-profit organizations as per **Figure 10**, much of which are churches as well according to data by the California Franchise Tax Board.<sup>91</sup> In addition to grassroots organizations, churches can help disseminate information about upcoming meetings, system updates, and more.

**2. Fund community-based organizing**

CBOs provide critical services, knowledge, and empowerment that can harness the diverse voices of residents necessary for an equitable process.

Figure 10



**Religious/charitable/scientific  
85.3%**

Data source: State of California Franchise Tax Board, "Exempt Organizations List."

Because SELA is limited in this regard, investing in more grassroots causes is necessary to leverage the community's political power. This also improves the currently strained relationships between governance and the public. In addition, this requires expanding the current pool of organizations Metro regularly works alongside.

### **3. Fund local research**

The absence of region-specific knowledge continues the cycle of disinvestment. By first learning the gaps and building knowledge in areas, better & clearer solutions can be offered. This also means spreading research into other disciplines because transit works in tandem with other systems, such as housing and environmental health. All stakeholders can pool the data and other materials, such as calendars, onto one portal accessible by all, making it easier for everyone to share and arrive on equal understandings as recommended by USC PERE.<sup>92</sup>

### **4. Connect public transportation to everyday issues**

Engagement is a two way street. For many, riding transit is already an everyday occurrence but, like the rest of the County, a majority of residents use vehicles, thus less likely to care about public transit. Equitable transit is in the best interest of all, but non/former riders understandably need a push to see transit as an option. To encourage more residents to think about transit, consider linking it to issues that already have a presence in the area. Possible topics can be environmental justice, which CBOs can help organize, youth safety, and healthy living.

### **5. Continue providing more dynamic & engaging outreach**

Residents expressed that public meetings often feel contrived and tokenizing. To move away from the common public forum, interactive workshops and interactives tools with accessible language. Interviewees offered door-knocking and walking tours as potential outreach tactics, both within the expertise of CBOs, but can also include pop-ups at nearby stations or major commercial centers.

Another important fixture of Southeast LA culture is the street fair. Many cities, like Maywood and Huntington Park, hold annual weekend events that bring families out onto the street, a perfect opportunity to receive meaningful feedback.

At more formal meetings, conclude each encounter with a call to action on both sides. This ensures that not only decision-makers receive something from residents, but that residents also receive something in return. This can vary from relationship-building actions, such as campaign SMS sign-ups & local event invitations, or more intensive efforts such as scheduling future meetings & discussing the possibilities of contracts (Community Benefits Agreements, local hire, etc).

#### **6. Create smaller working groups around the I-710 Corridor Project**

Outreach emerged as a central issue when discussing the 710 project, mostly because of competing interests. The COG and Metro are essential to creating intracity bonds, but CBOs lack this capacity and participation. If government and planning stakeholders took an equal effort with public participation on the 710 project, the results would be more gratifying and unifying.

#### **7. Collaboratively work on action items and assess community needs for Metro's Long Range Transportation Plan & Multi-Year Subregional Program**

This must be developed with a diverse set of SELA stakeholders to avoid funding the wrong projects. The Long Range Transportation Plan also infuses public engagement and equity guidelines within it as leading principles, so lifting community voices and CBOs at these planning meetings can help build a basis for authentic engagement.

## CONCLUSION

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This paper defines public transit equity as three-fold: 1) investment: funding distribution and project allocations that consider the historic disinvestment in SELA and consequences from said disinvestment, while additionally preventing further disparities 2) accessibility: increased physical and social access through a multimodal, connected, & sustainable system, 3) authentic community engagement at all levels of transportation planning. This research addresses competing practices and viewpoints by elucidating key problems in Southeast Los Angeles' current public transportation system. While several areas of the county enjoy a renewed sense of mobility from policy like Measures R and the new Measure M, the Southeast LA cities have historically been underserved with a very sparse amount of projects despite the need for mobility. Many of the system-wide gaps identified match with anecdotal accounts of disconnect, such as rudimentary-level service and poor mobility options. These core cities are overwhelmingly Latino and low-income, also containing a sizeable immigrant population. But, while Metro is exploring the concept of equity, this conversation hasn't quite reached the Southeast cities. It is at these intersections that cities find themselves underfunded, disconnected, and disengaged. Therefore, this research has attempted to contribute to the limited body of knowledge dedicated to this region at a timely moment when transit is taking a center stage in LA County.

Key findings of this research include inconsistencies in funding as shown through active funding streams (Prop A, Prop C, Measure R, Measure M), a need for dynamic connectivity in preparation for the West Santa Ana Branch light rail, growing anxieties concerning the rail, and a noticeable difference in the interactions between decision makers and residents/community organizers. While this research offers a preliminary framework for an equitable process and system, all stakeholders must take the first steps to converge & develop a definition for transit equity or equity by its own at the very least. This is

necessary to reverse the damage of long term disinvestment deeply felt and observed by all SELA stakeholders, allowing its residents a mobility of empowerment.



# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX I

### ENDNOTES

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## APPENDIX II

### INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

City of Huntington Park:

- Karina Macias, Vice Mayor

City of South Gate

- Fernando Rodriguez, Transit Services

City of Bell

- 3 staff

Gateway Cities Council of Governments

- Karen Heit, staff

USC Program for Environmental and Regional Equity

- Madeline Wander, Senior Data Analyst

Communities for a Better Environment (CBE)

- Dilia Ortega, Organizer
- Kayleigh Wade, Organizer

East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice (EYCEJ)

- Laura Cortez, Organizer
- Ana Adalco, Member
- Jocelyn Del Real, Organizer

## APPENDIX III

### SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- What are your thoughts on the state of transportation in Southeast Los Angeles?
  - Are there benefits and shortcomings? Is it different from other parts of the county?
- How do you envision public transportation in Southeast LA?
- How do you define transportation equity? Does this differ from the way your company/city/organization defines equity?
- How effectively do you feel Metro advances equity in SELA?
  - By extension, how has the city advanced transportation equity?
- Historically, the Southeast has been known to be an area of political and socio-economic disenfranchisement. Knowing this, what are some areas Metro and stakeholders (residents, community groups, public officials, planners) should focus on to keep transportation projects equitable?
- How does collaboration function between Metro and communities?
  - Ex: what role does Metro assume when working with cities
    - Any improvements to strengthen these ties?
- Can you list examples of how the city has historically utilized funds/grants from Metro for local transportation improvements?
- Can you name prospective transportation projects the city has planned?
- SELA will receive its first high-quality transit project, the West Santa Ana Branch, in the coming years. What significance do you believe the rail has to the area?
  - How involved was your city in the planning of the rail?
- What conflicts, if any, have you noticed during transportation planning processes?

- How have these conflicts been resolved?
- In addition to the rail, where else do you believe SELA can benefit from transit-wise?
  - What improvements have residents expressed they'd like to see?
- Do you know who else I should reach out to about this issue?

# APPENDIX IV

## CODE GLOSSARY

Code	Definition
	Sub-code; general/passing references to accessibility
<b>Accessibility*</b>	Root code definition: degree of physical & social connection within the transit system plus characteristics/infrastructure that support this ability to connect.
<b>Multimodalism</b>	Services/infrastructure that utilize non-conventional transit options (conventional meaning bus/rail) and facilitate this diversified movement. Ex: biking, walking, first mile/last mile.
<b>Displacement /Gentrification</b>	The relocation of residents (usually low-income, of color) by 'outsiders' (usually upper-income)
<b>Connectivity</b>	Positive and negative references to how efficiently one is able to move across an area. Also describes the impacts of upcoming projects to the degree of connection.
<b>Environmental Justice</b>	Refers to the movement for the fair treatment of disadvantaged communities in accessing a clean environment Ex: Zero-emissions, greening projects, public health, pollution.
<b>Social Safety</b>	Miscellaneous concerns about safety on transit Ex: sexual assault, immigration crackdowns, policing
<b>FWY Impacts</b>	Concerns the impact of freeways (I-710) upon the surrounding community
<b>Affordability</b>	Services provided by cities and resident concerns about transit costs. Ex: flat rate fares, rider subsidies
	Sub-code; general/passing references to outreach
<b>Outreach*</b>	Root code definition: Agency to city (both governmental and resident city stakeholder) interactions (positive or negative).
<b>Positive (+) Engagement</b>	Positive examples of community engagement among all stakeholders
<b>Negative (-) Engagement</b>	Negative examples of community engagement among all stakeholders

<b>Positive (+) Capacity</b>	Positive examples of capacity-building among all stakeholders
<b>Negative (-) Capacity</b>	Negative examples of capacity-building among all stakeholders
<b>Collaboration</b>	Methods, suggestions, and conflicts concerning collaboration amongst all stakeholders
<b>Representation</b>	Suggestions for more local representation in transit planning / transit-related positions
<b>Public Education</b>	Suggestions for more public education concerning public transit and available resources
	Sub-code; general/passing references to investment
<b>Investment*</b>	Rootcode definition: Patterns, problems, praises pertaining to funding and subsequent outcomes from funding
<b>Community Differences</b>	Social differences perceived as mechanisms that perpetuate disinvestment and political exclusion Ex: Low-income and/or non-white population; comparisons with wealthier neighborhoods
<b>System Dissatisfaction</b>	Complaints on current transit network/system, not necessarily related to infrastructure Ex: Timeliness, spatial mismatch
<b>System Satisfaction</b>	Compliments on current transit network/system, not necessarily related to infrastructure Ex: Widespread coverage, benefits towards disadvantaged riders
<b>Infrastructural Safety/Upgrades</b>	Specific infrastructural complaints and suggestions on transit network/system Ex: Improved bus stops, FM/LM, active transport corridors, zero emissions technology
<b>Progressive Distribution</b>	Funding model that prioritizes underserved transit-riding communities
<b>Funding Uses</b>	Ways in which cities utilize their transportation funding Ex: municipal bus services