

Equitable Transit

Creating Healthy, Accessible and Affordable Communities



Investment in transit presents communities with both opportunities and challenges.

On the one hand, these investments can make regions healthier, safer and more equitable for all. But they can also make our regions less accessible, harder to navigate and less equitable.

Across the country, decision makers are facing this dilemma.

For the Partnership for Working Families, the path forward is clear. Partnership affiliates are bringing together strong coalitions of labor, faith, community and civil rights organizations, with the goal of leveraging transit investments to bring positive transformations to all communities. The Partnership is a national network of regional advocacy organizations committed to winning policies that support working families. These organizations pioneered the movement for a community benefits approach to public spending, arguing for redevelopment strategies that ensure all communities benefit. Now, Partnership affiliates in seven cities are using that approach to insert equity into all aspects of transit investment. Equitable transit is shaped by policies that:

- Include community input in decision making;
- Connect people to opportunity;
- Make public transportation accessible and affordable;
- Spur the creation of affordable housing;
- Create good jobs through the construction, operation and development of new transit lines and stops; and
- Decrease carbon emissions and slow global warming.

Investment in Transit: The Opportunity to Transform Communities

Transit investment will shape the next generation of America's cities. More than 80 regions across the country are planning transit projects of at least \$250 million. This spending drives new investments in housing, jobs and development. But it can also be devastating for working people. Property values around transit stops typically rise, pushing working families — bus and transit riders — farther from these crucial systems. Too often, redevelopment brings low wage part-time jobs with no benefits. And when low-income families can't access public transit, they rely on cars that pollute our cities and contribute to global warming.

Partnership affiliates are advancing innovative strategies that support development while engaging low income communities as partners to design, build and implement systems that better serve all communities. How?

- 1 By making equity a key element of public transit discussions and decision-making.** Transit equity ensures all communities benefit equally from investment. When new modes of transit displace other aspects of a multi-modal system (like buses), transit riders may find it harder get to their jobs, endangering their employability. The rising costs of housing near transit stops prices low-income communities out of the neighborhoods they have long occupied. Smart planning makes equity the core of transit discussion and decision making.
- 2 By organizing low-income communities and communities of color to have a stronger voice in transit planning from start to finish.** Low-income communities and people of color overwhelmingly rely on public transit as their only means of transportation. Leaving these communities out of the decision making process makes transit systems less sustainable. When transit schedules don't meet community needs, people ignore the system altogether, driving down demand. Including community members in transit planning at the onset helps to ensure investments in transit don't go to waste.
- 3 By establishing that an equity lens is crucial for solving other problems.** Building a transit system that fails to address the needs of low-income communities undermines the goal of reducing carbon emissions. Transit that isn't affordable or accessible drives these families back into their cars — typically older, dirtier and heavier-emitting. Ensuring low-income families' transit needs are met provides a stronger solution to the carbon-reduction goals that drive transit funding in the first place.

The Partnership's Approach

The Partnership for Working Families' approach to transit spending is simple — build coalitions of community, planning, labor and environmental groups to advocate for policies that create opportunities for all. This approach is yielding result for families across the country.

■ BOSTON: The Massachusetts Miracle

Regional Transit Authorities across the Commonwealth saw unprecedented cuts and fare hikes as a result of the economic downturn. **Community Labor United (CLU)** led a statewide transit campaign to Fix it, Fund it and Make it Fair. This advocacy and organizing effort is bearing real fruit by taking low-income communities' needs as the starting point for widespread system reform. Recent statewide legislation ensures that communities will see new investment in public transit. Riders now have a voice and vote in transit decision making. And Regional Transit Authorities can no longer raise fares at a whim. CLU and its allies are leading the nation in making transit affordable, accessible and beneficial for all.

■ SEATTLE: Producing Sound Policy

Puget Sound Sage is leading a multifaceted effort to make transit more equitable. As the Puget Sound region's Commuter Link light rail expands, Sage is ensuring that neighborhood development plans reflect the interests and concerns of low income, immigrant and other communities of color. Sage's recent report, *Transit Oriented Development that's Healthy, Green and Just*, advocates for more investment in public transit as a means to reduce the city's carbon footprint — and lays out the policies needed to get there. Sage is also leading a coalition effort to create affordable housing in Seattle by advocating for stronger inclusionary zoning policies, winning agreements that require developers to build and fund more affordable housing, and ensuring low-income communities are not priced out of key parts of the metro area.

■ SANTA CLARA COUNTY: Affordable Housing in Transit Rich Regions

As the build out of the BART system extends to Santa Clara County, **Working Partnerships USA** is ensuring dedicated funds to support affordable housing. In 2011, California eliminated local redevelopment agencies, erasing nearly \$1 billion earmarked for affordable housing. As a result of Working Partnership's broad-based coalition organizing, Santa Clara County has now dedicated more than \$12 million annually to affordable housing efforts. And cities like Sunnyvale and San Jose are following the county's lead by creating innovative tools to replace lost financing options. Identifying ways to fund affordable housing before the BART build out will help ensure working families thrive in the South Bay region.



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