



# Connect SoCal 2024 Subcommittee Draft White Paper

RACIAL EQUITY & REGIONAL PLANNING

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### INTRODUCTION

SCAG is currently developing Connect SoCal 2024. Three special Regional Council subcommittees have been created around Next Generation Infrastructure, Resilience and Conservation, and Racial Equity and Regional Planning. Each subcommittee met between September 2022 and January 2023, to identify recommendations that will inform how these emerging issues are addressed in Connect SoCal 2024.

The Racial Equity and Regional Planning Subcommittee was convened to respond to the following policy questions:

- What are the opportunities to advance racial equity through the policies and strategies in Connect SoCal? and
- How can Connect SoCal guide how planning and investments over the next 30 years can address and rectify the effects of racially discriminatory policies in the SCAG region?

The Racial Equity and Regional Planning Subcommittee convened four times between September 2022 and January 2023. Through the course of the Racial Equity and Regional Planning Subcommittee meetings, staff brought forth content and experts in the field to ground how SCAG could approach racial equity in Connect SoCal by first recognizing the history and current day prevalence of systemic racism, outlining how it has manifested in inequitable outcomes across the region, and uplifting a series of best practices and resources that SCAG can explore to advance racial equity in the Connect SoCal 2024.

### SUBCOMMITTEE FOUNDATIONS

In July 2020, the SCAG Regional Council adopted Resolution No. 20-623-2 affirming that systemic racism is a human rights and public health crisis which results in disparities in family stability, health and mental wellness, education, employment, environmental justice, economic development, transportation, public safety, incarceration, and housing and reaffirming its commitment to advancing justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion in Southern California. The resolution directed a series of comprehensive actions that were grounded in building awareness, competency, and impact around racial equity in the SCAG region.

Of note, the resolution spurred the formation of the Special Committee on Equity and Social Justice in 2019 that led the development of the Racial Equity Early Action Plan in 2019. The Racial Equity Early Action Plan defined racial equity for SCAG and included a series of goals, strategies and actions grounded in building staff awareness and education, data, engagement, and economic activity. Informed by research, best practices, peer agency review, the Racial Equity Early Action Plan identified leading with racial equity as a focal point in addressing the pervasive and deep inequities faced by people of color across the region. SCAG recognizes that challenging racism is essential if

SCAG is to support the creation of a just and equitable society. Though all dimensions of equity are not addressed in the plan, by focusing on race, SCAG staff will develop the skills needed to address inequities faced by other marginalized groups based on gender, sexual orientation, ability and age, among others. A comprehensive status report on these efforts is included on SCAG's website.

The Connect SoCal Subcommittee on Racial Equity and Regional Planning was formed to explicitly focus and seek board direction on strategies to "Center Racial Equity in Regional Policy and Planning," which is one of the four goals identified in SCAG's Racial Equity Early Action Plan. Connect SoCal provides a regional vision for integrating land-use and transportation for increased mobility and more sustainable growth and serves as the guiding policy document for local planning and transportation funding across the region. Therefore, ensuring that Connect SoCal's goals, policies and metrics are centered on racial equity is critical to integrating and institutionalizing the Regional Council's commitment to advancing justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion in Southern California through regional planning.

## SUBCOMMITTEE: DISCUSSION & KEY FINDINGS

### DISCUSSION

The Racial Equity and Regional Planning Subcommittee met four times between September 2022 and January 2023. Each meeting included a presentation from SCAG staff, presentations from experts in the field, facilitated dialogue by Mr. Charles T. Brown, founder and principal of Equitable Cities, and feedback collected from Subcommittee members. The meeting topics included:

- **Historic and Contemporary Impacts of Systemic Racism in the United States**

With a focus on housing and transportation, the first meeting examined the historic and contemporary impacts and outcomes of systemic racism in the United States. The content provided a national and historic perspective that illustrated the breadth of the systems that have created and perpetuated systemic racism across the country at every level of government.

Despite both the ratification of the 14th Amendment in 1868, intended to provide equal protection under the law, and the 15th (1870) and 19th (1920) Amendments, which guaranteed citizens the right to vote, people of color have consistently not seen the full benefits of these rights. In 1896, the United States Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of "separate but equal" laws in the case of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, ushering in the Jim Crow Era of racial segregation and disenfranchisement. During this era, major expansions in transportation infrastructure were encouraged by a stimulus of federal funding in California. In 1911, the newly established California Highway Commission implemented federal policy direction toward the creation of the Interstate Highway System, which included the 1921 and 1944 Federal Aid Highway Acts. The Commission determined project locations, and both state and local officials routed new freeways through existing communities of color, displacing thousands of households through eminent domain. Much of this freeway construction was in service of a suburban housing boom that was explicitly segregationist. Racist policies and decisions also influenced the siting of other types of transportation infrastructure, such as commuter railways, and the delivery of transit services.

The content included a viewing of [Segregated by Design](#), a short video that summarizes the book *The Color of Law*, which provides a historic overview of how systemic racism shaped housing policies and access to housing, homeownership opportunities for people of color, and racial segregation in the United States.

Segregated by Design highlighted how federal policies across the nation caused displacement of established and thriving Black communities for major infrastructure and public works projects. In addition, the video highlighted how a series of specific actions by the governmental actors, at all levels, across the nation, created segregated communities. For example, the United States Housing Authority of the New Deal Programs resulted in public housing projects that segregated different racial and ethnic groups. Another example was a program by the Federal Housing Administration which subsidized the development of suburbs with the requirement that the homes could only be sold to white families and the inclusion of deed restrictions that prohibited resale to African American families.

The meeting also included a presentation by Ms. Beth Osborne, Director of Transportation for America, on transportation and racial equity. Ms. Osborne highlighted the importance of roadway design and how it could create dangerous conditions for the most vulnerable users. She highlighted the increase in pedestrian fatalities (62%) between 2009-2020 and the higher risk for people of color, especially for Black and Native American pedestrians and those from low-income households.

- **Impacts and Outcomes of Systemic Racism in the SCAG region**

Building on the historic perspective that was offered in the first meeting, the second Subcommittee meeting focused on the current day impacts and outcomes of systemic racism in the SCAG region. Content included a presentation on the updated [Racial Equity Baseline Conditions Report](#) that was published in 2019 and later updated in 2022. The Baseline Conditions Report highlights demographic information and important regional data on the economy, communities, mobility, the environment, and wherever possible, disaggregation of the data by race/ethnicity. The report is significant in furthering SCAG's racial equity work because it memorializes how communities across the region are faring around the above topic areas. In addition, the report disaggregates data by race/ethnicity which allows for an assessment of how people from different racial and ethnic groups are impacted around the various indicators.

A few compelling SCAG region indicators and outcomes include:

- Hispanic/Latinx (40%), Native American (39%), and Black households (38%) experience the highest poverty rates, almost twice the rates of White Households (20.2%), who have the lowest rates in the region.
- Hispanic/Latinx full-time workers (29%) are three times more likely to be living in poverty than White full-time workers (10%).
- Hispanic/Latinx Households have the highest Housing Cost Burden of any racial/ethnic group in the region with 42% of renters and 16.2% of homeowners experiencing a housing cost burden (meaning that 30% of more of household income goes towards housing cost). This is in comparison with 24.2% of White Households who are renters and 9.4% of White Households who are renters who experience a housing cost burden.
- Black households have the lowest homeownership rates at 36% in the region, compared to White households with the highest at 61%.
- Hispanic/Latinx households make up the largest percentage of residents living in census tracts with the highest CalEnviroScreen scores (highest environmental/pollution burden) in comparison to White Households who disproportionately live in the areas with the lowest percentile (least environmental/pollution burden).

Beyond the Baseline data, the Connect SoCal 2024 Plan will also include Equity Performance Measures. The proposed measures are organized around the economy, communities, mobility, and the environment. Sample measures include neighborhood change and displacement, share of transportation system usage, resilience and climate vulnerabilities, and public health impacts.

The meeting also included presentations from two community-based organizations (CBOs)/community partners, Just San Bernardino (Just SB) and Santa Ana Active Streets (SAAS). The community partners were invited to share their work to uplift the importance of equitably integrating the community perspective in ground-truthing data, meaningfully engaging vulnerable and marginalized people and communities, and working with stakeholders to identifying community needs, assets, and solutions.

- **Best Practices for Mitigating the Impacts of Systemic Racism**

The third Racial Equity and Regional Planning Subcommittee meeting focused on best practices and strategies for mitigating impacts of systemic racism. The meeting started with a staff update on the Racial Equity Early Action Plan, followed by presentations by three guest speakers.

- **Racial Equity Early Action Plan:** The Racial Equity Early Action Plan includes a series of activities for SCAG to advance racial equity in the region. For example, SCAG has funded several initiatives that have advanced equitable engagement and partnerships with Community Based Organizations and community leaders. The Call for Collaboration is funded by REAP 1, in partnership with three foundations. SCAG provided \$1 million of its REAP 1.0 funding to develop a program that provided capacity-building technical assistance and grants to non-profits and CBOs. Fifteen organizations were invited to engage in land use planning efforts that support the acceleration of housing production, with an emphasis on ensuring principles of equity are included in planning processes, new funding programs, and policies.

The Go Human Program completed its Mini Grant Program, which aimed to build street-level community resiliency and increase the safety of people most harmed by traffic injuries and fatalities, prioritizing Black, Indigenous and People of Color; people with disabilities; and frontline workers, particularly those walking and biking. The program emphasized community-driven co-creation and community engagement. Go Human awarded more than \$350,000 to 26 CBO-identified and led projects, directly engaging more than 300,000 people.

In addition, SCAG is in process of developing the Sustainable Communities Program Call 4, the Call for Civic Engagement, Equity, and Environmental Justice which will prioritize resources in historically disinvested areas and communities most impacted by adverse public health outcomes and air quality impacts. This program will catalyze planning activities to support housing, GHG and VMT reduction, advance equity and environmental justice, and provide needed funding to communities with the highest need.

Addressing poverty and access to economic opportunity is one of the most impactful ways to address racial inequities. In July 2021 SCAG adopted the Inclusive Economic Recovery Strategy (IERS). The guiding principles for the IERS are: (1) center on racial and gender equity with regard to economic opportunity; (2) rebuilding the region's middle class; (3) contributing to a climate-ready region; (4) tailoring strategies to meet both regional factors and specific needs for targeted industries; and (5) reflect new and diverse voices. As a result of one-time State funding, SCAG created a limited-term Department of Inclusive

Economic Growth that is responsible for implementing targeted economic and workforce development projects that were direct recommendations from the IERS. These projects will expand access to economic opportunity in the region by centering the community in identifying pathways to quality jobs, promoting inclusive government contracting, and by building the business case for equity.

- **Ms. Jocelyn Gibson, Sr. Consultant, ZoneCo:** Ms. Gibson was the first speaker following the staff presentation on the Racial Equity Early Action Plan. She is an experienced city planner with extensive public and private sector planning, zoning, and commercial real estate experience. Ms. Gibson’s presentation highlighted the history of zoning and how its roots are infused with racism and the intent to segregate people. Of note, the presentation highlighted the confluence of a series of actions that included policies that terrorized black families who moved into white neighborhoods, the destruction of property, racial covenants, race-based zoning, redlining, and housing finance, urban renewal, real estate practices that have shaped the segregation, housing, and wealth inequities that exist today.

The equity-centered best practices that were discussed by Ms. Gibson focused on procedures, standards, and policies. For example, Ms. Gibson highlighted the value of limiting subjective review, requiring that public engagement is representative of the community, and that appointed bodies are representative of the community to ensure that a multitude of perspectives inform decision making. Zoning standards that were recommended to advance racial equity included promoting housing diversity in all zoning districts where residential uses are appropriate, removing parking minimums, and ensuring equal access to food, services, amenities, and public goods. Finally, policy recommendations included ensuring that equity-driven policy level frameworks at the general plan level related to the zoning level implementation tools.

- **Dr. Andre Perry, Senior Fellow, Brookings Metro:** Dr. Perry is a Senior Fellow at Brookings Metro, a scholar-in-residence at American University, and a professor of practice of economics at Washington University. A nationally known commentator on race, structural inequality, and education, Dr. Perry is the author of the book “Know Your Price: Valuing Black Lives and Property in America’s Black Cities”.

Dr. Perry’s presentation focused on the [Black Progress Index: Examining the social factors that influence Black well-being](#). The research-based tool looked at life expectancy for black people from 1200 major black cities and metropolitan areas across the United States. The Black Progress Index highlighted, through research, the places where black people are thriving most and the social predictors that are in place.

In the presentation, Dr. Perry highlighted the 13 key predictors of life expectancy that can generally be categorized around environmental quality, family health, human and social capital, safety, and wealth. Examples of these indicators include percent of black foreign-born adults, black higher educational attainment, black household income, black homeownership rates, black commuting via walking/biking, and black business ownership rates. The tool is a valuable resource because it uplifts the places where black people thrive in the United States and the factors that are in place to support this.

- **Mr. Christopher Coes, Assistant Secretary for Transportation Policy, U.S. Department of Transportation, Office of the Secretary:** Mr. Christopher Coes serves as the Assistant Secretary for Transportation Policy in the Office of the Secretary. Mr. Coes presented on Justice40 Program, which

established a commitment that 40% of federal investments and benefits will go to communities who have been overburdened with environmental justice harm and underserved from federal investments.

Mr. Coes highlighted that Justice40 is centered around seven areas, 39 funding programs, across five modes, and totaling \$204 billion. The presentation included an overview of the process that U.S. DOT is pursuing to carry out Justice40 including the key indicators that they are using to define disadvantaged communities and how Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) could use the indicators to identify Justice40 communities in their region. Mr. Coes highlighted that MPOs should incorporate housing, land use, and equitable economic development in their transportation planning processes and identify and prioritize the areas in the region who have experienced the greatest harm, identify a baseline and strategy for how to address those needs, identify the projects that will help address those needs, and focus on project delivery.

The content from the Racial Equity and Regional Planning Subcommittee meetings included a wealth of information for subcommittee members to identify opportunities for integrating racial equity in Connect SoCal 2024. The feedback received from subcommittee members is summarized in the Key Findings section with the recommendations included in the following Subcommittee Recommendations section.

## KEY FINDINGS

The overarching task of the Racial Equity and Regional Planning Subcommittee was to identify:

- What are the opportunities to advance racial equity through the policies and strategies in Connect SoCal? and
- How can Connect SoCal guide how planning and investments over the next 30 years can address and rectify the effects of racially discriminatory policies in the SCAG region?

Each of the subcommittee meetings included facilitated discussion led by Mr. Charles T. Brown of Equitable Cities with feedback collected at each meeting. The Racial Equity and Regional Planning subcommittee presentations and subsequent discussions highlighted the following key findings:

- Break down silos across governmental agencies and equity efforts.
- Important to identify short to long term recommendations and measure success.
- Systemic racism has shaped housing and transportation policy, funding, and implementation in the region.
- Housing cost burden (rental and ownership) is highest for households of color.
- People of color have lower homeownership rates in the region, with Black households experiencing the lowest homeownership rates.
- Predatory real estate practices have undervalued homes in black neighborhoods.
- Mobility infrastructure varies across the region (commuter community versus dense/transit rich community). However, the need to create walkable places is needed across the region.

- Need to identify economic development strategies to address poverty in the region, including employment opportunities for nonviolent offenders, contracting opportunities for people of color, improve wages and career ladders, and engaging the business community.
- There is a need to assess how to improve health outcomes for people of color.
- Environmental Injustice most negatively affects communities of color, with Latinx most affected in the region.
- Need to identify strategies to collect and use data and science to support black and brown communities in improving outcomes including affordable housing and mobility.
- Data should be disaggregated beyond racial/ethnic categories, identify historic trends, be shared widely, and vetted with affected communities. Essential to understand the underlying issues that are creating negative outcomes in communities of color.
- Need to include diversity and representation in jurisdictional staffing and decision making.
- Need to identify how to effectively engage affected disadvantaged communities and communities of color.
- Need to develop inclusive engagement practices, with accountability, that facilitate participation of historically underrepresented and marginalized groups.
- Need to document historic inequities as part of planning processes.
- Need to consult with indigenous and other marginalized people, beyond required consultation in environmental process.
- Broadly communicate SCAG's equity work.
- There is a need to analyze equity for SCAG and support jurisdictions to do this assessment.

## SUBCOMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

One of the most significant opportunities that SCAG has to advance racial equity is to first acknowledge that SCAG has a role in advancing racial equity. SCAG is in a unique position to advocate, convene, coordinate, and prioritize the implementation of racial equity-centered initiatives across the region. As the largest MPO in the United States, the infusion of racial equity policy direction in Connect SoCal will have a transformative impact in the region that will shape planning and investments that are grounded in recognition of historic harms with a keen focus on addressing inequities and prioritizing resources in the communities with the greatest need.

The following recommendations were informed by the feedback received at each of the Racial Equity and Regional Planning Subcommittee meetings. Given the intersectionality of racial equity, the recommendations are cross cutting and are centered on pursuing equitable processes and outcomes across all Connect SoCal topic areas.

1. Connect SoCal 2024 will be a vehicle to promote racial equity (as defined in the Racial Equity Early Action Plan), to address the historic impacts of systemic racism and coordinate and implement equity centered activities across the region.
2. Embed a racial equity lens in Connect SoCal implementation, prioritize equity as a process and outcome that benefits and reduces burdens for the most disadvantaged communities and people across the region, and identify opportunities to measure and track success and lessons learned.
3. Incorporate equity centered best practices in data collection to ensure that data assessments reflect community needs, disaggregate data by race/ethnicity and other important demographic factors, ground

truth data, widely distribute data to impacted stakeholders, and incorporate community perspective in data-informed decision making.

4. Break down silos-within SCAG and among other local, regional, and federal agencies that are doing equity-centered work, for example State Reparations Effort and Justice40.
5. Prioritize community-centered interventions, resources, and programming that serve the most disadvantaged communities and people in the region with strategies that can be implemented in the short-to-long-term.
6. Identify and target communities that are vulnerable to displacement and work towards stabilizing communities and increase access to housing that meets the needs of the region, with an emphasis on preserving and producing affordable housing, increasing homeownership opportunities, and reducing housing cost burden (for renters and homeowners), with a focus on the communities with the greatest need.
7. Incorporate equity-centered economic activities that increase access to opportunity and living wages for disadvantaged communities and individuals who face barriers to employment and economic mobility.
8. Increase equitable, inclusive, and meaningful representation and participation of people of color and disadvantaged communities in SCAG led and funded planning processes.

Beyond the above recommendations the following conceptual preliminary strategies are recommended for further consideration as regional policy priorities and/or implementation strategies for the plan:

1. Develop an agencywide Community Based Organization Partnering (CBO) Strategy that outlines tools and resources for partnering with CBOs to increase inclusive and equitable engagement opportunities.
2. Develop a Restorative Justice Pilot Program that prioritizes comprehensive solutions, capacity building, engagement, planning, and investment in the most underserved communities in the region (1 in each county in pilot phase).
3. Develop an Equity Assessment Tool that can be utilized by SCAG in program development and delivery and a complementary tool that can be incorporated into local assistance/subrecipient programming and delivery.
4. Identify, align with appropriate State and Federal partners, and utilize equity-centered measures to track outcomes, progress, and lessons learned on Connect SoCal implementation.
5. Identify innovative homeownership models that can reduce costs and increase housing production in the region and identify strategies to engage households of color that are underrepresented as homeowners.
6. Develop and deploy community stabilization (anti-displacement) resources that can be utilized to address displacement pressures for communities across the region and Affirmatively Further Fair Housing.
7. Deploy actions that expand access to training and employment, with an emphasis on lower income communities, communities of color, and others facing barriers to employment.
8. Implement strategies that support the creation and expansion of small, minority-, woman-, and veteran-owned businesses in the region.
9. Develop a resource guide and training for equitable stakeholder engagement for public agencies, including SCAG, that is culturally relevant, recognizes community contexts and histories, existing community resources and engagement opportunities, and inclusion of cultural and racial/ethnic groups.

The above list of conceptual strategies are preliminary ideas of how the recommendations move forward. Further assessment and evaluation of the policy recommendations and concept strategies will be explored through the SCAG Policy Committees and the Connect SoCal 2024 stakeholder engagement process.

## NEXT STEPS

These recommendations are intended to inform the on-going development of the Connect SoCal Policy Development Framework to provide direction for addressing emerging and cross-cutting issues in Connect SoCal 2024. They will be considered by the Joint Policy Committee alongside recommendations from the Next Generation Infrastructure Subcommittee and the Resilience and Conservation Subcommittee in March. The scope of the subcommittee discussions also illuminated opportunities for broader recommendations to inform SCAG's work both in Connect SoCal implementation and other program areas.

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