

# From transportation equity to transportation justice: within, through, and beyond the state

National Center for Sustainable Transportation

Caltrans Transportation Equity Workshop

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# Goals

1. Provide clarity on two terms:

**Equity:** State actors, planners, engineers, decision makers

**Justice:** Non-profit organizations, advocates, activists

2. Delineate strategies used to advance both equity and justice

3. Draw from justice perspectives and agency best practices to identify promising directions

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Article

## From Transportation Equity to Transportation Justice: Within, Through, and Beyond the State

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# Transportation equity

## Quantitative equity analysis

- Evaluate whether inequities exist
- Focus on race/ethnicity and income

## Public involvement

- Meaningful, early, and often

## Seeks reforms in adherence with regulatory requirements and guidelines

- Title VI
- Executive Order 12898
- Agency implementations (NEPA, FHWA, etc.)

# Transportation justice

**Rooted in “outside” social movements:** civil rights and environmental justice movements

**Current system:** heavily disadvantages non-drivers and overly burdens people of color and low-income people.

**Seeks to transform social structures to remedy the causes of inequities:** moving forward requires understanding and addressing past injustices by transforming inequitable structures of power and capital.

**Desired state:** All have access to transportation decision making and the transportation resources they need to lead a meaningful life; none are overly burdened.





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# State-centric and society-centric approaches



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# State-centric approaches

Generally focus on **distributions**

- Equity of what?
  - Benefits: how easily people can reach opportunities (accessibility)
  - Burdens: health and environmental costs
- For whom?
- How is equity defined?

Informed by public engagement

Reliance on state-led data and analysis

# Environmental justice perspectives

State often viewed as an **unreliable partner**:

- Historic role in perpetuating injustice (slavery, redlining, voter suppression, etc.)
- In modern transportation “equity analysis” setting
  - “Going through the motions” of public participation
  - State-led analyses can miss critical issues and sources of information
- State is invested in not “solving” environmental injustice, as doing so would be costly and disruptive to political and economic systems

→ State has not generally worked to achieve **transformative** change and mitigate prior injustice



# Society-centric approaches

Emphasis on social-movement organizations, activists, and advocates

More emphasis on justice:

- Importance of a **fair process** of decision making and **recognition diverse sources of knowledge**
- Addressing root causes and transforming unjust structural conditions

More emphasis on **transformational change** (rather than reform)



# Spectrum of strategies

*State-centric*

*Society-centric*



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# Spectrum of strategies

*State-centric*

*Society-centric*



Agency-led  
analysis

Data  
Modeling  
Indicators



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# Spectrum of strategies

*State-centric*

*Society-centric*



Agency-led  
analysis

**Traditional  
public  
engagement**

Public notice  
Public hearings and meetings  
Written comments  
Meaningful, early, frequent involvement  
Documented responses



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# Spectrum of strategies

*State-centric*

*Society-centric*



Agency-led  
analysis

Traditional  
public  
engagement

**Conflict  
resolution**

Litigation  
Administrative complaints  
Neutral arbiter (e.g. community ombudsman)  
Community benefit agreement



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# Spectrum of strategies

State-centric

Society-centric



Agency-led analysis

Traditional public engagement

Conflict resolution

**Participatory budgeting**

Budget share allocated to needs identified by residents  
Residents determine budget allocation and process rules  
Includes outreach to marginalized groups  
Funds staff time and assistance  
Budget is flexible (not tied to specific project types)  
Can include support for community involvement  
Tracking progress toward community goals



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# Spectrum of strategies

State-centric

Society-centric



Agency-led analysis

Traditional public engagement

Conflict resolution

Participatory budgeting

**Community-led analysis**

Led by or in collaboration with community leaders  
Scope and assumptions determined by community  
Transportation, health, or social impact assessment  
Community-based data collection and analysis  
Community-designed alternatives  
Scenario planning / visioning tools at public meetings  
Academic or agency partnerships (funds or analysis)



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# Spectrum of strategies

*State-centric*

*Society-centric*



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# Spectrum of strategies

*State-centric*

*Society-centric*



# Promise and peril of society-centric strategies

Potential for transformative change

Success depends on many factors

- mobilizing large numbers of people
- a favorable “opportunity structure”
- sufficient resources

Not a panacea

- Inside/outside tension
- Justice groups are not a monolith

Hybrid approaches are promising in the near term



# Justice “win”: Fresno County

*State-centric*

*Society-centric*



Rowangould, D., Karner, A., London, J. 2016. Identifying Environmental Justice Communities for Transportation Analysis. *Transportation Research Part A: Policy and Practice* 88:151–62  
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0885412220927691>

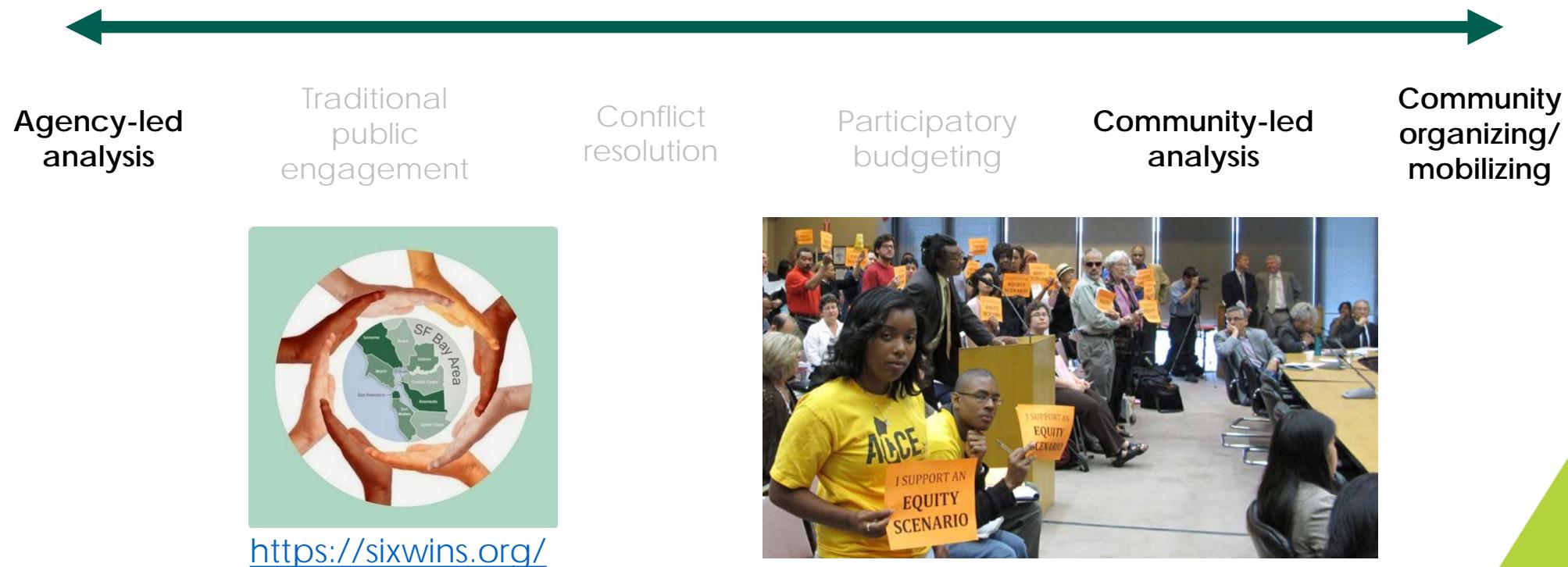


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# Justice “win”: Bay area

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*Society-centric*



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# How can the “state” engage in “society-centric” strategies?

## Advanced public engagement practices

- Receive training from community members about community engagement and justice concerns
- Maintain relationships with community-based organizations and leaders
- Hire staff from the community
- Use community liaisons for outreach
- Neutral facilitators
- Train community members and leaders about transportation planning and analysis
- Financially support community organization and leader engagement
- Attend community forums (rather than inviting community)
- Focus groups
- Interactive games, scenario/visioning tools

## Participatory budgeting and community-led analysis

- Provide resources (funds, analytical, staff)
- Recognize and value the results



# Key Takeaways

It's not that simple -- "State" and "Society" actors and actions are not a monolith and there is no one-size-fits-all approach

BUT justice perspectives and society-centric approaches pose promise for achieving transformational change

Near term: integrate broader perspectives into state actions

Longer term: Build power, sustained participatory budgeting efforts, tactical urbanism

Move towards transportation justice



# Further reading

The Untokening: <http://www.untokening.org/>

- Principles of mobility justice:  
<http://www.untokening.org/updates/2017/11/11/untokening-10-principles-of-mobility-justice>
- Mobility justice and Covid-19:  
<http://www.untokening.org/updates/2020/4/8/mobility-justice-and-covid-19>

Sheller, M. 2018. Mobility Justice: The Politics of Movement in an Age of Extremes. Brooklyn, NY: Verso.



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# Contact

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# Ask...

What is the historic context? What are current conditions?

What are the causes of past and current inequities?

Who is affected? Are affected community members at the table?

Are affected community members involved in outreach?

Are community members' engagement efforts supported (financially or through training)?

Are affected community members' insights recognized and valued?

Are affected community members involved in the identification of needs and scope?

Are affected community members involved in data collection and analysis?

Are affected community members involved in decision making?

