

LINK21

CONNECT NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

STRATEGIC PROGRAM PLAN

CHAPTER 9: EQUITY

December 2022

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ISSUE AND REVISION RECORD

REVISION	DATE	PREPARER(S)	PMC REVIEWER(S)	APPROVER	DESCRIPTION/NOTES
			BART/CCJPA REVIEWER(S)	BART/CCJPA APPROVER	
0	11/23/2021	Steve Lavelle, Intueor	Steve Lavelle, Intueor	Steve Lavelle, Intueor	Working DRAFT submittal
		---			<i>No review requirement</i>
1.A	09/23/2022	Kyle Morales, Mydria Clark, HNTB	Sudhish Verma, HNTB	Peter Gertler, HNTB	WPA.01-01 Working DRAFT submittal
	10/31/2022	---	Sadie Graham, Nicole Franklin, BART	Sadie Graham, BART	WPA.01-01 Working DRAFT submittal review
1.B	12/16/2022	Kyle Morales, Mydria Clark, HNTB	Sudhish Verma, HNTB	Peter Gertler, HNTB	WPA.01-01 DRAFT FINAL submittal
		---			<i>No review requirement</i>

SHAREPOINT PATH

Records Center/PRGM Record Center/WPA.01-01/SPP/
2-PRGM-PH1-SPP_CH9_Equity_DRAFT_FINAL

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ACRONYM/ABBREVIATION	DEFINITION
BART	San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit District
CCJPA	Capitol Corridor Joint Powers Authority
CBO	community-based organization
EAC	Equity Advisory Council
OCR	Office of Civil Rights
PMC	Program Management Consultants
PMT	Program Management Team

LINK21 PROGRAM TEAM NAMES

TEAM NAME	TEAM MEMBERS
PMC	The HNTB Team
PMT	BART/CCJPA + PMC
Consultants	Consultants supporting program identification/project selection
Link21 Team	PMT + Consultants

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9. EQUITY

9.1. Purpose

From the outset of work, the Link21 Program (Link21) Team¹ committed to an approach that advances a more equitable distribution of Link21's benefits and burdens and that works to address the needs of communities that have been marginalized.

This approach is informed by the Link21 Team's acknowledgement that, historically and contemporaneously, infrastructure projects have negatively affected systemically marginalized communities, resulting in decreased mobility options for certain groups, including barriers to passenger rail access that impact how people travel.

9.1.1. Policy Background

Equity is increasing as a focus for government entities at all levels. Of recent note, the Biden Administration enacted the Justice40 Initiative, which sets a goal for 40% of the overall benefits from federal investments to flow to communities that have been marginalized. Though the details around how Justice40 will be applied to transportation funding are still emerging, demonstrating a high level of benefit to communities that have been marginalized will be essential for projects seeking federal dollars. Although Justice40 only applies directly to federal funds, the State of California and regional and local governments in the Northern California Megaregion (Megaregion) emphasize equity in their funding decisions.

Achieving this level of equity benefit will not happen without deliberate effort. "Business as usual" approaches to transportation planning will yield work that does not generate sufficient and just benefits for communities that have been marginalized.

9.2. Strategy

Link21's overarching approach is to consider equity through the lens of the distribution of benefits and burdens. This framework is built on work by BART's Office of Civil Rights (OCR), which is in the process of developing overall equity guidance for the District. Link21's *Equity Vision Statement and Equity Commitment* builds on OCR's emerging equity framework, and it provides more detail on Link21's equity goals. The *Equity Vision Statement* is aspirational and guides the Link21 Team in supporting the creation of a just balance of benefits and burdens in the Megaregion. The *Equity Commitment* reflects discrete actions that the Link21 Team carries through all work.

¹ San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit District (BART)/Capitol Corridor Joint Powers Authority (CCJPA), Program Management Consultants (PMC), and Consultants supporting program identification/project selection (Consultants)



Link21's *Equity Blueprint Plan* further expands on OCR's developing equity guidance. This plan provides additional detail on how the Link21 Team can incorporate equity throughout the program. It establishes a framework of:

- **Reflecting:** Understanding and adjusting for internal biases and biases that are structurally built into typical transportation planning processes, especially for programs/projects as large as Link21.
- **Contextualizing:** Seeing the full picture, or full extent, of Link21's potential impacts, even if they go beyond what BART and CCJPA have direct authority over. It also entails understanding the history of communities that could be impacted by Link21.
- **Co-Creating:** Partnering directly with communities that have been marginalized to make them a part of the decision-making process, especially for decisions that could impact them the most.

9.2.1. Organization

Addressing equity requires a conscious effort from all parts of the Link21 Team. Ultimately, everyone contributing to Link21 should feel accountable for considering equity within their work. As equity is receiving increased attention in transportation projects, the Link21 Team has carefully considered how to create a network of internal equity leaders that support the program's efforts to consider equity in all work.

PROGRAM MANAGEMENT TEAM EQUITY TEAM

The Program Management Team's (PMT)² Equity Team consists of BART's Link21 program director, OCR's Link21 liaison, and PMC staff. The PMT Equity Team leads efforts to apply OCR's emerging equity framework throughout Link21 work. The overarching responsibilities of the PMT Equity Team are to:

- Create and refine an equity strategy that is rooted in OCR's approach to guiding the full Link21 Team.
- Aid coordination on equity work that requires integration among different parts of the Link21 Team.
- Support other tasks in their efforts to implement Link21's equity strategy throughout their scope.

Accomplishing Link21's equity goals requires careful coordination within the PMT Equity Team and among the Link21 Team members. The PMT Equity Team's responsibilities that support coordination with other Link21 Team members include:

- Holding weekly PMT Equity Team meetings to discuss how equity is being incorporated into work throughout the program.

² BART/CCJPA and PMC



- Having a PMT Equity Team representative regularly attend programmatic meetings and meetings for other tasks to provide additional equity perspective and accountability.
- Hosting a regular Equity Coordination Meeting with equity leads from each Consultant team to promote cross-functional equity consideration.
- Participating in work plan development and review for all tasks to promote the incorporation of equity elements into the scope, schedule, and budget.

CONSULTANT TEAM EQUITY LEADS

The PMT Equity Team provides limited support for the direct implementation of the equity strategy, as each part of the Link21 Team must ultimately be responsible for identifying how the equity strategy applies to their work and for turning the strategy into action. In support of this, each of the four service category Consultants (Engagement and Outreach, Environmental, Planning and Engineering, and Travel Demand and Land Use) has a designated equity lead who oversees the implementation of equity into all work performed by that team. Notable areas of focus for the equity leads are:

- **Engagement and Outreach:** Equitable engagement strategies, including co-creation and the Equity Advisory Council (EAC)
- **Environmental:** Environmental justice communities and the identification of equity-related environmental constraints and opportunities
- **Planning and Engineering:** Concept development that meets the needs of communities, as heard through forums, such as co-creation
- **Travel Demand and Land Use:** Consideration of how communities that have been marginalized may be underrepresented in modeling techniques and in developing solutions to better account for those groups

9.2.2. Key Equity Work By Phase

The overall Link21 equity strategy is structured around the program's four development and delivery phases. The following list outlines the key points of strategic equity focus for each program phase; it is not exhaustive and may change as Link21 progresses.

- Phase 0: Program Definition
 - Establish a programmatic equity framework to guide all work.
 - Incorporate equity into the foundational technical work that guides all future work.



- Phase 1: Project Identification
 - Advance concepts that align with the expressed needs and desires of communities that have been marginalized with regards to markets, service, infrastructure, and technology.
 - Create additional paths to allow the Link21 Team to “design with” communities that have been marginalized.
- Phase 2: Project Selection
 - Identify equitable ways to fund and integrate housing and land use work into delivery.
 - Select a project that meets or exceeds all government standards for the type and extent of benefits and investments that will go to communities that have been marginalized.
- Phase 3: Project Delivery
 - Construct in a way that avoids, minimizes, or mitigates impacts to communities.
 - Deliver community benefits that are defined in partnership with communities that have been marginalized.

9.3. Implementation

This section provides a high-level overview of how the Link21 Team has incorporated equity into the delivery of Phase 0 and Phase 1 work. Equity is woven into work throughout the program, so this section is not an exhaustive list of all equity-related actions.

9.3.1. Phase 0: Program Definition

PROGRAMMATIC EQUITY STRATEGY

As described in Section 9.2, the Link21 Team created an *Equity Vision Statement*, *Equity Commitment*, and *Equity Blueprint Plan* during Phase 0. These documents serve as foundational resources. They will be regularly revisited and updated as the Link21 Team further refines its understanding of equity in partnership with communities that have been marginalized.

In advance of drafting the *Equity Blueprint Plan*, the Link21 Team also conducted a round of “landscaping” to inform how to approach equity. In landscaping, the Link21 Team held interviews with community, advocacy, academic, and agency leaders to understand their thoughts on questions such as:

- How should communities be engaged with?
- Who should the Link21 Team partner with to reach communities that have been marginalized?



- What should be centered in the program development process to advance equity?

This landscaping process allowed the Link21 Team to craft an equity framework that accounts for learnings from past work.

CO-CREATION

The Link21 Team is committed to conducting equitable engagement with communities that have been marginalized. One of the Link21 Team's most important tactics for this is community co-creation. In co-creation, the Link21 Team seeks to “design with” instead of “design for” communities by giving them a direct opportunity to shape the work that could impact them the most. Co-creation seeks to elevate the importance of community stakeholders in comparison to more typical engagement work. It allows the Link21 Team to act on behalf of actual community needs instead of acting on assumptions of what those needs may be.

In co-creation, the Link21 Team partners with community-based organizations (CBO) who serve as effective partners to encourage participation from communities that have been marginalized. CBO partners and participants are compensated for their time and expertise.

During Phase 0, the Link21 Team conducted two rounds of community co-creation. Across these two rounds, the Link21 Team partnered with more than 30 unique CBOs, and they collaborated with over 600 community members through workshops and targeted surveys. The Link21 Team also conducted a poll of 1,500 low-income individuals and people of color to supplement learning. Details about each round are shown in **Table 9-1**.

Table 9-1. Co-creation Rounds 1 and 2

ROUND	TIMING	MAIN QUESTIONS
1	February-April 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ What goals and objectives do you have for Link21? ▫ How and where do you travel today? How and where would you like to travel? ▫ Do you have any concerns about how Link21 could impact your community?
2	August-October 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ What are the biggest barriers to achieving equal access and opportunities? ▫ How should Link21 identify priority populations?

These two rounds of co-creation directly shaped some of the most important pieces of work in Phase 0, including:

- Program goals, objectives, and the metrics underpinning them
- Equity evaluation framework for the business case
- Priority populations definition



▫ *Equity Vision Statement and Equity Commitment*

A summary of co-creation Rounds 1 and 2 is posted on the [Link21 website](#). The Link21 Team continues to look for new ways community contributions from co-creation Rounds 1 and 2 can influence current work.

PRIORITY POPULATIONS DEFINITION

Equitably balancing the benefits and burdens associated with Link21 requires an understanding of what geographic areas are most impacted by inequity today. The Link21 Team refers to these areas as *priority populations* (PP), which are the census tracts in the Megaregion where people are most impacted by negative economic, mobility, community, health, and safety outcomes.

The Link21 PP definition was developed through a rigorous process that included co-creation with communities that have been marginalized, thorough research, and conversations with agency stakeholders.

The primary use of PP is within the Business Case (described further in the Business Case Equity Evaluation Framework subsection). In the [Market Analysis](#), increased weight was placed on PP trips. This was intended to counteract the tendency of modeling to underestimate ridership from communities that have been marginalized and the structural conditions (e.g., lack of access to rail) that can make it harder for communities that have been marginalized to ride today.

The Link21 Team also endeavors to use this definition where applicable in other work. This includes emphasizing the distinction between PP and communities that have been marginalized, which is a broader term that refers to individuals, groups, or sets of the population that are of equity importance to the program due to experiencing inequitable conditions.

A factsheet and a PP map are available on the [Link21 website](#).

BUSINESS CASE EQUITY EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

Setting up the overall *Business Case Methodology* and *Strategic Case Framework* was an important Phase 0 milestone (refer to *Chapter 2: Business Case*). The Link21 Team also developed a framework for including and evaluating equity within the Business Case.

Co-creation input shaped Link21's goals and objectives and the metrics the Business Case uses to assess whether those goals and objectives are realized. Some of these metrics can be disaggregated to show the anticipated benefit to PP in comparison to all other census tracts (general population). This breakout allows the Link21 Team to understand what proportion of benefits would accrue to PP, which is key to assessing whether a concept could be equitable. Metrics were also assigned an equity weighting based on their prominence in co-creation so that higher values could be assigned to the outcomes that communities said they need the most.



EQUITY IMPLEMENTATION PLANS

The *Equity Blueprint Plan* provides high-level guidance for how different parts of the Link21 Team can incorporate equity in their work. To identify more detailed actions, the equity lead for each of the four Consultant teams developed an *Equity Implementation Plan* that documented the anticipated mindsets and actions that different parts of the program would take to advance equity during the remainder of Phase 0 and in Phase 1.

EQUITY ONBOARDING

Onboarding the Link21 Team to the program's equity approach was an essential step to establishing a shared understanding of the approach and to enable each member of the team to consider equity within their work. Sessions were held to onboard the team to the *Equity Blueprint Plan*, and the four Consultant teams also participated in a seven-part equity onboarding series.

9.3.2. Phase 1: Program Selection

BUSINESS CASE EVALUATION

In Phase 1, the Link21 Team has refined the *Business Case Equity Evaluation Framework*, and they are beginning to apply it to initial concepts. Results from this evaluation will influence how concepts are iteratively refined throughout the phase.

During Phase 1, the Link21 Team will also examine what adjustments should be made to how equity is measured within modeling and the Business Case for Phase 2. This includes the consideration of anti-displacement metrics and strategies.

CO-CREATION

Across June and July 2022, the Link21 Team partnered with 11 CBOs to work with 222 community members on a third round of co-creation. The goals of Round 3 were to better understand the transportation challenges in neighborhoods that might be impacted by Link21 work and to co-create potential solutions for those challenges.

Information shared by community members was used to develop initial Link21 concepts. The Link21 Team plans to hold additional co-creation activities, or similar equitable engagement efforts, in 2023.

EQUITY ADVISORY COUNCIL

Though co-creation is an essential equitable engagement tactic, the Link21 Team recognizes there must be multiple ways for communities that have been marginalized to participate in program development. Another key form of dedicated equitable engagement is Link21's EAC.



Through the EAC, the Link21 Team aims to accomplish the following:

- Integrate lived experts (those who have lived experience in inequitable transportation and infrastructure) into Link21 work, including the Stage Gate Process.
- Supplement other equitable engagement activities, such as co-creation workshops, to increase opportunities for community partnership and to influence the Link21 Team's work at key points in program development.
- Introduce a community-driven body with the benefit of long-term engagement with the program, which will allow for deeper discussions and stronger community alignment with how Link21 progresses.

The EAC is composed of diverse individuals that represent various communities that have been marginalized. Starting in 2023, the EAC will meet bimonthly to discuss key Link21 work. Similar to co-creation, the Link21 Team seeks to engage the EAC on topics where their input can directly shape work.

More details about the EAC are available on the [Link21 website](#).

EQUITY BASELINE REPORT

The Link21 Team needs to understand the current state of inequity in the Megaregion to design, in partnership with communities, solutions that advance equity. During Phase 1, the Link21 Team finalized its [Equity Baseline Report](#), which summarizes the Megaregion's demographics, the current distribution of burdens as identified by the Link21 Team, and the current travel behaviors of communities in the Megaregion. In addition, the report highlights the disparities between the general population as a whole and PP.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE COMMUNITIES

In fall 2022, the Link21 Team conducted a preliminary mapping exercise, in accordance with Federal Transit Administration methodology, of Environmental Justice populations within the Metropolitan Transportation Commission's region. This preliminary mapping helped the Link21 Team identify equity communities that may not have been captured in the PP definition but should be emphasized as important locations for community engagement.

CONTINUED EQUITY LEARNING

Continuous learning helps promote more equitable work. The Link21 Team plans to hold internal knowledge-building sessions during Phase 1 to support staff in better incorporating equity into their work.



EMERGING EQUITY STRATEGIES

The Link21 Team's understanding of equity is always evolving as the team learns more in partnership with communities. As the program transitions into more detailed planning and eventually environmental review, design, construction, and operations, new tactics need to be considered to make this work equitable. To assess the viability of potential new additions to Link21's equity approach, the Link21 Team is authoring papers on information sharing, community benefits, and participatory budgeting. These high-level papers will support the Link21 Team in its near-term efforts to enhance equity work. They will also inform future work planning.

9.3.3. Stage Gate Support

As part of Stage Gate 2 documentation, the program will demonstrate the full implementation of the *Equity Commitment* throughout the entire development process and that the team has recommended a project(s) that advances equity. The Link21 Team anticipates that a similar equity statement will likely be a part of future stage gates as well.

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