



CONNECT NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

EQUITY BLUEPRINT PLAN

DRAFT FINAL

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ACRONYM/ABBREVIATION	DEFINITION
BART	San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit
CCJPA	Capitol Corridor Joint Powers Authority
CBO	community-based organizations
DBE	Disadvantaged Business Enterprise
MTC	Metropolitan Transportation Commission
OCR	Office of Civil Rights
PMC	Program Management Consultants
PMT	Program Management Team
RDC	Reflex Design Collective
SBE	Small Business Entity

LINK21 PROGRAM TEAM NAMES

TEAM NAME	TEAM MEMBERS
Program Management Consultants (PMC)	The HNTB Team, including Reflex Design Collective
PMT	BART/CCJPA + PMC
Consultants	Consultants supporting program identification/project selection
Link21 Team	PMT + Consultants

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1. PURPOSE

From the outset of the Link21 Program (Link21), San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) and Capitol Corridor Joint Powers Authority (CCJPA) Board members, executives, and staff charged the Link21 Team¹ to set a new standard for how megaprojects advance equity. Since the initiation of Link21 in 2019, BART and CCJPA, as well as partner agencies throughout Northern California, have reaffirmed their commitment to equity. As the largest re-envisioning of how passenger rail can serve Northern Californians since the original development of BART and Regional Rail² systems, Link21 represents an opportunity to make a positive generational impact in the equity space.

Understanding the importance of prioritizing equity from the start of work, the Program Management Team (PMT)³ adopted a programmatic approach to equity that demands attention across all tasks and throughout all program phases.

This *Equity Blueprint Plan* is a framework to shape how the Link21 Team approaches equity. Although the most specific recommendations in this plan concern the PMT, the broad approaches and mindsets set out in this *Equity Blueprint Plan* should also serve as guiding principles for future individuals working on Link21.

1.1. Overview

Large-scale transit infrastructure projects create significant opportunities for the communities they serve, but they also have a long history of unintended impacts on communities, particularly low-income communities of color. To avoid these disparate, negative impacts based on community or identity, the Link21 Team will need to plan ahead. Sections 2, 3, and 4 overview the iterative process recommended for the Link21 Team to promote both equitable processes and outcomes:

1. **Reflect:** Understand internal biases in assessing impacts and benefits.
2. **Contextualize:** Consider history and lessons learned from previous projects and account for them in the development and execution of Link21.
3. **Co-create:** Work with experts, peer agencies, community organizations, and the public to craft program elements that reflect a wide range of views, perspectives, and context relevant to the impacts and benefits associated with Link21.

Members of the Link21 Team should apply the approaches and mindsets included in this plan to all of their work.

¹ Comprised of BART/CCJPA, Program Management Consultants (PMC), and Consultants supporting program identification/project selection (Consultants).

² Could include commuter, intercity, or high-speed rail.

³ Comprised of BART/CCJPA and the PMC.



1.2. Equity: What It Is

The Link21 Team's commitment to advancing equity is a commitment to reducing the inequitable distribution of benefits and burdens that currently exists throughout the Megaregion.

Equity is defined as the state, quality or ideal of being just, impartial and fair. It is a state in which an individual's background does not predetermine or predict their opportunity.⁴ Given the reality that some communities have been afforded certain resources at the expense of others, and that barriers to accessing these resources have been intentionally and unintentionally restricted by those with relative privilege and power, residents of the Northern California Megaregion (Megaregion) currently live in an inequitable state.

Equitable processes and outcomes work to make sure that priority populations⁵ get the *same* benefits as everyone else. Achieving this, though, requires putting additional *effort* into advancing these equitable outcomes, because the status quo has intentionally disenfranchised these groups for a long time. The Link21 Team will, first and foremost, have to work hard to unlearn inequitable practices and approach this program differently. Seemingly innocuous trade-offs at every step of an infrastructure project determine whether inequitable patterns will continue or be reversed.

Disproportionate harms, such as displacement, gentrification, and community destabilization, continue to accrue to low-income communities of color where land may be cheaper and property ownership has long been distorted by discriminatory lending practices. Simultaneously, disproportionate benefits accumulate to largely white and middle-upper class communities, who have been given a seat at the planning table when designing these projects and determining their funding sources. This is also a reality for those who are disabled, younger, older, and non-English speaking, among other groups.

Achieving equity in the Megaregion will require action from a wide variety of partners and agencies; however, the Link21 Team can tangibly contribute to better outcomes for historically marginalized communities in the 21 counties. The Link21 Team can also amplify its impact by setting a standard for how other public agencies can consider equity in their work.

1.3. Equity: Why and How

Public agencies exist to serve all constituents. Every resident deserves good outcomes, not only the loudest or most powerful. Transportation planning practices, however, continue to embed social inequity by prioritizing the voices most comfortable at the

⁴ This is a commonly accepted definition of equity, e.g., see <https://sgba-resource.ca/en/concepts/equity/distinguish-between-equity-and-equality/>

⁵ Link21's priority populations consist of census tracts identified as priority populations (disadvantaged or low-income) by the State of California and Communities of Concern by the Metropolitan Transportation Commission and Congestion Management Agencies.



table. Over time, these voices have shaped the way cities are designed and operate, further justifying their existence.

The Link21 Team must, therefore, be intentional about transforming this active legacy at all levels of the Link21 Team, including through intentional community engagement processes that meet constituents where they are; active and ongoing evaluation of goals, objectives and metrics for normative assumptions and traditional biases; and, honest, transparent, and authentic communication at all steps of the process.

Ultimately, equity is not a uniform concept and must be defined in and through partnership with community members. A history of exclusion and broken promises, however, leaves many communities unaware of, distrustful of or unenthused by government work. To counteract this, the Link21 Team needs to invest time, commitment, resources, and expertise into equity.

The quality of equity work has significant implications for the long-term health and safety of Bay Area communities. Link21 may be the largest overhaul to passenger rail in the Megaregion for generations to come, and the improvements that it advances will define the system — including what future projects are prioritized — for potentially more than a century. If Link21 does not create more equitable outcomes, it will entrench the status quo and perpetuate the continued marginalization of minority and low-income communities by limiting access to opportunity, displacement, and other burdens.



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2. REFLECT: INTERNAL ASSETS AND BIASES

Reflection hinges on understanding what the Link21 Team brings to the table, both in strengths and challenges. With a long-range program like Link21, the pieces may fall into place differently than planners currently expect or can imagine. Therefore, it is important to consider the “big picture” from the start. Seemingly small choices or leanings can cause Link21’s goals and values to veer off course when extended into the distant future.

BART’s Office of Civil Rights (OCR) leads equity policy and action for the Link21 Team and BART at large. OCR has a Public Participation Plan that details the BART District’s current standards for more equitable community engagement, as well as staff dedicated to federal civil rights compliance work. OCR is in the process of developing a more robust equity framework for the BART District that will proactively address the ongoing inequitable distribution of benefits and burdens throughout the BART service area. It will result in the organization’s wholesale commitment to equity work and will catalogue policies, procedures, programs, and projects throughout the organization to identify opportunities to better serve the needs of all Bay Area residents.

When reflecting, the Link21 Team should also question existing standards or norms in transportation planning and program development more broadly. Approaches that may have been codified as ‘best practice’ over the years could actually be perpetuating inequity, as many large infrastructure projects have not created needed benefits and reduced burdens for disenfranchised communities.

The Link21 Team has already begun important reflection work. Notably, by defining “priority populations,” the Link21 Team acknowledges that the opinions of some groups with common social, economic, and demographic factors are typically overlooked in large infrastructure project development and have committed to intentionally including these communities.



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3. CONTEXTUALIZE: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND CURRENT REALITIES

Equity is rooted in context — how the distribution of benefits and harms has emerged within the context of historical and current patterns and governments actions. To engage fully with communities, the Link21 Team must learn about a community's strengths, needs, and priorities and how they have been formed by past experiences and current actions.

The Link21 Team can better understand community feedback when put in context, particularly the context of past transportation projects and current service. Context defines the baseline conditions in place at the start of this program and serves as a benchmark against which program outcomes can be measured. Given Link21's commitment to reducing the inequitable distribution of benefits and burdens, this context is critical to understanding what is needed from a project.

In Section 3.1 there are some key contextual elements that have shaped these inequities. They represent ongoing challenges and the experiences that continue to impact how residents think about and move through the 21 counties.

3.1. Past Actions, Current Impacts

Past grievances, real and perceived, affect how individuals and communities comprehend current events. Overarching historical trends and individual events are relevant to understanding how marginalized communities react to BART, CCJPA, and Link21. Some of these key trends are listed in the following bullets. There are many more past actions that continue to impact communities today. Inviting community members to further catalogue past harms can provide a clearer picture of the starting line for Link21.

- **Dispossession of indigenous land:** Indigenous peoples in Northern California were stripped of their land by the Mexican, Spanish, and United States governments. Today, many indigenous peoples do not recognize the authority of the state over land in the Megaregion. Respecting indigenous peoples requires highlighting and prioritizing their needs in the Link21 Team's work.
- **Structural racism:** Legal and social barriers and discriminatory practices have systemically marginalized minority populations in the United States for centuries. The historical use of public and private resources to benefit select groups has resulted in inequalities of wealth, wellness, and opportunity. Without deliberate effort to recognize and address the needs and concerns of minority populations, Link21 will perpetuate these inequitable conditions.



- **Disparate investment in rail over buses:** *Darensburg v. MTC*⁶ (2005) charged that MTC exhibited discriminatory behavior by investing disproportionately in rail over bus systems, since rail riders are disproportionately white and wealthy compared to bus riders. The logic of *Darensburg* remains relevant today. To address these concerns, the Link21 Team should identify and meet the needs of transit-dependent riders and craft a long-term funding strategy that relies on equitable funding sources.
- **Commuter rail development:** After World War II, middle- and high-income white individuals began moving to newly formed, government-subsidized suburbs in large numbers. Infrastructure investment decisions since then, including the alignment of rail systems, fare structures, and hours of operation, in large part were made to meet the commute needs of these growing suburbs. This 70-year history nationwide created the narrative that suburban commuters are the demographic most likely to ride rail. In reality, this is just the group with the best access to quality rail; discriminatory planning practices created barriers to access for other groups.
- **Displacement, gentrification, and the suburbanization of poverty:** Trends of “white flight” from urban areas that began in the 1960s have recently started to reverse, as more wealthy individuals and families look to live in cities. Without protections in place, the return of investment to urban neighborhoods has often resulted in rapidly increasing rent and cost of living that, along with limited tenants’ rights, forces lower income residents to seek less expensive housing elsewhere. This gentrification is particularly acute around marque new amenities like transit stations. As lower-income residents are displaced, they often find cheaper housing in the suburbs, but this may come at the tradeoff of inconvenient access to the amenities and services, like transit, that are essential to their lives. Northern California, and in particular Bay Area cities like San Francisco and Oakland, has experienced extreme levels of displacement.

3.2. Challenges Facing Us All

State and national issues beyond the Link21 Team’s direct control will intersect with Link21’s work and amplify the impacts of Link21 for better or for worse. By identifying these challenges early, the Link21 Team can develop tactics to overcome them and establish a new standard for transportation work and megaregional planning.

⁶ Metropolitan Transportation Commission



Some of these challenges, and their connection to equity, are listed here:

- **Changing political regimes:** Link21 will be developed across multiple political administrations at the local, regional, state, and national level. Though policies may shift as administrations change, the Link21 Team should seek to implement equity best practices regardless of requirements.
- **COVID-19:** The COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately burdened low-income and minority communities. Transportation systems have been impacted by shrinking ridership leading to fiscal challenges and may result in fewer people commuting to work in the long-term. This highlights the importance of serving transit-dependent riders and the need to explore new funding models.
- **Climate change:** Avoiding catastrophic climate change impacts requires achieving significant greenhouse gas emissions reductions. For transit projects, these emissions are largely achieved by increasing ridership and mode share. Options that maximize ridership, however, may not be options that offer direct benefits to low-income and minority communities, who are often the most impacted by climate change. The Link21 Team will need to identify options that yield desired emissions reductions while also serving priority populations.

3.3. Building on Progress

As the Link21 Team seeks to set a new standard for how megaprojects advance equity, the Team can leverage the efforts and resources of others. Equity staff on the Link21 Team will continuously monitor for developments from peer agencies. Relevant opportunities for this are in the following bullets:

- **Capitol Collaborative on Race and Equity:** The California Strategic Growth Council is helping agencies like the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) develop more robust equity strategies. Understanding what other agencies are doing can help position Link21 to receive funding and to coordinate better.
- **Communities of Concern Update:** MTC is embarking on a multi-year effort to update its Communities of Concern definition, which identifies census tracts of interest in the nine-county Bay Area. MTC will be considering extensive expert and public input throughout this process. Input received may be relevant to the Link21 Team.
- **Community Resources:** Outside of the public sector, community groups are effective at identifying their own needs and advocating for solutions. These organizations already have deep ties with community members, so if partnered with, they can help the Link21 Team hear from communities that are often considered difficult to reach.



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4. CO-CREATE: EQUITABLE ENGAGEMENT

Engagement is key to building equity into program development and implementation that reflects the actual — rather than perceived — needs and goals of Link21 communities. There are different levels of community engagement (**Table 4-1**), and each has its own purpose, but partnership — or co-creation — is considered a best practice to ensure equitable processes and outcomes.

As previously noted, major transportation projects have often failed to serve those most in need of their benefits. This is due in large part to insufficient community engagement strategies that are inaccessible to priority populations. As a result, the Link21 Team has committed to a co-creation approach, particularly with priority populations, that will bring underrepresented voices to the table early and often. As opposed to alternative engagement strategies that often misinterpret or ignore public input, co-creation builds both accountability and trust through ongoing collaborative relationships.

Table 4-1. Community Engagement Spectrum⁷

PARTICIPATION		ENGAGEMENT		PARTNERSHIP
Outreach	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Co-Create
Communication flows from the program or initiative to inform community members	Community members provide one-time or periodic feedback	Communication flows both ways and community members provide ongoing participation	Community members influence decision-making	Community members share power and responsibility, making decisions together
Outcome: Optimally establishes reliable communication channels to the community	Outcome: Develops connections	Outcome: Establishes visibility of the partner and increased cooperation	Outcome: Increased trust and partnership-building	Outcome: Strong partnership with bidirectional trust that affects broader community outcomes (e.g., health, wealth, and opportunity)

Note: From left to right, categories reflect increasing levels of community involvement, impact, trust, and communication flow.

⁷ Office of Health Equity, Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. "Authentic Community Engagement to Advance Equity," n.d. <https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/sites/default/files/Authentic-Community-Engagement-to-Advance-Equity.pdf>.



In co-creation, community members are recognized as knowledgeable peers in decision-making processes rather than outsiders with limited input.⁸ This approach builds trust, showing that Link21 is *for* them as well.

Co-creation involves the following process:

- **Identify** opportunities to collaboratively address community priorities through partnerships.
- **Co-create** program work, including initial concepts, with community stakeholders.
- **Address** the technical considerations of incorporating community input.
- **Solicit** feedback on updated proposals in terms community members can understand.
- **Refine** the proposals further by incorporating learnings.
- **Continue** to iterate with and for communities at each step.

Co-creation brings together planners and technical experts with residents and lived experience experts. Early community involvement will help prevent us from “anchoring” on a particular idea that could become a foundational aspect of the work without serving the needs of community members. The political slogan “nothing about us without us” may be a simple summary: the best outcomes can only come with the involvement of the people being served by the work.

Crucially for the Link21 Team, this process should continue throughout Link21 and through each project. The Link21 Team will be most successful in advancing equity if they continually iterate with community stakeholders through design and implementation.

⁸ Stanton, Brooke, Julia Kramer, Pierce Gordon, and Lauren Valdez. “From the Technical to the Political: Democratizing Design.” *Contested Cities*, 2018.



5. HIGH-LEVEL RECOMMENDATIONS

Table 5-1 is a set of high-level recommendations that support equitable processes and outcomes for Link21. These recommendations and tactics are described in the following subsections. There is some overlap between the bulleted actions that undergird these interrelated recommendations because these strategies are meant to work together.

Table 5-1. High-Level Recommendations for Considering Equity

RECOMMENDATION	TACTICS
Reflect: Think about equity programmatically	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Develop a strong, clear alignment on equity internally ▫ Incorporate equity into each task ▫ Consider equity in current and future phases ▫ Be open to adjusting timelines and budgets ▫ Plan for bureaucracy ▫ Leverage internal resources
Contextualize: See the full picture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Account for the full Megaregion ▫ Proactively consider race, class, age, and other identities ▫ Convene parallel tables with other agencies ▫ Pursue policy development ▫ Recognize and redress past harms ▫ Know and address the opportunity costs ▫ Understand the current conditions
Co-Create: Treat the community as core partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Communicate clearly, early, and transparently ▫ Build relationships intentionally and consistently ▫ Continue co-creation ▫ Invest locally ▫ Compensate partners fairly ▫ Create and utilize equity councils ▫ Consider a Community Benefits Agreement ▫ Practice participatory budgeting

5.1. Reflect: Think about Equity Programmatically

Process is product. The Link21 Team will not create equitable outcomes without committing to equitable processes that apply comprehensively throughout the program. Make every decision with an eye towards creating a Megaregion with the conditions that allow every resident and visitor to thrive. This will require keeping everyone on the same page through transparency and feedback loops.

The following are suggested tactics for the Link21 Team to think about equity programmatically.



- **Develop a strong, clear alignment on equity internally.** Just as the California High-speed Rail Authority rallies staff around the “biggest, greenest rail” goal, the Link21 Team can rally around tangible, equity-related objectives that are easily understood and widely applied throughout Link21. Developing a simple slogan to support a shared understanding and values-aligned decision-making will encourage prioritization of equity in every task.
- **Incorporate equity into each task.** Engagement and co-creation are essential parts of equity, but all tasks need to be thinking strategically and acting to advance equity through their work.
- **Consider equity in current and future phases.** Though the PMT is diligently working to determine what equitable processes look like for Link21, equity will be an evolving concept throughout Link21’s life cycle. Different program phases bring new equity considerations, and the Link21 Team’s understanding of equity will shift as information comes in from communities. The Link21 Team must make room at every stage of program development to integrate community priorities and equity best practices.
- **Be open to adjusting timelines and budgets.** Advancing equity will not always be easy, and the path forward will not always be clear. Developing long-term strategies with communities may mean slowing down to make sure the Link21 Team understands its potential impact. Short-term, budget conscious choices can diminish the long-term benefit potential of the project and may unintentionally cost more down the road.
- **Plan for bureaucracy.** Government organizations have commitments to fairness that are codified in contracts and laws and must be observed. These processes need to happen, even though they may seem opaque, confusing, and unnecessary to outsiders. By understanding the nature of bureaucracy, the Link21 Team can:
 - Plan ahead to navigate requirements transparently with community members.
 - Engage communities early so that their feedback can be used.
 - Clarify the purpose of different steps.
 - Where possible, use bureaucracy to advance Link21’s goals. For example, Small Business Entity (SBE)/Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) requirements are an opportunity to bring staff with needed local perspective onto the Link21 Team. Do not use bureaucratic processes as a reason to overlook the Link21 Team’s equity commitment.



- **Leverage internal resources.** The Link21 Team includes equity practitioners, such as OCR staff, so when questions around equity arise, there is a resource to ask. Using other established resources, such as BART's Government and Community Relations connections to communities and Planning staff's relationships with regional planning experts, can help the Link21 Team accomplish its equity goals.

5.2. Contextualize: See the Full Picture

Based on its scale and scope, Link21 will have notable impact on opportunity, health, and wealth across the Megaregion. Link21 has the potential to provide benefits and create burdens beyond just transportation. The Link21 Team must endeavor to understand all of Link21's direct and indirect impacts and needs to take an active role in addressing them, even ones that fall outside of BART and CCJPA's normal sphere.

The following bullets are suggested tactics for the Link21 Team to consider the full context in its work.

- **Account for the full Megaregion.** A considerable amount of the Link21 Team's data, relationships, and attention is focused in the BART service area and more broadly in the nine-county Bay Area. Though the Bay Area demands attention as the most impacted part of the Megaregion, it is important to allocate time, resources, and attention across the 21 counties. The Link21 Team should vet its work with peer agencies, stakeholders, and the public in the Sacramento, Northern San Joaquin Valley, and Monterey Bay Areas to validate that it holds relevance throughout the Megaregion. This will include giving stakeholders from these areas seats on working groups and holding outreach events there.
- **Proactively consider race, class, gender, age, immigration status, and other identities.** The Link21 Team is developing a targeted definition of priority populations that proactively acknowledges the impact decisions will have on different community members. It is imperative that all staff working on the program understand these identities and their intersections when thinking through different decision-making steps. This takes contextual knowledge and practice but forming the habit will support staff in thinking ahead about who to consider and how on different decisions.
- **Convene parallel tables with other agencies.** For problems or requests outside of the Link21 Team's scope or control, the Link21 Team should use BART and CCJPA's institutional power and existing relationships to convene a "parallel table." In this proactive approach, instead of passing an issue off to another agency, the Link21 Team will actively work with agencies who control the relevant policy levers to communicate the importance of the issue to Link21 and to advocate for solutions that amplify Link21's benefits and decrease potential burdens. On a case-by-case basis, include other agencies, advocates, and community members in parallel tables. It is not sufficient to simply hear the community, the Link21 Team must also act with the community, to the best of its ability, to address the issues raised.



- Parallel table issues for Link21 could include housing, fare integration, connecting transit service, workforce development and employment opportunities, and many more. For example, if the Link21 Team hears from an East Oakland community that a new station would cause too much displacement without additional affordable housing or anti-displacement strategies in place. Instead of either telling the community to raise the concern with the City of Oakland or simply notifying the City of the issue, the Link21 Team should convene a “parallel table” with the City, affordable housing developers, major property owners in the neighborhood, and community leaders. This would consist of arranging meetings with relevant stakeholders, sharing internal data on the issues (e.g., displacement modeling), and advocating for policies that would address the community concern.
- **Pursue policy development.** Achieving Link21’s goals will require new and updated policies at the local, regional, state, and even national level. The Link21 Team should engage in policy discussions with relevant bodies that can increase Link21’s benefits and decrease its burdens, and proactively share data to inform these discussions. For example, by conducting analysis into how fares affect projected Link21 ridership, the Link21 Team can play a more active role in policy discussions around fare coordination.
- **Recognize and redress past harms.** Acknowledging that past transportation projects have harmed communities is key to building trust. As the largest improvement to the Megaregion’s rail network since BART and other Regional Rail systems were created, Link21 doubles as an opportunity to create improvements that both address future needs and redress past harms. This redress could look like a seat at the table for historically underrepresented communities, allocating additional benefits and resources to previously harmed communities, and remediating the impacts of transportation infrastructure on communities and the built environment. At a minimum, it includes prioritizing engagement with historically impacted communities so the Link21 Team can learn about their burdens and how to address them.
- **Know and address the opportunity cost.** *Darensburg v. MTC* (2005) recognized that rail improvements came at the expense of potential bus improvements, which serve a greater proportion of low-income communities of color. This means that without explicit effort to provide benefits to low-income communities of color, Link21 will start from a doubly inequitable position of prioritizing improvements that could benefit wealthier riders while decreasing the pot for bus improvements. Consider how Link21 can benefit current bus riders throughout program work.
- **Understand the current conditions.** The PMT’s Equity Team will prepare an Equity Baseline Report that captures the current conditions, in particular current levels of benefits and burdens, for priority populations throughout the Megaregion. Understanding this baseline will help the Link21 Team set targeted goals and identify what additional benefits are needed at macro and micro levels.



5.3. Co-Create: Treat the Community as Core Partners

Almost every organization and individual has blind spots, assumptions, and behaviors they are not aware of that impact personal, interpersonal, and organizational relationships and experiences. Blind spots translate good intentions into negative, unintended impacts. When making decisions, the Link21 Team will invite diverse stakeholders to identify the immediate and long-term impacts of Link21's decisions. Co-creation offers the best chance of avoiding blind spots, while developing solutions that work well for as many people as possible.

The following are suggested tactics for the Link21 Team to see the community as core partners.

- **Communicate clearly and transparently.** Not every decision can be made by consensus, but every decision can be made transparently. This includes having open and honest conversations about what is under consideration to try to avoid overpromising to communities. Transparency is critical to being accountable to the public, especially priority populations who may not find standard communications intuitive or may actively distrust government communications. With transparent decision-making and clear communication, challenges can be addressed early rather than escalating over years and decades.
- **Build relationships intentionally and consistently.** The Link21 Team should invest time in fostering reciprocal relationships with community leaders, organizations, and residents that will be most impacted by ongoing inequitable transit. They should make sure these partners receive as much benefit from their collaboration as the Link21 Team receives from their expertise. These relationships need to be nurtured over time through consistent communication, not just prior to requesting support. Newsletters and one-on-one follow ups after an engagement event will help them stay updated on Link21's progress and provide them with open lines of communication to use as needed.
- **Continue co-creation.** The process of co-creation with the public that has started in Phase 0 should continue throughout Link21. The Engagement and Outreach Team will coordinate with other tasks to identify topics for future rounds. In addition to co-creation focus groups, the Link21 Team should always consider equity within its broader engagement. This will include investing in promoting public workshops and surveys in priority populations and developing materials that are understandable to people with different transportation baselines and backgrounds. Equitable engagement is not an additional engagement strategy but is central to ensuring that all of the public has been given a chance to weigh in on the project.
- **Invest locally.** Using local minority-owned and small businesses, help spread the economic benefit of Link21's development to communities that are often excluded. Firms entrenched in these communities bring needed perspective to the Link21 Team. When fulfilling SBE/DBE requirements in the PMT and Consultant workshops, staff should be intentional about partnering firms based in the potential



new transbay passenger rail crossing project (Crossing Project) area. Internships or other training programs are also ways to incorporate the local community.

- **Compensate partners fairly.** Community-based organizations (CBO) and participants are essential partners in successful co-creation. Payment may not be necessary for general outreach, but compensation should be considered for more intensive contributions, such as focus groups or advisory councils. Compensating both CBOs and public participants is a best practice currently employed by peer agencies, such as MTC, the San Francisco County Transportation Authority (SFCTA), and the City of Oakland.
- **Create and utilize equity councils.** The PMT is working on proposals for a Link21 equity accountability council(s), comprised of community leaders and liaisons. The PMT should clearly identify powers for this group and set expectations on when meetings will occur in the Link21 development process, what will go to the council, and how input will be incorporated. Anything presented must be adequately explained so that community members or representatives on the council can provide meaningful feedback and share information with their communities.
- **Consider a Community Benefits Agreement.** Project-specific benefits may not be readily available to all impacted communities, so the Link21 Team should engage in a design and development process that enables these communities to request other benefits from a project, such as workforce development, local hire requirements, affordable housing, or small business set asides.
- **Practice participatory budgeting.** Marginalized communities have traditionally faced underinvestment and disinvestment. Redressing past harm requires actively investing in marginalized communities in ways that help local residents thrive in place. Participatory budgeting is a process that invites community members to learn about government/project budgeting and to determine budget priorities to reverse investment inequity. This form of co-creation has been proven effective across the country. Places in the Megaregion, including the City of Oakland, Merced County, and City of Vallejo, have used participatory budgeting to increase buy-in and encourage more equitable practices. Participatory budgeting will become particularly relevant at more detailed phases of analysis (e.g., what amenities would you create for a station in your community if you had X dollars), but the Link21 Team should also consider how it could factor in earlier in the process.



6. CONCLUSION

Link21 will transform the Megaregion, changing how people move, work, play, study, and thrive equitably in Northern California. To successfully create equitable outcomes, the Link21 Team will be intentional in its efforts to consider equity. As a blueprint, this plan recommends the following approach:

1. **Reflect:** Understand internal biases in assessing impacts and benefits.
2. **Contextualize:** Consider history and lessons learned and account for them in the development and execution of Link21.
3. **Co-create:** Work with experts, peer agencies, community organizations, and the public to craft program elements that reflect a wide range of views, perspectives, and context relevant to the impacts and benefits associated with Link21.

The Link21 Team members should consider the mindsets and approaches laid out in this plan as part of their day-to-day activities and tasks associated with this program.