

PRIORITY POPULATIONS

An Updated Definition for Link21



OVERVIEW AND DEFINITION

The Link21 Program is committed to advancing equity in the Northern California Megaregion through accessible and connected passenger rail. Link21 has a goal to promote equity and livability, striving to deliver benefits needed by communities that may have been harmed previously by past infrastructure and transportation projects.

The Program's priority populations definition is one tool to help evaluate how equitably Link21 benefits and burdens could be distributed. Priority populations will receive emphasis throughout program development work. Link21's priority populations do not capture every community that experiences inequities. Instead, it is intended to complement and support other ways that equity is being considered by the Link21 Program.

NEED FOR AN UPDATE

The preliminary definition combined designations used by the State, Metropolitan Transportation Commission, and local counties. However, it lacked a consistent methodology across the Megaregion and program-specific community input. The previous definition identified nearly 50% of the Megaregion as priority populations, which made it difficult to make informed equity decisions.

The Bay Area Rapid Transit District, Capitol Corridor Joint Powers Authority, and other agencies at all levels of government are increasingly defining equity based on the distribution of benefits and burdens. The updated priority population definition also better aligns Link21's work with this burdens-based approach.



Priority Population Definition

Link21 defines priority populations as census tracts where people are most impacted by negative **economic, mobility, community** and **health and safety** outcomes.



Economic



Mobility



Health & Safety



Community

PRIORITY POPULATIONS



BURDENS IN THE UPDATED PRIORITY POPULATION DEFINITION

Economic

Low Income, unemployment, low wages, family size, multiple jobs, and housing cost burden.

Health & Safety

Medically underserved areas, asthma rates, heart disease deaths, poor air quality, auto collisions, overcrowded homes, and low employment benefits.

Mobility

Transportation cost burden, zero car households, car-to-worker mismatch, long commute length, and limited access to transit.

Community

Disconnected youth, miles of highway, limited access to parks, limited access to groceries, low educational attainment, displacement, older adults, and limited internet access.

Definition Update Process*

Priority populations were identified and validated through the three-step process outlined below:

STEP 1: QUALIFY

Determine the census tracts with higher proportions of low-income, transportation cost burdened, or non-white populations. Those tracts are evaluated in the next step.

STEP 2: EVALUATE

Determine the census tracts where people experience the highest levels of economic, mobility, community, and health and safety burdens. Those tracts are considered priority populations.

STEP 3: VALIDATE

Conduct a demographic analysis of the priority population tracts defined in **Evaluate** to validate the definition correlates with identities that have historically been marginalized: race/ethnicity, gender, disability, limited English proficiency, foreign born, single parent household, and veteran status.

*Additional identities that have been historically marginalized, such as LGBTQIA+ individuals and unhoused community members, could not be included in the validation process due to a lack of available Megaregional data. Link21 will continue to work with these communities through co-creation.



Shaped by Community Input

Communities played a key role in shaping the updated definition by providing input to support the identification, validation, and weighting of burdens. Initial input from co-creation workshops and surveys (over 300 community members) and a poll (1,500 community members) resulted in the updated priority population definition.



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Next Steps

The priority populations definition will be utilized in the creation and evaluation of Link21 concepts, among other work. The definition will be revisited at appropriate points to determine whether additional community feedback, emerging practices, or newly available data should be incorporated.

Link21 is sponsored by the San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit District (BART) and the Capitol Corridor Joint Powers Authority (Capitol Corridor). The Program Team is also working closely with our Northern California rail partners and the state of California to ensure an integrated rail program. For more information visit Link21Program.org.

