

# Actualizing Equity: Integrating Anti-Displacement into Transit Evaluation

From housing to transportation, many community development projects led by government agencies include community engagement to ostensibly integrate the insights of those most impacted. But, too often, these “public” processes are highly technical and challenging for community members to understand, let alone respond to in ways that have real and meaningful impact on the project. At our July 2024 Actualizing Equity event we explored how these dynamics show up within the work of the Blue Line Coalition, hearing from Anndrea Young from Heritage Park Neighborhood Association, Mitchel Hansen from Harrison Neighborhood Association, Malik Holt-Shabazz from the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs and Kelcie Young from Metro Transit.

Any public transit project must undergo an Environmental Impact Statement that “provides detailed information about the extent of potentially significant environmental impacts of a proposed project and identifies methods for reducing adverse environmental effects.” For the Blue Line Light Rail Extension, advocates emphasized the need to integrate anti-displacement considerations into the environmental impacts.

## Environmental Protection Agency definition

**Environmental justice means** the just treatment and meaningful involvement of all people, regardless of income, race, color, national origin, Tribal affiliation, or disability, in agency decision-making and other Federal activities that affect human health and the environment so that people:

- are fully protected from disproportionate and adverse human health and environmental effects (including risks) and hazards, including those related to climate change, the cumulative impacts of environmental and other burdens, and the legacy of racism or other structural or systemic barriers; and
- have equitable access to a healthy, sustainable, and resilient environment in which to live, play, work, learn, grow, worship, and engage in cultural and subsistence practices

## What Does Environmental Justice Look Like for the Blue Line Extension Project?



When it comes to environmental justice, you have to start with racism. BIPOC communities have always been victimized by environmental hazards, and half of BIPOC people die from those hazards. Environmental justice means to look at those systematic barriers that mean BIPOC communities are not able to thrive — or to exist. *Malik Holt-Shabazz*



Environmental justice is fixing the sidewalks and pedestrians crosswalks on the highway that divided the community. It's providing resources for people to get inhalers and fixing the air quality. It's addressing the noise and vibrations from project construction, recognizing the mental health impacts and considering funding that allows residents along the corridor to seek mental health supports. *Anndrea Young*

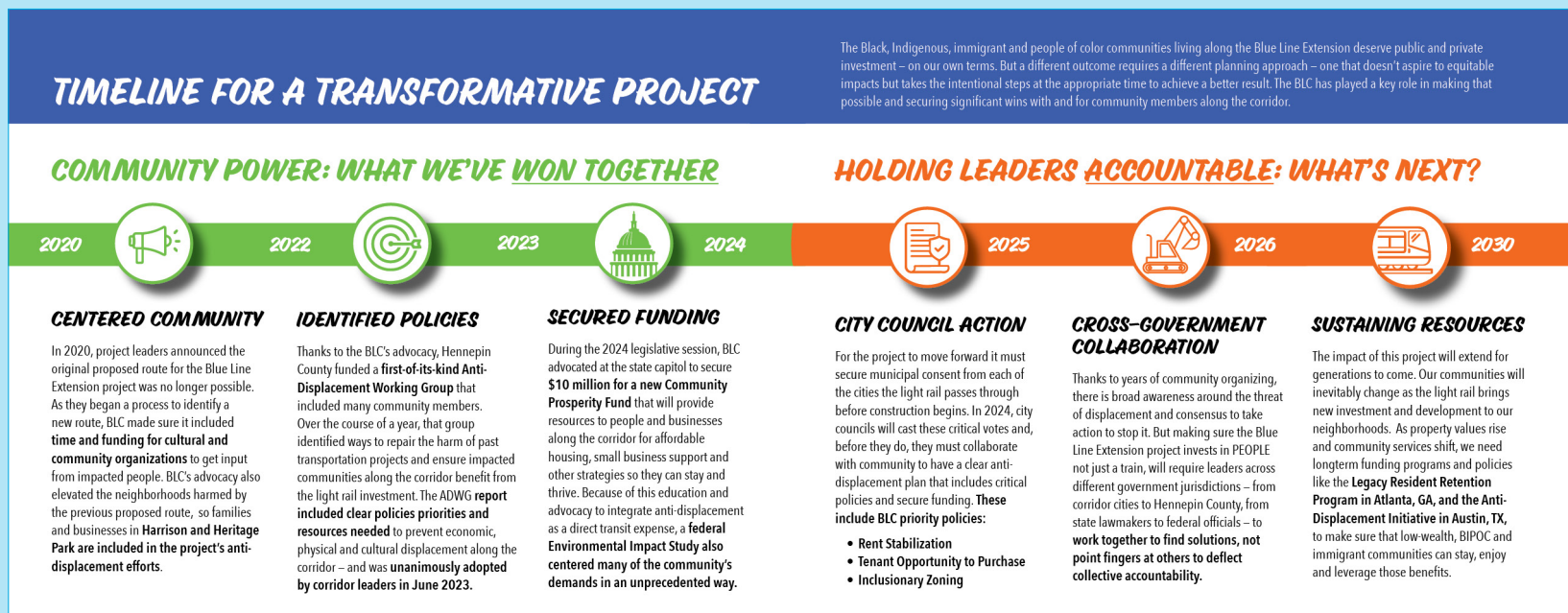


Environmental justice is considering a home an environment. Right now, I can't help a woman who's been in the neighborhood for 40 years avoid condemnation and foreclosure -- when it would only cost \$10,000 to fix her house so she can stay here. One part of environmental justice is having safe, healthy homes. It's identifying people that are here and making sure they stay here. *Mitchel Hansen*



Environmental justice is leaving communities whole at the end of the project, lifting up EJ communities and changing the patterns of how government projects have interacted with them in the past. It also mean having positive consequences because transit is so key to serving people's transportation needs. *Kelcie Young*

Learn more about how the Blue Line Coalition is integrating anti-displacement into transit evaluation in their 2024 Community Report



[www.bluelinecoalition.org/2024-report](http://www.bluelinecoalition.org/2024-report)

## How can we make processes like Environmental Impact Statements work for our communities?

When we developed the EJ chapter [in the Environmental Impact Study for the Blue Line Extension] we leaned more on qualitative experiences of people because that's been an issue with environmental tools – not bringing in those perspectives or lived experiences of EJ communities because it's not “technical analysis.” That change represents a big shift and a huge opportunity for communities to shape things about the project itself to make it most successful for people in the communities. *Kelcie Young*

We should be proactive in educating communities constantly about EJ and racism so they're always ready to go – because more projects are coming to our communities. And when an EIS process starts that should automatically kick funds to participating organizations to increase their capacity and operations and community members to be compensated for their time. We pay consultants all the time when we're asking for their expertise. *Malik Holt-Shabazz*

We need to think about the length and the language barriers for the people in our communities – making sure the information is in their language and terminology is understandable. We also have to recognize that scheduling in-person hearings during morning hours in the summertime is challenging for parents who have more kids or have bigger household sizes. *Anndrea Young*

The timeline that's required keeps going at same rate; there's never more stakeholder engagement or intentional inclusion of the people affected throughout the process... They're focused a lot on climate justice but not environmental justice and repairing past harms. Striving to eliminate racial disparities doesn't have to be at anyone's expense. We shouldn't have to fight for the basic right to not have polluters in our backyard. *Mitchel Hansen*