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 antidisplacement into transit evaluation in their 2024

Community

Report

TIMELINE FOR A TRANSFORMATIVE PROJECT

he Black, Indigenous, immigrant and people of color communities living along the Blue Line Extension deserve public and private westment – on our own terms. But a different outcome requires a different planning approach – one that doesn't aspire to equitable mpacts but takes the intentional tepp at the appropriate time to achieve a better result. The BLC has played a key role in making that ossible and securing significant wins with and for community members along the corridor.

COMMUNITY POWER: WHAT WE'VE WON TOGETHER

2020

2022



2023



2024

HOLDING LEADERS <u>ACCOUNTABLE</u>: WHAT'S NEXT?





2026



2030

CENTERED COMMUNITY

In 2020, project leaders announced the original proposed route for the Blue Line Extension project was no longer possible. As they began a process to identify a new route, BLC made sure it included time and funding for cultural and community organizations to get input from impacted people. BLC's advocacy also elevated the neighborhoods harmed by the previous proposed route, so families and businesses in Harrison and Heritage Park are included in the project's antidisplacement efforts.

IDENTIFIED POLICIES

Thanks to the BLC's advocacy, Hennepin County funded a first-fo-fits-kind Anti-Displacement Working Group that included many community members. Over the course of a year, that group identified ways to repair the harm of past transportation projects and ensure impacted communities along the corridor benefit from the light rail investment. The ADWC report included clear policies priorities and resources needed to prevent economic, physical and cultural displacement along the corridor – and was unanimously adopted by corridor leaders in June 2023.

SECURED FUNDING

During the 2024 legislative session, BLC advocated at the state capitol to secure \$10 million for a new Community Prosperity Fund that will provide resources to people and businesses along the corridor for affordable housing, small business support and other strategies so they can stay and thrive. Because of this education and advocacy to integrate anti-displacement as a direct transit expense, a federal Environmental Impact Study also centered many of the community's demands in an unprecedented way.

CITY COUNCIL ACTION

For the project to move forward it must secture municipal consent from each of the cities the light rail passes through before construction begins. In 2024, city councils will cast these critical votes and, before they do, they must collaborate with community to have a clear anti-displacement plan that includes critical policies and secure funding. These include BLC priority policies:

- Rent Stabilization
- Tenant Opportunity to Purchase
- Inclusionary Zoning

CROSS-GOVERNMENT COLLABORATION

Thanks to years of community organizing, there is broad awareness around the threat of displacement and consensus to take action to stop it. But making sure the Blue Line Extension project invests in PEOPLE not just a train, will require leaders across different government jurisdictions – from corridor cities to Hennepin County, from state lawmakers to federal officials – to work together to find solutions, not point fingers at others to deflect collective accountability.

SUSTAINING RESOURCES

The impact of this project will extend for generations to come. Our communities will inevitably change as the light rail brings new investment and development to our neighborhoods. As property values rise and community services shift, we need longterm funding programs and policies like the Legacy Resident Retention Program in Atlanta, GA, and the Anti-Displacement Initiative in Austin, TX, to make sure that low-wealth, BIPOC and immigrant communities can stay, enjoy and leverage those benefits.

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