

**AGENDA:** February 13, 2023

**TO:** Elderly/Disabled Transportation Advisory Committee  
**FROM:** Rachel Moriconi, Transportation Planner  
**RE:** Regional Transportation Equity Priority Communities Definition

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## **RECOMMENDATION**

Staff recommends that the committee provide input on potential metrics to use to identify areas and individuals who have been overburdened or underserved due to historic or systemic inequities or racism (referred to as “equity priority communities” or “disadvantaged communities”).

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## **BACKGROUND**

The Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission (RTC) received a Caltrans planning grant to develop a Transportation Equity Action Plan. One element of this planning effort is to update the regional definition of “Disadvantaged Communities” that is used to identify communities and individuals that have faced greater barriers due to historic or systemic inequities or racism and to address disparities. Terminology and metrics used by government agencies, community-based organizations, and others to identify communities and individuals that are more likely to experience inequities vary at the local, regional, state, and national level. For many state and federal grant programs, local entities are required to use definitions set by the funding agencies, but regions and local agencies are also allowed to develop more locally applicable definitions. RTC staff has been working with the RTC’s recently formed Transportation Equity Workgroup and U.S. DOT Thriving Communities partners to update regional definitions, terminology and metrics used by the RTC.

## **DISCUSSION**

### Nomenclature

While the RTC previously used the term “disadvantaged community” based on terminology used in state and federal legislation and guidance, several state, federal, and local agencies and grant programs are now using more positive or objective terms and avoiding terms that could be pejorative. Based on thoughtful discussion at the Transportation Equity Workgroup, **staff recommends using the term “equity priority communities”**

rather than “disadvantaged communities” across all RTC activities. Notably, language and terms related to equity and representation are continuously evolving and may be modified in the future. Some of the other terms that were considered are shown in [Attachment 2](#).

### Metrics

Demographic factors (or metrics or indices) have been used by state, federal, and local agencies as screening tools to prioritize projects, evaluate investments, set policy, and focus engagement. Unfortunately, metrics and data used by state and federal agencies sometimes exclude many individuals and communities that experience inequities in Santa Cruz County.

**Staff recommends that the committee provide input on potential metrics and thresholds for the RTC to use to identify Equity Priority Communities.** While there are hundreds of criteria that could be considered, staff recommends that no more than 10-15 indices be used for the RTC’s updated regional definition of Equity Priority Communities (*previously referred to as Transportation “Disadvantaged Communities”*), as listed below and in [Attachment 1](#). These criteria were identified based on review of dozens of criteria used by state, federal and regional agencies, input received from the U.S.DOT Thriving Communities team, and ranking by the RTC’s Transportation Equity Workgroup.

Geographic areas would be considered Equity Priority Communities based on the percentage of people meeting the criteria and concentration thresholds, as compared to other areas in Santa Cruz County or California. Geographic area sizes maybe at the census block or locally defined neighborhood level, and some metrics may be at the census tract level depending on available data. The project team is still evaluating potential concentration thresholds, but preliminary potential concentration thresholds are shown in italics. Some of the additional criteria that were considered, but not included are listed at the end of [Attachment 1](#). Metrics previously used by the RTC for the 2045 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) are denoted with an asterisk (\*); those that were previously used but for which new thresholds are recommended are noted with a caret (^).

1. Low-Income\*
  - Low-Income: *an area would be considered low income if greater than 33% of residents earn less than 80% of the statewide median income or are at or below the most recent county limit set by the California Housing and Community Development (HCD)^ or 200% of the federal poverty level\**

- Poverty-Level: *an area would be considered low income if greater than 25% of residents earn less than the federal poverty level*
- 2. People of Color\*
  - *greater than 65% of the residents in an area are non-white, mixed-race, or Hispanic, Latino, Latinx or Latine ("minority areas")*
- 3. Limited English Proficiency/Linguistic Isolation\*
  - *15% or more of households in an area where English is not spoken "very well"*
- 4. People with a Disability\*
  - *More than 10% of people with disabilities*
- 5. Seniors 75 Years and Over^
  - *10% over age 75 and low-income*
- 6. Youth under 18^
  - *Areas with higher concentrations of youth and Title I schools*
- 7. Cost of Transportation
  - *More than 25% of households spending more than 30% of household income on transportation (gas, bus fares, car insurance/maintenance, etc)*
- 8. Housing Affordability and Renters
  - *Severely Rent-Burdened/Cost-of Living: More than 15% of renter households paying more than 50% of income on housing or more than 25% of renters paying > 50% of income in rent*
  - *Unhoused: Areas with high concentrations of unhoused individuals*
- 9. Destination-based criteria:
  - a. *Areas with high concentration of low wage jobs: Greater than 50% of jobs pay an hourly wage that would not place employees above the poverty line for a family of four if they worked fulltime*
  - b. *Destinations serving low-income individuals (e.g. senior and community centers, food banks, health and human service departments, Title I schools, +)*
- 10. Transportation Access and Mobility criteria:
  - a. *Average travel time and/or distance to work or school*
  - b. *Proximity and travel time to essentials (groceries, healthcare, services)*
  - c. *Distance to bus stop with regular service (at least every 30 minutes)*
  - d. *Transportation facilities - condition and options: road condition, bike lanes, sidewalks, and transit options*

**Staff recommends that the committee also provide input on if metrics #3-10 should be standalone determinants, or only be**

**considered equity priority communities if the area also meets a 10-25% low-income threshold.** Staff is also analyzing if sufficient data is available to consider additional criteria that were ranked as very important by Equity Workgroup members, such as condition and availability of transportation facilities (pavement condition, bike lanes, sidewalks, and transit service levels) and social capital criteria (opportunities not accessibility due to transportation limitations; stress levels; “time poverty”/hours available for family, friends, exercise, leisure). Communities and individuals may also face barriers due to factors that cannot be mapped and those barriers may also be considered when prioritizing projects and outreach.

### **Next Steps**

Staff will solicit feedback and recommendations on terminology and metrics from stakeholders, the public, and the RTC board. Geographic information about Equity Priority Communities will be used to target outreach and be considered when evaluating and identifying transportation priorities in the Regional Transportation Plan, the Climate Adaptation Vulnerability Assessment (CAVA), and other planning and project implementation efforts.

As part of the RTC’s Equity Action Plan, the RTC will also be developing an equity engagement toolkit focused on best practices for soliciting input from historically underrepresented, equity priority community members; metrics and thresholds to evaluate transportation equity, such as percentage of funds invested in equity priority communities, number of roads with sidewalks, location and frequency of transit service; an equity analysis of RTC policies and procedures; and using .

### **SUMMARY**

Staff is seeking input from stakeholders on nomenclature and metrics to use for identifying areas and individuals living or working in Santa Cruz County who have been overburdened or underserved.

### **Attachments**

1. Preliminary Draft Equity Priority Communities Metrics
2. Nomenclature: “Disadvantaged Communities” alternatives

**Preliminary Draft Equity Priority Communities Metrics**

The following is a list of demographic metrics or indices recommended to be used for the RTC's updated regional definition of Equity Priority Communities (*previously referred to as Transportation "Disadvantaged Communities"*).

Geographic areas in Santa Cruz County would be considered Equity Priority Communities based on the percentage of people meeting the definition and concentration thresholds, as compared to other areas in Santa Cruz County and/or California. The project team is still evaluating potential concentration thresholds, but preliminary potential concentration thresholds are shown in italics. These criteria were identified based on review of dozens of criteria used by state, federal and regional agencies, input received from the U.S.DOT Thriving Communities team, and ranking by the RTC's Transportation Equity Workgroup. Criteria considered, but not included are listed at the end of this document.

**Demographic variables and *potential thresholds*:**

1. Low-Income\*
  - *Low-Income: an area would be considered low income if greater than 33% of residents earn less than 80% of the statewide median income or are at or below the most recent county limit set by the California Housing and Community Development (HCD)^ or 200% of the federal poverty level\**
  - *Poverty-Level: an area would be considered low income if greater than 25% of residents earn less than the federal poverty level*
2. People of Color\*
  - *greater than 65% of the residents in an area are non-white, mixed-race, or Hispanic, Latino, Latinx or Latine ("minority areas")*
3. Limited English Proficiency/Linguistic Isolation\*
  - *15% or more of households in an area where English is not spoken "very well"*
4. People with a Disability\*
  - *More than 10% of people with disabilities*
5. Seniors 75 Years and Over^
  - *10% over age 75 and low-income*
6. Youth under 18^
  - *Areas with higher concentrations of youth and Title I schools*
7. Cost of Transportation
  - *More than 25% of households spending more than 30% of household income on transportation (gas, bus fares, car insurance/maintenance, etc)*
8. Housing Affordability and Renters

- *Severely Rent-Burdened/Cost-of Living: More than 15% of renter households paying more than 50% of income on housing or more than 25% of renters paying > 50% of income in rent*
  - *Unhoused: Areas with high concentrations of unhoused individuals*
9. Destination-based criteria:
    - a. Areas with high concentration of low wage jobs: *Greater than 50% of jobs pay an hourly wage that would not place employees above the poverty line for a family of four if they worked fulltime*
    - b. Destinations serving low-income individuals (e.g. senior and community centers, food banks, health and human service departments, Title I schools, +)
  10. Transportation Access and Mobility criteria:
    - a. Average travel time and/or distance to work or school
    - b. Proximity and travel time to essentials (groceries, healthcare, services)
    - c. Distance to bus stop with regular service (at least every 30 minutes)
    - d. Transportation facilities - condition and options: road condition, bike lanes, sidewalks, and transit options

**Staff recommends that the committee also provide input on if metrics #3-10 should be standalone determinants, or only be considered equity priority communities if the area also meets a 10-25% low-income threshold.** Staff is also analyzing if sufficient data is available to consider additional criteria that were ranked as very important by Equity Workgroup members, such as condition and availability of transportation facilities (pavement condition, bike lanes, sidewalks, and transit service levels) and social capital criteria (opportunities not accessibility due to transportation limitations; stress levels; “time poverty”/hours available for family, friends, exercise, leisure). Communities and individuals may also face barriers due to factors that cannot be mapped and those barriers may also be considered when prioritizing projects and outreach.

\*^ Metrics previously used by the RTC for the 2045 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) are denoted with an asterisk (\*). Those which were previously used in the RTP, but for which new thresholds are recommended, are noted with a caret (^). Metrics previously used by RTC which were not ranked as very high and are not included below include: Car-ownership/zero-car household; and High school diploma rates.

**Data Sources include:**

- U.S. Census Bureau. American Community Survey (ACS)
- Federal [Justice40 Mapping tools](#)
  - [USDOT Equitable Transportation Community \(ETC\) Explorer](#)
  - FHWA: [Screening Tool for Equity Analysis of Projects \(STEAP\)](#)

- U.S. Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool (CEJST): <https://screeningtool.geoplatform.gov>
- [Areas of Persistent Poverty & Historically Disadvantaged Communities](#)
- EPA Environmental Justice Screen (<https://www.epa.gov/ejscreen>)
- EPA Smart Location Database: <https://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/smart-location-mapping>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [PLACES](#)
- CDC Social Vulnerability Index (SVI): <https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/placeandhealth/svi/index.html>
- U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency. National Risk Index: <https://hazards.fema.gov/nri/>
- HUD Exchange Location Affordability Index
- FEMA Resilience Analysis and Planning Tool (GINI Index); [www.FEMA.gov/RAPT](http://www.FEMA.gov/RAPT)
- CARB: CalEnviroScreen: <https://oehha.ca.gov/calenviroscreen> and [Priority Populations](#)
- Caltrans Transportation Equity Index (EQI): <https://dot.ca.gov/programs/esta/race-equity/eqi>
- California Healthy Places Index: <https://www.healthyplacesindex.org/>
- CA Dept Water Resources: <https://gis.water.ca.gov/app/dacs/>
- CA HCD-dataviewer: <https://affh-data-resources-cahcd.hub.arcgis.com/> & <https://www.treasurer.ca.gov/ctcac/opportunity.asp>
- California Poverty Measure designed by the Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequality

## **Other Metrics Considered but Not Recommended**

*The following is a list of some of the additional metrics that were considered, but not ranked as the most important criteria to consider when defining Transportation Equity Priority Communities, in part because other measures reflect key issues faced by communities and individuals more likely to be facing barriers due to historic or systemic inequities. For instance, income often is a determining factor or serves as a proxy for many other possible metrics. In some instances, data limitations exist and the most feasible metrics to use may be those where data is more readily available and more regularly updated. Some of these criteria may however be considered when identifying transportation challenges (needs) and possible solutions (projects, services, programs).*

### **Transportation-specific criteria**

- Zero-Car ownership: Households who do not own a vehicle/Percentage of households without access to an automobile
- Travel times for:
  - employment purposes (duration or percentage of day)
  - social purposes
  - caregiving purposes (for example, for transporting children, the elderly or disabled)
- Mode: Percentage of workers (16 years and older) commuting by walking, cycling, or transit (excluding working from home)
- Areas with high bus ridership (bus stops with greatest on/off numbers-existing and anticipated with route changes)
- Transportation Facility Conditions:
  - Historic and current transportation investments/underinvestment in neighborhoods/areas
  - Road condition: Percentage of roadways in fair/poor condition
  - Transit routes and frequency; distance to transit stop less than a 5 min walk
  - Distance and time it takes to travel on public transit (for work and non-work, essential and leisure trips)
  - Walkability - Concentration of sidewalks, lighting, street trees
  - Bike facilities - none, lanes, buffered lanes, separated paths, etc
- Crash exposure and rates
  - areas with high collision rates, especially involving bikes or pedestrians
  - Amount spent on childcare due to commute time
- Traffic exposure
  - Traffic volumes and location relative to freeways and major roadways (highways and arterials)
  - Truck/diesel vehicles volumes
  - Air pollution - Diesel particulate matter levels, concentration of ozone, PM2.5, PM10, NOx, Vox, etc



- Toxics cancer risk
- Annual average spatial distribution of gridded diesel PM emissions from on-road and non-road sources (tons/year)
- Mean of summer months (May-October) of the daily maximum 8-hour ozone concentration (ppm), averaged over three years (2017 to 2019)

### **Social Capital**

- Hours spent working
- Number of jobs held
- Time Poverty: Hours available to spend with family, friends, accessing educational or professional opportunities, leisure / cultural opportunities and events, attend events which support your family, such as parent-teacher night
- Access to beaches and parks
- Opportunities and activities not pursued due to lack of safe or convenient transportation
- How would spend time if transportation times were shorter
- Mental health: Amount of mental health or stress due to not enough time to pay attention to your relationships such as family, friends, etc.

### **Income**

- Assets, such as savings and real estate
- Unemployment: % of pop aged 25-64 who are unemployed
- Areas (destinations) with high concentration of low-wage jobs – farmworkers, service industry (hotels, restaurants), etc
- [High resource areas](#)
- High concentration of migrant or undocumented residents or workers
- Common destinations for low-income individuals:
  - public school locations - avg family income information
  - Senior and community centers
  - Community service locations (and where clients come from)
- Population over 25 without a high school diploma\*
- Education:
  - Percent of pre-K-12 attending Title 1 schools
  - Percent of 15-17 year olds enrolled in school
  - Percent of 3 and 4 year olds enrolled in preschool

### **Housing**

- Low-income housing locations, Section 8, solar voucher locations, mobile home parks
- Renters: Proportion of occupied housing units not occupied by property owners (excluding 2<sup>nd</sup> homes). *Areas with higher concentrations of renters as compared to the rest of Santa Cruz County.*

- Affordability: Overall cost and percent of income spent on housing compared to average countywide; mid-income homeowners paying more than 50% of income on housing
- Occupancy: Percentage of households with more than 1 occupant per room
- Percent of households without complete kitchen facilities and plumbing
- Population density
- Single-parent household

### **Demographic Factors**

- Race/ethnicity: A more detailed breakdown and focus on most disadvantaged groups
- Gender identify
- Youth: Percent of population under age 16\*
- Percentage of people with disabilities
- Percentage of people over age 80 (or 75)
- Sexual orientation

### **Other factors**

- Climate Vulnerability/Hazards-Risk to extreme weather – flooding, fire, excessive heat, etc
- Low engagement indices
  - Percentage of registered voters that voted in 2020 general election
  - Percentage of population that responded to the 2020 Census
  - Percentage of households with no computing device available
  - Digital divide: access to wifi and broadband
- Healthcare Access:
  - Asthma/Cardiovascular Disease/Low Birth Weight
  - Insurance: Percentage of adults aged 18 to 64 years currently uninsured
  - Percentage of adults aged 18 to 64 years with access to Medical
  - Percentage of children under 18 with access to Medical
  - Percentage of the population living within 5 miles of a healthcare facility
  - Time it takes to for medical services (distance, urgent care/ER vs appointments)
  - Do you accompany anyone to their medical appointments, such as children, the elderly, or disabled? If so, how much total time do you allocate for the appointments? Do you need to change your work schedule to accommodate these appointments?
  - Do you need to plan your transportation needs in order to attend a medical appointment, or to access medications?
- Neighborhood characteristics:

- Parks: Percentage of the population living within ½ -mile of a park, beach, or open space greater than 1 acre
- Tree canopy: Population-weighted percentage of the census tract area with tree canopy
- Alcohol & Cannabis Dispensaries: Percentage of the population residing within ¼ mile of an off-site sales alcohol outlet or cannabis
- Distance to grocery stores
  - Percentage of the urban and small-town population residing less than 1/2 mile from a supermarket/large grocery store,
  - Percent of the rural population living less than 1 miles from a supermarket/large grocery store
- Jobs/acre: Combined employment density for retail, entertainment, supermarkets, and educational uses
- Rural and actual wages
- Cultural Resources: Identifying areas with limited access to cultural resources (libraries, concert hall, etc)

**Nomenclature: “Disadvantaged Communities” Alternatives**

State, federal, regional, and local agencies and entities use a variety of terminology to identify communities and individuals that have faced greater barriers due to historic or systemic inequities or racism and to address disparities. While the RTC previously used the term “disadvantaged community” based on terminology used in state and federal legislation and guidance, in recent years many state, federal, and local agencies and grant programs are now using more positive, empowering and uplifting, forward-looking and action-oriented terms that communicate priority and intentionality, and that can be more easily understood. The term “Disadvantaged Community” is sometimes seen as pejorative, demeaning, negative, vague, and passive.

**RTC staff recommends using the term “equity priority communities”** rather than “disadvantaged communities” across RTC transportation planning efforts, equity analyses, prioritization criteria in programming of funds and seeking grants, and alignment of resources for public engagement.

Below are some of the terms used by other entities, drawn from existing sources, including, but not limited to the [Racial Equity Tools Glossary](#), the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE), and the [University of Washington Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Style Guide](#). The list of terms is not exhaustive, and the definitions and understandings of the terms may differ depending on agency or stakeholder perspectives.

- Areas of Concentrated Poverty
- Communities of Concern
- **Disadvantaged Communities**
- Economically Distressed Areas
- Environmental Justice Communities
- Equity Action Areas
- Equity Emphasis Area
- Equity Focus Communities
- Equity Prioritized Investment Communities
- **Equity Priority Communities**
- Equity Priority Neighborhoods
- Historically Marginalized Communities
- Opportunity Zones
- Priority Populations
- Transportation Disadvantaged Areas
- Transportation Equity Zones
- Underserved Communities