

EQUITABLE TRANSIT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT

WE believe Equitable Transit-Oriented Development is a policy, process and a development form that facilitates equitable development serving the needs of existing community residents and stakeholders, especially the most vulnerable. ETOD is centered on the people who live, work and create in communities of color and in low-income communities that are served by existing or planned high-capacity transit service, whether bus and/or rail. As our communities recover from the simultaneous racial justice, public health, housing and climate crises we currently face,

ETOD can be an important strategy to create a healthy, climate resilient and equitable future for all while also generating economic value and providing more public services more cost effectively.

Our cities and regions rely on the workers and families who reside in transit oriented communities. They fuel our economy, enrich our culture, and create the backbone of resilient communities. The recent COVID-19 crisis has demonstrated how dependent our communities are on the essential workers that keep our hospitals, clinics, pharmacies, grocery stores, mail service and delivery companies running. Many of those workers depend on public transportation to access their jobs. ETOD affirms the rights of those who rely on transit, and the value of transit-served communities. This manifests itself through:

- Housing that is affordable to people at a range of incomes, regardless of their household size, race, gender, physical ability or ethnicity.
- Residents, including the most vulnerable, who are physically safe from traffic, community violence and police harassment or brutality.
- Accessible pathways and sidewalks that connect people regardless of their physical ability or age to reliable, convenient transit and other green mobility options like bicycling, walking and car-sharing.
- Mixed-use neighborhoods where small, locally-owned businesses can thrive next to daycare and community centers, schools, libraries, community gardens and parklets, light manufacturing and housing.
- Shared economic prosperity through resident-driven creation and preservation of place that stimulates growth, offers pathways to community ownership, provides culturally relevant spaces and places for BIPOC residents, and unlocks self-determination.
- Vibrant neighborhoods where art and culture celebrate, honor, and elevate the City's multi-racial identities while affirming the rights of Black and Brown residents as cornerstones of our future.
- Sustainable building design and the inclusion of green spaces and natural climate solutions that ensure greater climate resiliency and lower energy costs.
- Community members and civic stakeholders who are equal partners with public agencies to plan, design and implement future plans, policies and investments.



OUR CHALLENGE

We are in a moment when communities across the country are facing a multitude of challenges that collectively have not been felt before, and that are disproportionately felt by our lowest income households and people of color. We are losing affordable housing faster than it can be replaced, especially for those who rely on transit to reach critical destinations including jobs, clinics, schools and groceries.

We are seeing continued disinvestment in communities segregated by race and poverty despite transit access that may exist. Transit itself is in crisis. We are witnessing transit ridership plummeting as the health pandemic rages on, forcing local agencies to make

impossible service and fare policy decisions that severely affect the livelihoods of riders and the economic prosperity of regions. We are facing a growing climate crisis that cannot be overcome without increased availability of reliable and affordable transit options, of utilizing green and sustainable building design, and of preserving green and open space within the public realm accessible by transit. We are living in a time when community voice and agency has never been more important, yet is also challenged by insufficient funding, social isolation and segregation, and reliance on technical over community expertise.

WHAT DOES ETOD MEAN?

To achieve EQUITY, policy makers at all levels of government must acknowledge and build political power and agency for residents and business owners in all aspects of designing, planning and implementation of ETOD. This requires taking intentional steps to both correct past racially unjust systems and investments, and to ensure future systems and investments create and retain economic opportunities for Black and Brown residents and under-invested communities.

To ensure TRANSIT is safe, reliable and affordable for all essential riders, we need cities, regions, states and the federal government to provide financial resources necessary to maintain reliable, affordable and regular transit service. Transit is facing an unprecedented crisis today. Free or greatly reduced fares must be part of transit recovery for our most vulnerable members of society who rely on transit for critical services and jobs.

To stabilize neighborhoods, policy makers and designers must **ORIENT** investments beyond the station or bus stop to build community wealth and maximize community benefit. Transit-oriented communities require investments to improve walkability, preserve affordable housing, retain community culture, and support local business development that go beyond a single station or project. Community is at the center of ETOD. Local land use and zoning policies and TOD funding programs should be defined to encompass the area within one-half mile of a fixed rail station or one-fourth mile from a high frequency bus stop.

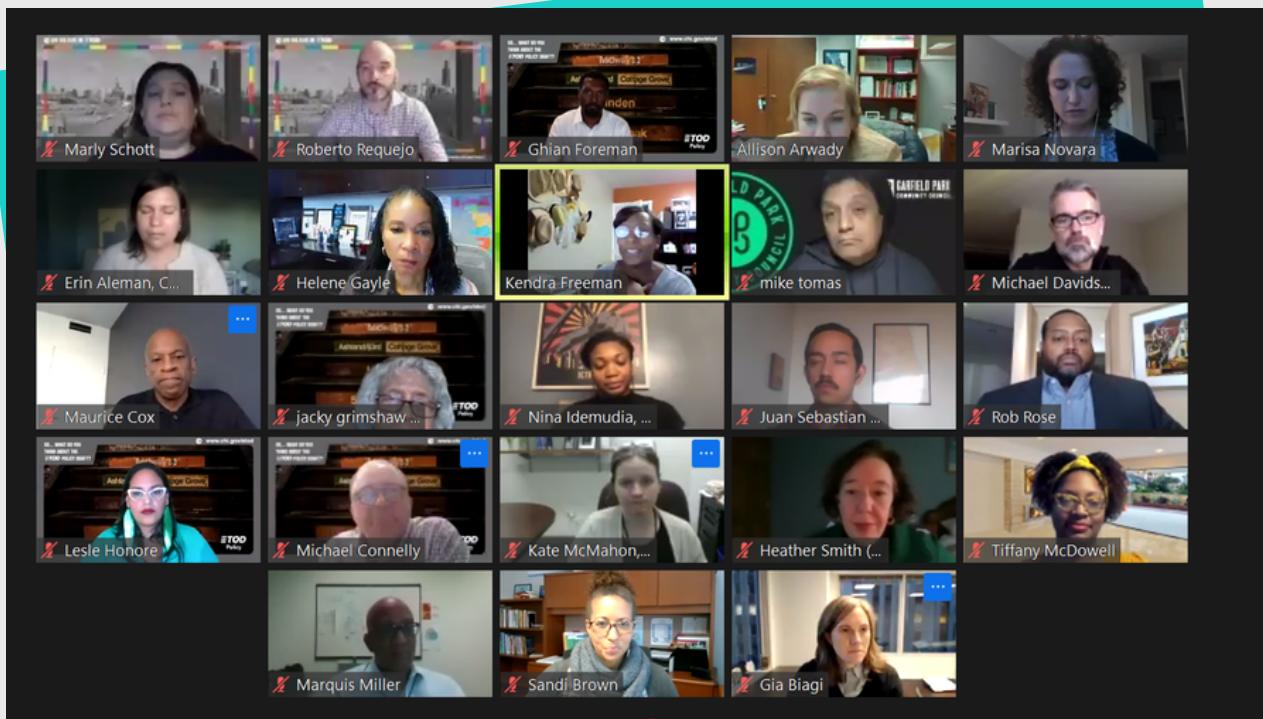
To create equitable DEVELOPMENT, project investment and design should advance community needs. Affordable housing is a key element but not the only aspect of ETOD. Transit oriented communities need access to grocery stores, daycare centers, business incubators, public health centers, workforce training centers, parks and open space. We need a comprehensive concept of ETOD projects and processes in place to ensure that any project is maximized to achieve community benefits, with financial incentives appropriately aligned and shaped through equitable community engagement.



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The most rewarding part of our work bringing together community leaders, government representatives, and developers, is when we see open communication of community frustrations about the injustices they are subject to, power players acknowledging their active and passive role in policies and decisions that deeply hurt communities of color, and firm commitments to repair the damage done being realized. This trust-building process is the hardest and most fragile part of the work, but it is also the foundation without which enduring equitable development is not possible.

Roberto Requejo,
Elevated Chicago



The Leadership Council of Elevated Chicago includes City Commissioners, Mayor's Office representatives and other government and community leaders, and meets periodically to monitor the City's commitment to equitable transit-oriented development" (Source: Elevated Chicago, December 2020)

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

We recognize that successful ETOD must include design and planning strategies that support climate resiliency and energy efficiency, improve public health outcomes, and create community wealth-building opportunities, especially for BIPOC and people of different genders, ages, abilities, and incomes. The preservation and stabilization of homes and businesses for low-income members of our Black and Brown communities who are connected by transit is foundational to ETOD.¹

ETOD goals intersect with goals and policy priorities of the other elements of SPARCC's policy platform. In addition to the policy priorities being advanced by SPARCC partners at the local and national levels for restorative and regenerative economies, for housing, and for parks and open space equity, SPARCC is also focused on the following five specific ETOD policy areas:

1. Proactive Actions Required to Prevent Displacement

As TOD policies and projects have been implemented across the country, the investment of major transit improvements and new development have spurred gentrification, leading in some areas to the displacement of low-income communities and small businesses as land values rise, rents increase and cultural identities of communities change. People of color have been the most impacted by displacement pressures within transit-served areas. Many communities, such as Chicago and Denver, have seen a precipitous loss of Black and Brown households and businesses in TOD neighborhoods. Intentional policies are required and should be developed in parallel to new transit planning with the most impacted BIPOC residents and businesses.

Local land use, zoning and housing policies should be evaluated and modified to **ensure that new development increases housing production** serving households across a range of incomes, that **affordable housing** is

preserved, and that tenants and small businesses are **protected from rent gouging, evictions without just cause**, and that **improved transit service** takes their needs into account to maximize benefit. We advocate for policies to preserve **long-term affordability**, including local action to **fund community land trusts and other community ownership models** for commercial and housing uses within transit served areas. We also advocate for right-of-first refusal policies to **preserve market-rate affordable rental housing** near transit corridors, and to **prioritize the use of public lands near transit for community uses**. *(For more specifics, see the housing section of the SPARCC policy platform).*

To **identify potential impacts** and mitigation efforts, a **racial, climate and health equity screen** should be applied to TOD policies as they are being developed and implemented in communities, not just for housing, policies but across other areas such as parking and land use policies that are often reformed as part of TOD implementation.

¹ SPARCC has developed additional materials [articulating ETOD and the work of local partners](#); and the necessary elements of [successful ETOD implementation](#).



2. Elevate Equity in Federal TOD Programs

Nationally, SPARCC supports efforts at the federal level to recognize that TOD is an important transportation and housing strategy, but that it must be centered on equity. [During 2019-2020, several bills were introduced in Congress to advance TOD.](#) We look forward to working with federal policy makers in the new Congress and new Biden-Harris Administration championing ETOD policies, programs and funding.

We align with efforts to specifically allow the use of transportation resources to support affordable housing near transit and to align transportation and land use with housing and economic development planning. We advocate for resources provided directly to affordable housing developers, community development corporations and CDFIs to provide communities with needed resources through TOD grants or TIFIA/RRIF loans.

Federal TOD funding must require a strong commitment to supporting affordable housing and other community serving needs such as access to public health facilities. Housing is an

essential but not the only important element of ETOD. We advocate for defining ETOD to encompass more than affordable housing, but to also include workforce development, economic development, and access to parks, open space, health care facilities, grocery stores, schools and other community-serving needs. LA Metro's definition of Transit Oriented Communities provides a powerful example of this.² We do not support allocating scarce federal TOD resources to market-rate or luxury housing. As transportation and infrastructure bills move through Congress, we will monitor and weigh in, as appropriate, to amplify these priorities.

Locally, we believe that **affordable housing should be required** within any new multi-family housing development. We support the creation of **anti-displacement plans** as a condition for transit expansion, for utilizing public funding or tax credits, or for upzoning regulatory changes. Funding to **include the arts in the design and planning of ETOD projects**, including transit stations and as specifically eligible, use of transportation and community development funds to center culture and place-keeping within eTOD projects and neighborhoods.

² "Transit Oriented Communities (TOCs) are places (such as corridors or neighborhoods) that, by their design, allow people to drive less and access transit more. A Transit Oriented Community maximizes equitable access to a multi-modal transit network as a key organizing principle of land use planning and holistic community development. TOCs differ from Transit Oriented Development (TOD) in that a TOD is a specific building or development project that is fundamentally shaped by close proximity to transit. TOCs promote equity and sustainable living in a diversity of community contexts by: (a) offering a mix of uses that support transit ridership of all income levels (e.g. housing, jobs, retail, services and recreation); (b) ensuring appropriate building densities, parking policies, and urban design that support accessible neighborhoods connected by multimodal transit; (c) elevating needs of vulnerable users and their safety in design; and (d) ensuring that transit-related investments provide equitable benefits that serve local, disadvantaged and underrepresented communities." [2019 - METRO TRANSIT ORIENTED COMMUNITIES POLICY - Metro Transit Oriented Communities](#)



3. Adequately Fund Transit

Nationally, SPARCC supports efforts at the federal level and will lend our voice to communications and advocacy that center on the value of transit to provide essential mobility, especially to low-income riders. Those who rely on transit to participate in the regional economy are essential riders. In our messaging on transit advocacy, our priority is placed on riders first, and transit workers second. For both, we support investments and policies that maintain public health, continuation of service for essential riders, and affordable or free fares.

We call on Congress to enact a bold and transformative federal transportation funding bill that adequately funds transit, and provides resources and flexibility to local communities to make investments that **improve the safety and accessibility for pedestrians, bicyclists and transit users**. Achieving this will require public subsidy for operating assistance and prioritization of routes that serve those who most rely on transit to connect them to health

centers, grocery stores, and other essential services and regionally important jobs. We support **enacting reforms to the federal transit capital improvement program** that expedite project delivery without sacrificing community engagement.

Federal transportation funding should be reformed to provide parity, at a minimum, between transit and highway funding. SPARCC sites are working locally to advance funding opportunities within their city and state budgets to adequately fund transit, and to provide affordable or free fares.

Equally important, we call on federal agencies to **require racial, climate and health equity assessments** to be applied to major transportation and housing investments funded by the federal government, and for the federal government to establish a shared set of climate resilient building standards.



Photo Credit: Transformation Alliance and Soccer in the Streets

4. Redefine Safety

All people, regardless of their gender, age, color or income deserve to feel safe riding transit, walking to or from transit, and living in their communities. In most communities, the answer to improving safety has been to increase police presence on the transit system or to hire private security guards for new TOD projects. Yet these actions, along with increased enforcement of fare evasion and loitering, contribute to racial profiling and increased incarceration rates for Black and Brown people. A lack of safety can derive from over policing or police violence; from community violence; or from systemic violence including sexual harassment of women and transgender people. SPARCC partners in Los Angeles, for instance, are working with their transit agency, LA Metro, to rethink how it defines and responds to transit safety.

We believe that defining and addressing solutions to improve safety within ETODs must be **centered on the inherent dignity of those who ride transit and live in TODs**, especially the most vulnerable, so that all feel safe and welcome. Locally and nationally, SPARCC supports efforts to [reimagine safety and re-align budgets](#) to take a more comprehensive safety approach. This includes specific local actions such as **funding mental and public health professionals** to help respond to transit safety needs. This could include funding **programs to activate transit spaces with artists**, to include **programming for teens**, and to partner with **supportive housing and other social service providers**. Federal transit funding should be created to innovate and pilot these new approaches to improve public safety on transit with **community-driven, non-law enforcement methods**. Further, we believe in the alignment of transit and ETOD safety indicators and approaches with **state and local efforts to reduce transportation fatalities** and severe injuries such as through “Vision Zero” and “Complete Streets.”

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5. Resource Community-Based Organizations

Successful ETOD requires local changes to land use, zoning, parking, and a myriad of other regulations and programs both in the planning and in the implementation stages. BIPOC communities are best positioned to speak to their own needs and develop solutions when resourced and when public-sector led processes specifically require their engagement. Locally, governments should **allocate at least 10% of project or planning budgets specifically for community-based organizing and engagement**. We advocate for this to become standard engagement practice.

Inclusion of artists, storytellers, and other creative engagement practices all must be eligible activities valued as part of equitable community engagement. Intentional effort should be given to **meaningfully engage those with disabilities and those for whom English is not their primary language**. Public agencies should **create community engagement staffing** positions; formalize processes that **standardize equitable engagement practices** across agencies and departments; and **recognize the value of cultural competency, mediation and facilitation** skills within their staff.

³ For more information on Vision Zero see <https://visionzeronetwork.org/about/what-is-vision-zero/> and for Complete Streets visit <https://smartgrowthamerica.org/program/national-complete-streets-coalition/publications/what-are-complete-streets/>





**ACT-LA
members after
a LA Metro
Board meeting**

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Our vision is that every Angeleno has access to free, convenient and efficient public transit and quality, safe housing. We believe LA Metro's \$160 billion expansion - if done with a firm commitment to equity and in partnership with communities of color - is a game-changing opportunity to prioritize racial and economic justice, expand access to affordable housing, and transition the region to an economy of opportunity for BIPOC.

Laura Raymond,
Alliance for Community Transit, Los Angeles