



EQUITABLE TOD
CENTERS THE DIGNITY
OF TRANSIT RIDERS



Equitable Transit Oriented Development (ETOD) Centers the Dignity of Transit Riders

The Strong, Prosperous, and Resilient Communities Challenge (SPARCC) is a multiyear initiative investing in and amplifying local efforts in six regions (Atlanta, Chicago, Denver, Los Angeles, Memphis, and San Francisco Bay Area) to ensure that public investments in the built environment reduce racial disparities, build a culture of health, and respond to the climate crisis. The initiative's long-term goal is to change the way metropolitan regions grow, invest, and build through integrated, cross-sector approaches that benefit low-income people and communities of color.

WHAT IS EQUITABLE TRANSIT ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT (ETOD)?



ETOD is a policy, process, and a development form that facilitates equitable community development serving the needs of existing residents, especially the most vulnerable, and of future residents and employers. ETOD is centered on the people who live, work, and create in communities of color and in low-income communities that are served by 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 public services more cost effectively.

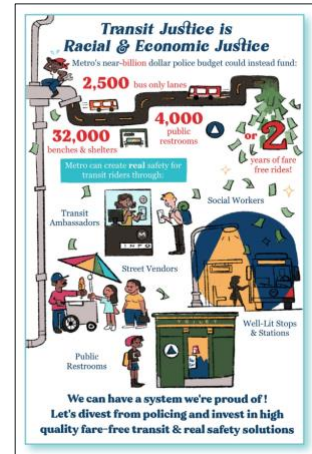
WHY MUST ETOD CENTER THE DIGNITY OF TRANSIT RIDERS?

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 or to hire private security guards. 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, police violence, community violence, or systemic violence, such as sexual harassment of women and transgender people. SPARCC believes 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. ETOD must reimagine safety and realign budgets to take a more comprehensive safety approach.

LOCAL ETOD EFFORTS CENTERING THE DIGNITY OF TRANSIT RIDERS

REIMAGINING SAFETY ON THE LOS ANGELES METRO

Throughout the years, L.A. Metro has been relying on policing as its sole source of security and safety. In 2017, L.A. Metro approved a \$797 million, 5-year contract employing the L.A. Police Department, L.A. County Sheriff's Department, Long Beach Police Department, and the Metro Transit Security Guards and contract security personnel. However, the greater police presence has increased both racial profiling and criminalization of poverty throughout the Metro system and decreased feelings of safety and security among riders, especially among young, Black and Latino riders who make up a majority of Metro's ridership. Since the contract is ending in 2022, the Alliance for Community Transit-Los Angeles (ACT-LA), a SPARCC partner, has been advocating for L.A. Metro to divest from policing and invest in other services and support that will provide every rider with safety, freedom, belonging, and care. Some recommendations include to:



[Read more of ACT-LA's work.](#)

- » Activate transit stations and make them spaces for gathering with street vendors and locally owned shops, accessible and regularly maintained public bathrooms, and art installations and musicians.
- » Hire transit ambassadors, who are unarmed and trained in de-escalation and customer service, to serve as official representatives that will support transit workers and riders.
- » Employ social workers, emergency housing experts, and nurses and doctors as frontline workers in transit stations in order to provide immediate onsite health and crisis support.

ADVOCATING FOR EQUITY ASSESSMENTS BY TRANSIT AGENCIES IN COLORADO



[Read more of Mile High Connect's work.](#)

In April 2021, the Regional Transportation District (RTD), the agency who operates bus, rail, and light rail transit services to Denver, Boulder, and surrounding cities in Colorado, began a systemwide study of its fares and a fare equity analysis after acknowledging that its fare structure is one of the most expensive in the transit industry.

In order to provide equitable service, RTD's General Manager and CEO, Debra A. Johnson, stated, "I want to understand our customers' pain points, and an examination of our fares through a lens of equity and accessibility intends to provide that answer." The study will have extensive outreach to BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) communities, youth, seniors, people with disabilities, people experiencing homelessness, veterans, and LGBTGIA+ communities. Mile High Connects, a SPARCC partner, convened an equity working group to draft recommendations. Recommendations included:

- » Offer free passes to low-income riders in order to provide financial support and increase transit ridership.
- » Revise requirement for low-income individuals to provide proof of eligibility to qualify for discounted fares.
- » Balance transit incentives and discounts between large employers and others from community who ride transit but may be cost-burdened. EcoPass, is an employer-sponsored pass that provides enrolled employees unlimited rides on RTD buses and trains. While a pro-transit policy, the most marginalized and transit-dependent riders typically work at jobs that do not provide a transit benefit.

MEMPHIS BUS RIDERS UNION’S FIGHT FOR EQUITABLE TRANSIT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT

Memphis Bus Riders Union (MBRU) is a grassroots organization founded on the principle that public transit is a civil right. In Memphis, 90% of bus riders are Black, a majority of whom are women, and 60% have annual incomes of \$18,000 or less. Transit service cuts disproportionately impact low-income residents and communities of color and can create long-term financial impacts when families and individuals can no longer access jobs, school, or healthcare reliably and affordably.

SPARCC partner, the Center for Transforming Communities (CTC), and MBRU are advocating for equitable transit-served communities where both mobility and housing needs of low-income BIPOC families are elevated in policy making, transit service, and investment decisions. This includes better and increased bus service throughout Memphis, and stabilizing rents and home ownership in transit served communities. CTC and MBRU are working to ensure that at least 10% of city project or planning budgets for development initiatives are allocated specifically for community-based organizing and engagement.

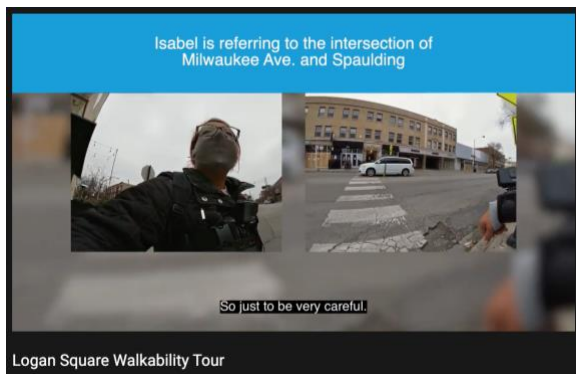


Read more about [MBRU](#).



Read more about the [Center for Transforming Communities](#).

CHICAGO’S COMMUNITY-DRIVEN EFFORTS TO ENHANCE NEIGHBORHOOD WALKABILITY



Read more of [Elevated Chicago's work](#).

In 2018-2020, the Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH) put its Healthy Chicago 2.0 Seed Grants in service of SPARCC’s partner Elevated Chicago’s equitable hubs (eHubs) to improve walkability for those living and working within the half mile of seven Chicago Transit Authority stations. The funding was also aligned with Elevated Chicago’s effort to drive systemic change towards greater racial equity in the built environment through ETOD.

Six Elevated Chicago community partners led locally driven planning activities and walkability solutions.

Additional funds from Robert Wood Johnson Foundation helped amplify these [efforts through resident-led videos to help public agencies better measure and understand emerging challenges and changing priorities](#) triggered by COVID-19 and the racial justice uprisings of 2020. These walkability efforts are also informing the City’s ETOD policy and pilots.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON LOCAL ETOD EFFORTS

- » Los Angeles – [Alliance for Community Transit \(ACT-LA\)](#), contact@allianceforcommunitytransit.org
- » Denver – [Mile High Connects](#)
- » Memphis – [Center for Transforming Communities](#)
- » Chicago – [Elevated Chicago](#), roberto@elevatedchicago.org