

ClimatePlan



August 7, 2020

Vice-Chair Hilary Norton
Mitch Wiess, Executive Director
California Transportation Commission
1120 N Street, MS-52
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Equity Update

Dear Commissioner Norton and Mr. Weiss

During the June California Transportation Commission meeting, Charles Brown gave a thought-provoking presentation on transportation equity. In his presentation and subsequent comments, he laid out the groundwork for advancing equity at the CTC. This letter is a reiteration of many of the points he made. The undersigned organization strongly urge the CTC to implement the below recommendations immediately. We feel that equity needs to be a priority at the CTC, and while this list is not exhaustive or definitive, it is a good starting point.

Below are three recommendations to move the CTC from equity presentations to elevating equity.

1. Committing to an Anti-Racism Framework

Rio Oxas, the co-founder of [RAHOK](#): Race. Ancestors. Health. Outdoors. and Knowledge, has led many discussions around anti-racism work. To commit to an anti-racism framework, they said,

“At its best, anti-racist work requires that we self-reflect on the ways that some continue to benefit from racism. Participating in racism does not imply that one is outright prejudice or intolerant. It means that we may be complicit--whether knowingly or unknowingly--in supporting systems, policies, funding, culture, and decision-making that continuously perpetuates the oppression of some and unwarranted privileges to others.”

For the CTC to commit to anti-racism work, there needs to be an internal and external assessment and clear, public acknowledgment of how CTC policies have and continue to hurt those more vulnerable. The proposed listening sessions, if done correctly, would be a significant step towards anti-racism. The external listening sessions should accompany an internal assessment, including a review of past comments and other input provided by equity and justice-focused stakeholders. These assessments must then be the basis for which subsequent policies are based. We know CTC was unable to hire a social equity consultant due to lack of funds--we encourage the CTC to partner with Caltrans and CalSTA to secure funds to hire a social equity consultant to conduct an internal assessment for the three agencies.

2. Co-Create / Be Collaborative

Once there is a commitment to an anti-racism framework, the next step is co-creating and collaborating. Co-creating is a form of reparations to those that have been the most harmed. By allowing people who have been previously blocked from a seat at the table to not only join, but also work alongside you to rebuild the table, you acknowledge their value and expertise. For decades, communities of color and low-income communities have faced the brunt of poor decisions in California's land use and transportation sector. They have a wealth of lived experience about how land use and transportation decisions can cause negative impacts if equity is not front and center. It is essential to use that expertise as we plan for the future.

In practice, what this looks like is intentionally including voices of those most impacted at all steps of the process. When the CTC is crafting agendas for meetings, those who are the most impacted should help set the tone and direction of the meetings. This includes advocacy organizations and community residents. When the CTC is looking for panelists and experts to speak, reach out to communities that have lived experiences with the subject matter. Once the meetings happen, the CTC should check back in with advocacy organizations and solicit feedback about room for improvement from those communities. If setbacks happen at CTC meetings or public workshops, invite advocacy organizations and communities to help staff and Commissioners create the solutions. This also means meaningfully incorporating feedback that has been provided by communities with lived experience and implementing new and tangible actions, policies, guidelines, programs, initiatives, and ways of doing business throughout the Commission.

By implementing these practices of co-creation and collaboration, the CTC can start to identify and address the systemic racism and oppression built into the transportation system.

3. Create accountability structures

Once there is an anti-racism framework in place, and a co-created plan, now is the time to create an accountability mechanism. There needs to be an additional layer of accountability to the communities that are the most impacted by the agency's decisions. Accountability should not be a one-time thing; instead, it should be a system. This shows good faith in building a long-lasting, mutually beneficial relationship. This is where an equity advisory committee could shine.

By creating an equity advisory committee, or similar group, the CTC is setting themselves up to be stronger and more resilient. These accountability groups need to be able to provide critical feedback, give direction on how the CTC can improve, and work with the CTC to not repeat the same actions of the past.

In closing, we appreciate the work the CTC has done in the last few months listening to our concerns around equity. We hope that we can soon move from conversation and conceptualization to actionable steps. We acknowledge that what we are proposing in many ways is a shift from business as usual for the CTC. That can be hard and challenging work, but in the words of the late John Lewis, "You have to be optimistic in order to continue to move forward." With that, we optimistically look forward to working in partnership with you to create an Equity Advisory Committee.

Sincerely

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