

LA Metro and Transit-Oriented Communities: Creating Equitable Planning Practices through
Community Engagement at Mariachi Plaza



Michael Jiménez
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Professors Shamasunder and Cha
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Introduction

To understand Los Angeles as a city with vast options for transportation, it is important to discuss who uses public transit and what say they have when new services are created. Past and current literature in urban planning, sociology, and law offer that communities most reliant on public transit are often urban, low-income, and working-class communities of color. In this report, I outline opportunities for transit planners at Metro (Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transit Authority) to engage transit-dependent communities to design and develop new services specific to their needs. I intend to contextualize community planning theory at Mariachi Plaza in Boyle Heights, an economic, cultural, and social center where Metro has been urged to integrate equity through community engagement and participatory planning.

At every point in this study, I apply the following research question: “How effectively does Metro integrate community engagement and participatory planning at Mariachi Plaza in Boyle Heights?” Through textual analysis of Metro community engagement policy (Joint Development) and interviews of Boyle Heights residents, community organizers, and Metro administrators, this investigation puts forth a set of recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of community engagement for equity-based transit-oriented development (TOD). The goal of this paper is to discuss equitable transit planning and development with regards to Metro. In the event that the transit authority fails to meet the needs of its most transit-dependent communities, it is the tradition and tendency of Boyle Heights residents and organizations to fight for their right to equity, land, and quality of life. The evaluation of Metro JD put forth in this report approaches a set of community-based recommendations to further inform equitable TOD for Boyle Heights and Metro’s service territory as a whole.












Background

Boyle Heights and Metro

Boyle Heights is home to four light rail transit stops along the Metro Gold Line: Pico/Aliso, Mariachi Plaza/Boyle Heights, Soto, and Indiana (on the neighborhood boundary with unincorporated East Los Angeles). While the Gold Line connects Boyle Heights with Downtown Los Angeles, seven Metro Local bus routes and three Metro Rapid routes serve the community. Metro owns various aboveground parcels in Boyle Heights. At the historic intersection of First Street and Boyle Avenue, Mariachi Plaza is undergoing significant community-driven discussions for equitable, desirable development.

Boyle Heights is largely a transit-dependent community. The average income level for community members is under \$35,000, below the median income of \$55,000 for Los Angeles County (Figure 1). Additionally, almost half of households in Boyle Heights have four or more members (Metro 2017, 9). The figure shows that over 56% of local households have no more than one car, so residents

rely on services like Metro rail, Metro buses, LADOT DASH, Montebello Bus Lines, and others. At 73%, renters in Boyle Heights make up the majority of households, significantly higher than the median of

	Boyle Heights	Los Angeles County
POPULATION 	148,806	9,818,605
HOUSEHOLD		
Median household income	\$34,493	\$55,870 ²
Family households	78.8%	67.1%
Average household size	O 4.2 R 3.9	O 3.2 R 2.87
Household size		
1 	16.7%	25.6%
2 	17.1%	27.3%
3 	16.6%	16.5%
4 	49.6%	30.6%
Vehicles available per housing unit		
0	19.8%	9.8%
1 	36.4%	35.1%
2 	27.2%	35.1%
3 	16.5%	20%
HOUSING 	39,680	3,462,075
Occupied 	37,310	3,242,391
	O 10,083 R 27,227	O 1,503,915 R 1,738,476
	27.1% 72.9%	46.4% 53.6%
Vacant 	2,370	219,684
Homeowner Vacancy Rate	2.0	1.4
Renter Vacancy Rate	3.6	4.1

O: Owner
R: Renter
Source: US Census Bureau, 2010-2014 American community survey

¹ Population size is based on the aggregate data of the following zipcodes: 90023, 90033, 90063
² The California Department of Housing and Community Development estimates the 4-person Area Median Income to be \$64,800

Figure 1: Community characteristics of Boyle

54% shown renters across Los Angeles County. In this figure, Metro provides community-based statistics that have compelled transit-oriented development in Boyle Heights to link transit and housing with equitable mobility options. Boyle Heights community members have mobilized and engaged for better services, to ensure that Metro addresses the characteristics and needs of the community.

Metro Joint Development and Mariachi Plaza

The Guide for Development: Mariachi Plaza (“*Guide*”) was published by Metro in January 2017. The *Guide* is a function of the Joint Development (“Metro JD”) program. Metro JD requires Metro to convene with community stakeholders to approve and move forward with local desires for land use and transit services. The *Guide* summarizes the community “desires” for Metro JD at Mariachi Plaza, expressed by residents and drafted in site-specific Development Guidelines. In 2014, Metro proposed plans for a commercial and market-rate housing development on two undeveloped lots adjacent to Mariachi Plaza. The authority met widespread resistance and opposition from Boyle Heights community members. Between January and July 2016, Metro held community meetings and workshops to produce the *Guide* and community-driven requirements for development. The *Guide* was published in January 2017.

The project at Mariachi Plaza is a mixed-use joint development of two Metro-owned parcels to integrate affordable housing, local commerce, and culturally specific design language (Metro 2017, 49). Mariachi Plaza lends its name to on-hire mariachis that gather at the site; as such, the *Guide* seeks to preserve this aspect of the local, collective economy.

The *Guide* operationalizes community engagement and participatory planning in Boyle Heights per the Metro JD Policy and Process framework. Metro JD breaks down on the local

level into Boyle Heights JD and community-led Development Guidelines for Mariachi Plaza. With regards to Mariachi Plaza, community members convene under the Design Review and Advisory Committee (DRAC) to propose, discuss, and approve desires for development to be proposed to the Metro Board of Directors (Metro 2017, 35). DRAC is unique to Boyle Heights, positioning the community as the benchmark for JD across the service territory. The preservation of the site as a gathering space for on-hire mariachis was a top priority for residents. In addition, members expressed the need for 100% affordable housing units with the incorporation of healthy, affordable food options. The interviews included as a part of this report sought to engage with community members to express room for improvement in the design of Metro JD in Boyle Heights and at Mariachi Plaza. See Appendix B for the guidelines put forth by the *Guide* and other active JD projects in Boyle Heights.

The Fight for Boyle Heights

Boyle Heights, Los Angeles is a community with a long history of inequitable transit policy and services. Residents of Boyle Heights have lived a narrative of segmentation and separation due to auto-centric mass-transit investment and freeway expansion that displaces residents and does not serve their needs (Gottlieb 2007, 195). Boyle Heights residents breathe dirty air in the shadow of the four major freeways and major industrial rail lines that cut through the neighborhood. Yet, Boyle Heights has a strong history of collective, communal efforts for equitable land use and community wellbeing. When plans for development and eastward expansion from Downtown have sought to promote “community re-creation” in Boyle Heights, local residents have historically mobilized against unwanted forces approaching the community (Gottlieb 2007, 300). Various coalitions in the community have mobilized on issues such as

affordable housing, infrastructure development projects, and the right to green space in the community.

Working-class communities are often designated as at-need zones for reinvestment and urban renewal (Gottlieb 2007, 198). For years, Boyle Heights has been designated as a Difficult to Develop Areas (DDA). The DDA process offers tax breaks and publicly sourced funds that can often bring outside developers to an at-need community. This system may attract developers to the community with little concern or understanding of what is needed and desired by neighborhood residents (Avila 2005, 50). Robert Gottlieb in *Reinventing Los Angeles* (2005) suggests the low-income, Latin American makeup of Boyle Heights as an indicator to transit planners and investors of a community unlikely to resist disruptive development practices (Gottlieb 2005, 186). In this paper, I explore the need for equitable development in Boyle Heights as a movement to reclaim lost place and space in the historic development of the Angeleno transit network.

Development in the landscape of a working-class urban community often sheds light to community changes. These changes may be marked in the physical landscape by a transforming demographic makeup and by increased cost of life and land. For Boyle Heights, the development of the Metro Gold Line and creation of Mariachi Plaza as a central transit hub for the Gold Line and the Eastside transit territory harkens back to freeway investment and consequent segmentation of the neighborhood; that is, the notion of mass transit in Boyle Heights denotes the influx of extralocal groups and poses Metro as an “agent of gentrification” (Estrada 2017, 242). With regards to community displacement as an effect of mass transit development, Boyle Heights residents perceive gentrification and displacement as a “real yet resistible force moving an immovable object” (KCET 2017). Community members exude a “networked politics of

place” that informs communal cohesion and belonging as a working-class Latino community with a (Gottlieb 2005, 300). A long history of civil action and local organizing suggests a standard for community involvement when it comes to outside development and the threat of displacement.

The collective fight for equitable and desirable land use directly informs Metro JD. Since 2014, Metro has formulated two JD teams specific to local development: one for Boyle Heights and one for Mariachi Plaza. The Plaza is an established cultural and economic center and is a gathering space for on-hire mariachis, street vendors, farmers markets, and community activists. A question of “development for whom?” has emerged in relation to TOD led by Metro, posed by residents, businesses, and community organizers in the conversation of participatory planning. In order to evaluate the successes, inaccuracies, and overall value of community engagement facilitated by Metro, this study is situated at Mariachi Plaza.

Literature Review

By designing urban development programs to be inclusive and specialized for at-need communities, various discussions in urban planning and sociology urge planners and authorities to consider displacement, transit dependence, and equity in how projects are designed and carried out. The works referenced in this literature review cite successful and ineffective public development projects as pertinent to participatory planning. This review is a platform to explore the following question: “How effectively does Metro integrate community engagement and participatory planning at Mariachi Plaza in Boyle Heights?” The broad discussions regarding urban renewal and reinvestment in at-need communities will be linked to development and organizing in Boyle Heights and at Mariachi Plaza.

Transit authorities own and manage vast amounts of real estate in metropolitan areas. As such, conversations around best practices for engaging transit-dependent communities points to justice-based development practices. The following literature review discusses the theoretical, political, and organizational bases which necessitate community engagement in urban planning and transit-oriented development.

Community Engagement and Spatial Justice

Recent research on best practices for community engagement highlights key elements for mobilizing and empowering communities to express their needs and desires for the development of local transit services. Engaging commentates for “collective efficacy” allows community stakeholders to influence the planning process and design while acting independently of the administrative and legislative bodies that carry out public policy (Freudenberg et al. 2011, S123). The “diversity of perspectives about the goals of public participation” urges a plural definition of

best practices for participatory planning (Chess and Purcell 1999, 2685). Professor of Environmental Design Judith Innes posits that “public participation must be collaborative and it should incorporate not only citizens, but also organized interests, profit-making and non-profit organizations, [and] planners and public administrators” (Inness and Booher 2004, 422). As Freudenberg et al. similarly state, “Agencies need to consider a variety of issues to be [willing], equal, and receptive partners in the process” (Freudenberg et al. 2011, S128). A receptive and engaged agency will encourage communities to trust and partake in the planning process.

Planning administrators should highly consider the socio-spatial context of the communities they serve. To determine an equitable project design, administrators must reach out to communities to understand “the history of the issue, the context in which the participation takes place, the expertise of those planning the effort, and the agency commitment [to community aspirations]” (Chess and Purcell 1999, 2690). (The last criterion denotes that the agency establish an internal effort to define equitable planning practices.) For at-need and environmentally disadvantaged communities, “capacity building” through involvement in the planning process establishes “assets for empowerment, community agendas, and community competence to protect community wellbeing” (Freudenberg et al. 2011, S124). In addition, participatory planning brings environmentally burdened communities — those which are overwhelmingly low-income communities of color in urban areas — to the table of public policy legislation and capacity building (Freudenberg et al. 2011, S123). Environmental justice for these groups necessitates effective and equity-based environmental laws, regulations, and development policies to fairly treat and meaningfully involve burdened residents (Wellman 2015, 127). When planning bodies instill equity and local input in development projects in urban areas, they ensure

spatial justice for communities in the face of historically disruptive and pollutive development practices.

Modeling Participatory Planning

Various authors of community planning theory visualize effective models for local engagement and empowerment. The Spiral Model of popular education illustrates how a community's experience of injustice and inequity can be articulated to create local leadership, strategizing, and planning to be applied in policy-specific action (Haas 2010,

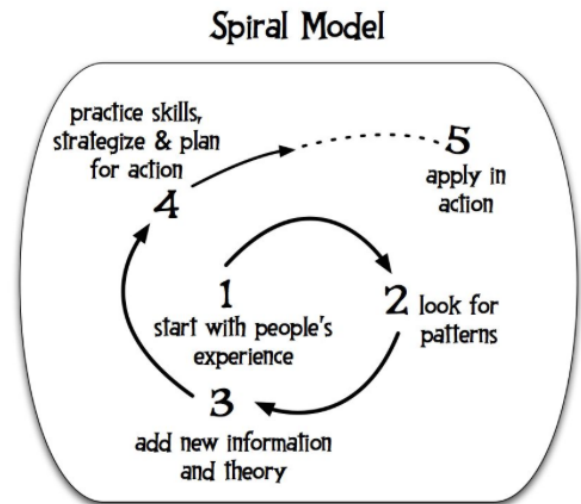


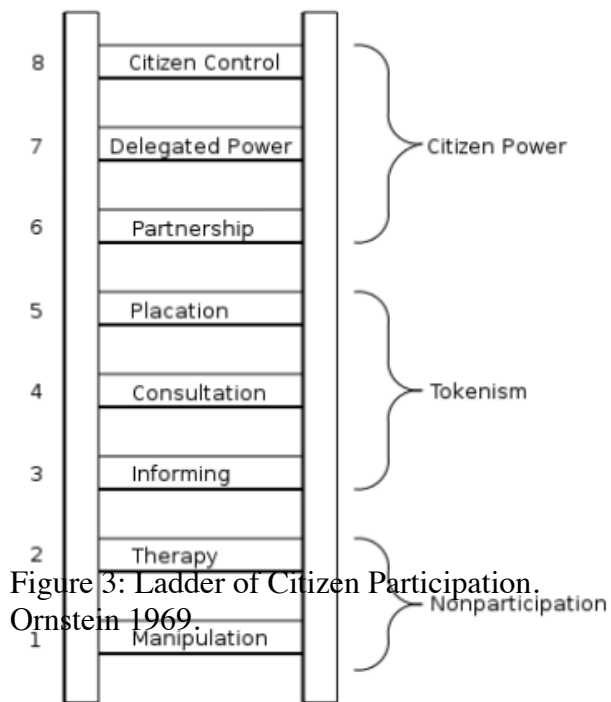
Figure 2: Spiral Model of Popular Education

Figure 2). This model demonstrates the

experience-based nature of recognizing patterns of injustice to highlight social values, desires, and methods to pressure equitable policy practices (Fig 2., rung 1 and 2). Community organizing and public actions allow residents to publicly voice the ways in which their identities are not reflected through public policy. In the third rung, local experiences are articulated as community-based theory of locally desired policy. Community-based organizations can act as moderators and facilitators of strategizing for policy-based action (Fulton and Shigley 2005, 7). With equity at the forefront of policy change, a community will plan, strategize, and mobilize (Fig 2., rung 4) to publicly express the need for policy reform (rung 5).

In her Ladder of Citizen Participation (Figure 3), community planning theorist Shelly Arnstein segments various approaches to the participatory process as: total non-participation,

even “manipulation” of communities; indirect participation through administrator-to-community “consultation” and “placation” absent of capacity building; and true civic power is realized by “partnerships” of interests and, ultimately, the “delegation and redistribution” of control by and for citizen (community) interests (Arnstein 1969). The Ladder of Participation reveals that community engagement programs may be ineffective in empowering community stakeholders if the authority maintains its deciding power. Additionally, Metro notes that “good planning for transit-oriented districts can be difficult to understand for well-seasoned planners” (Metro and CTOD 2010, 70). Hence, the engagement process should define “what strategies and action best strengthen community capacity” (Freudenberg et al. 2011, S128). To create equitable, local planning, planners and community members must convene to design the engagement process to prioritize partnerships, delegate power locally, and create citizen aptitude regarding the policy framework.



Transit Dependence

In the context of this review, community engagement in transportation planning calls for identifying and locating transit-dependent groups. In the implementation of transit-oriented development (TOD), Metro suggests that TOD should be measured and defined based on the broader outcomes that projects seek to provide. “TOD integrates land use, transportation and

urban design, and prioritizes walkable neighborhoods with well-integrated connections to the regional transit network” (Metro and CTOD 2010, 16). Successful TOD in Los Angeles should implement the following goals:

1. Reduce the combined costs of housing and transportation;
2. Reduce auto-dependence, [alleviate traffic] congestion, reduce greenhouse gases, and encourage residents to bike and walk;
3. Expand transportation choices for households of all incomes; and
4. Contribute to economic development and job growth (Metro and CTOD 2010).

A possible element absent from these goals is specifying TOD to account for past projects and policies that inequitably disrupted, displaced, or segmented communities. Pollack et al. suggest that investment in transit systems in newly transit-served neighborhoods may induce changes in neighborhood demographics and increase housing costs (Pollack et al. 2010, 25). The four parameters listed above address issues of traffic congestion, increased modes of mobility, and economic stimulation. However, in the event TOD brings services to groups that prefer or can use private or auto-centric modes of transportation, transit-dependent groups are less likely to benefit.

With regards to transit-dependent communities, Professor of Public Administration Gerard Wellman asserts that public transportation policy in the United States has historically “trapped” communities of color, women, and the poor “in their place” in a privatized, auto-centric transportation system (Wellman 2015, 117). Transit-dependent communities consequently experience a regressive relationship between mobility and income, in that dependent riders pay a larger percentage of their monthly income than the average American to get around the city (Bullard 2003, 1189). While new transit investment intends to reverse “isolating race and class

dynamics” of transit dependence, projects often “cut through” low-income, transit dependent zones, posing displacement for transit-dependent urban communities (Bullard 2003, 1205). In effect, transit riders may be left with older, less safe, and slower services.

Race, Transit-Riders, and Equitable Development

Authors like Pollack et al. and Brian Taylor and Eric Morris bring demography-based perspectives to TOD and nationwide public transit trends. In 2015, Taylor and Morris found that the nationwide median household income of transit riders was between \$22,500 and \$35,000, \$40,000 lower than that of private vehicle travelers (Taylor and Morris 2015, 353). Furthermore, public transit riders are predominantly groups of color; bus riders represent the lowest-income transit riders and are predominantly black, inner-city groups (355). Private vehicle and group rail (e.g. subways, light rail, streetcars) travelers are otherwise more affluent, implying that new investment in rail tends to increase the agency’s ridership by offering higher-income groups more options for transit (353). When investment in public transit prioritizes dense, diverse, and socially integrated neighborhoods, the transit authority serves its established ridership while providing connections that may also reach groups with wider mobility options or preferences.

Race, income, and transit dependence otherwise demonstrate a positive approach to transit planning: that accessible, high-quality public transit services provide marginalized groups more access to housing, jobs, and social participation in the city. Certain authors concur that “a symbiotic relationship [exists] between diverse neighborhoods and successful transit” (Pollack et al. 2010, 2). High-density zoning practices are touted as “key policy to reform automobile-dependent cities” (Ziegler 2011). Transportation policy may negate spatial equity if the ultimate goal of development is to mitigate traffic and benefit whiter, wealthier groups that prefer to travel

in their cars (Taylor and Morris 2015, 357). While “mobility and accessibility are crucial to a functioning society,” increased transit options, preservation of local routes, and better quality of transit services augment the opportunity of socio-spatial integration for urban, transit-dependent groups (Wellman 2015, 130). In Los Angeles, TOD designed for existent transit-dependent will address local needs for service improvements, secure housing, and economic development. By locating and engaging these groups, Metro can prioritize equity through transit but should consider the possible displacing effects of new investment in at-need areas.

TOD and the Risk for Displacement

In Los Angeles, displacement is a current term and issue. As stated by Pollack et al., TOD and urban development tend to displace communities through increased value of land and incomes in TOD-planned communities (Pollack et al. 2010, 16). Regarding gentrification, Chris Hamnett states the following:

The crucial point about gentrification is that it involves a social change and, at the neighborhood scale, a physical change in the housing stock and an economic change in the land and housing market. (Hamnett 1991, 175)

As Hamnett states, displacement is an issue of housing and local business. When members of a community are displaced due to increased land value, and are consequently barred from finding new space within their community, one can look to gentrification as the active issue of displacement.

The Guide for Development: Mariachi Plaza (“Guide”) accounts for the possibility of gentrification as marked by shifts in the social and economic functions of Boyle Heights. What makes a community gentrifiable, according to Devajyoti Deka, is the spatial displacement of a residing and predominant low-income demographic makeup (Deka 2016). In Boyle Heights,

community members consider gentrification as a predictable force of urban development. The concern of this growing phenomenon lies in the sense that disruptive public policy is designed to make “alleged improvements to physical structures” in low-income, yet locally affordable areas (Estrada 2017, 235). While the racialization of gentrification has “complicated” the nationwide discussion of community changes, Estrada links displacement to a lack of social integration in the urban landscape (Estrada 2017, 232). More segregated cities are more likely to experience the displacement of low-income groups, as we have seen in the case of Baltimore (Welch 2013) and with historic TOD practices at Metro.

As low-income communities are often those most dependent on public transit systems in the service territory of the transit authority, they are often the most at risk for displacement and gentrifying effects (Taylor and Morris 2014). To this degree, Boyle Heights can be considered a “gentrifiable” community (Deka 2016). Yet, the Guide cites gentrification just once:

As with any community, there were a variety of opinions [in the set of two community stakeholder charrettes (workshops) in February and March 2016, but a major concern in Boyle Heights was gentrification that would displace existing residents. (Metro 2017, 40)

Investment in TOD, as Pollack et al. observed, can “catalyze a process of neighborhood change that produces gentrification and, potentially, displacement of prior residents by higher-income, more racially homogeneous residents” (Pollack et al. 2010, 19). Metro should exercise caution when applying the concerns for displacement as uniform across all communities in its service territory. Metro should consider transit investment as a possible displacing force but view the “fiscalization” of its parcels as disruptive or a source of inaccessibility for groups that depend on its services and effective TOD.

i. Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Participatory Planning for Effective Urban Regeneration

Local urban renewal projects become effective with community-to-authority collaboration. Sunnam Park, Professor of Architecture, Planning, and Landscape at Newcastle University in Seoul, South Korea, suggests that interactive communication with local stakeholders, urban development agencies, and the contracted developer are the necessary components of "urban regeneration" for at-need groups (Park 2014, 183). Park describes urban regeneration as the product of an analytical framework that seeks to see and incorporate the "social dimension in urban design," which means that state-led urban regeneration projects seek to benefit communities through physical changes in local infrastructure. Effective projects for social-change design implement bottom-up community planning practices (184).

Park reveals a tendency of state-led housing programs to displace members of low-income, developing communities without instating principles of participatory planning; typically, end users of a project are not the existing community members (178). In illustrating this phenomenon and seeking policy alternatives to overcome the consequences of community displacement, he cites a "Going for Growth" policy in the West and East Ends in Newcastle upon Tyne in England as a case for socio-spatial justice in urban policy. Each End was assessed as a "significant area of poverty and continuing [residential] decline" (Park 2014, 179): the West End utilized a market-based approach to destigmatize the struggles and blight of the West End, a marketing process defined as "engineered gentrification," attracting new, yet wealthier groups to the area; the East End integrated a planning design that utilized a community-to-authority partnership to bring out community desires for development, mobilize and engage residents, and ensure that residents were not consequently displaced (180-181).

Equitable planning necessitates worthwhile public investment and increased quality of life for at-need groups within their socio-spatial realities. Development in the East End was successful in achieving its goals to engage residents, preserve the local demographic makeup, and increase local quality of life. In its final result, plans for the East End educated community members on the aspect of facilitating the process of planning and public policy. One can note a similar concept in practice through capacity building (see Freudenberg et al. 2011). Additionally, planning for equity concerns the “distribution of benefits and costs of public policy” for groups of varied social opportunities (Litman 2007, 2). With regards to housing and transit policy, administrators distribute the means by which at-need groups access secure modes of living, mobility, and opportunity across the city (Wellman 2015, 121). Community planning places the responsibility on transit authorities to anticipate the effect of their systems on transit-dependent groups' relationships with their geographical surroundings in the context of their socioeconomic realities. In equitable planning, administrators must draw out the possible benefits and mitigate the possible negative consequences in order to provide impacted communities with the greatest potential to improve life quality with a planning system that will affect everyday local life.

ii. Community Planning at Metro: Empowering Those in Need

The debate for community planning is localized in Los Angeles through Metro-specific efforts for community planning and transit equity. Various fights in the 1990s urged Metro to carry out participatory planning practices to rectify instances of severely disruptive and inequitable development programs. Planning professor Mayhar Arafí discusses the impacts of the Los Angeles Neighborhood Initiative (LANI) of 1993 through 1997 on movements for community-based capacity building for urban Angeleno communities predominantly populated

by minority races. LANI was implemented to assess community-based perceptions of urban blight in the deindustrialized, disinvested Los Angeles of the 1990s. “LANI communities with adequate social capital capitalized on their strengths and bridged their differences while inadequate social capital had adverse impacts on the outcomes of other areas” (Arefi 2002, 105). That is, LANI was successful for communities with a united sense of desire for redevelopment projects. Yet, without collective mobilization to define local needs for development, the transit authority “consolidates” its services in a way that displaces and excludes groups in the path of its programs (Cruz 2006, 71). Lack of community-based education of the LANI occurred at the administrator level, and consequently failed to attract continued investment in at-need neighborhoods (101). Yet, through LANI, Metro and the Department of City Planning were able to locate areas of increased need for redevelopment projects; that is, the agencies came to recognize the varying levels of need for reinvestment across the city and county (Arefi 2002). Initiatives like LANI are opportunities for agencies to locate, educate, reinvest in, and bring equitable services to the communities most dependent on public services.

While Metro had a passive participation in LANI, the authority has been held accountable for active discrimination and inequity. In 1994, the Los Angeles Bus Riders Union (BRU) filed an innovative lawsuit alleging civic rights violations by Metro. The BRU and the Labor/Community Strategy Center (LCSC) posited that Metro’s prioritization of new rail systems, reduction in bus services to create development funding, and fare hikes along popular bus routes intentionally and disproportionately discriminated against inner-city minority bus riders, a group that made up 94% of the authority’s ridership in 1994 (Grengs 2002).

The BRU and LCSC revealed a severe lack of outreach, collaboration, and consensus regarding Metro’s priorities and purposes to serve dependent groups. BRU organizers viewed

participatory planning “as a means of developing a civic consciousness [and] expectations” for development (Grengs 2002, 175). BRU leaders fought for citizen engagement to “demystify” the notion of ultimate authority at the administrative level (Grengs 2002, 165). By pressuring transit administrators to provide specified, local services, the BRU’s effort implemented the principle of citizen control and power in the process and progress of public policy (see Shelly Arnstein’s Ladder of Community Participation). The tensions between Metro and the BRU stimulated a localized case to mobilize transit riders for equity. Non-participatory planning practices fail to integrate the perspectives of at-need groups to specify public policy to their needs. Community engagement, organizing, and education on issues of public and transit policy remediate barriers to participation. The BRU in turn was able to create local tools for participation and policy facilitation for low-income, transit-dependent communities of color in Los Angeles.

Methodology

There is a tradition in community planning literature to evaluate the effectiveness of transit-oriented development projects and policy through interviews. For this reason, I designed my research to implement interviews and text-based analysis of transit policy. These methods are described in the following sections. The following research question informed the formulation of the interview questions: “How effectively does Metro integrate community engagement and participatory planning at Mariachi Plaza in Boyle Heights?” The insights and concerns gained from the interviews provide a basis to evaluate how effectively Metro has met local needs and desires for development through joint development. Consequently, interviews were conversation based so as to allow each participant to comfortably and candidly share their insights.

Interview Design and Process

Interviews were designed to prompt various stakeholders in the Metro TOD process, such as Boyle Heights residents, community organizers, and Metro administrators. The qualitative, community-based evaluation put forth in this study creates an intersection of community interests and the guiding policy framework of the transit authority. Along these lines, interviews commenced with some background questions. For each participant, questions shifted to engage perceptions of equity in the practice of transportation planning, and concluded with evaluative questions regarding Metro as an interpreter of place-based identity at Mariachi Plaza.

Interview questions were designed to be inclusive of the various stakeholders involved in the planning process at Mariachi Plaza. From residents of the community and members of the East Los Angeles Community Corporation (“ELACC”) constituency, to administrators and planners at Metro and the Los Angeles Department of City Planning (“City Planning”), the

design of the questions accounted for myriad visions of community identity and community planning in Boyle Heights. In addition, interviews were carried out in the preferred language of the interviewee to account for a pragmatic interpretation of the interview prompts. The interview questions followed an open-ended design to account for each participant as a stakeholder in the planning process.

Seven interviews took place in person and two over the phone between January and March 2018. Interviewees were contacted by phone, email, and social media, and interviews were collected based on a convenience sample of interviewee availability. Five of the interviews were carried out in Spanish and four in English. Five interviewees are Boyle Heights community members (all whom identify as Latina women and mothers), one interviewee is a community organizer for the East Los Angeles Community Corporation, and two interviewees are involved with Metro Joint Development at varying levels. I frequently convened with an anonymous lead ELACC organizer to develop my research question, reach out to interview community members, and check in with the progress of my interviews and research.

Interviews were recorded for note-taking and quoting purposes, with the written informed consent of the participants. Recurring themes in conversations were coded using dedoose.com, which incorporates annotating, tagging, and analyzing interview transcriptions. These themes are described as “Interviewee Concerns.” Each concern was recurring throughout one or more conversation(s), new to my knowledge of community engagement theory, or supplemental to community engagement theory included in the Literature Review. While the sample size of participants is relatively small compared to other reports that discuss community planning and transit equity, the participants accurately represent the group(s) that have been involved since the

initiation of the project site. See Appendix A for a detailed list of interviewees and interview questions.

This investigation considers Boyle Heights as a transit-dependent community. The interview questions engaged stakeholders to discuss transit-dependence, equitable community engagement and development, and their experience collaborating with Metro. Conversations frequently covered a wide range of issues regarding social justice, personal experience with displacement, and the perceived role of Metro in Boyle Heights. Interviewee insights, or “Interviewee Concerns,” were used to compile a set of best practices for Metro and other mass transit authorities to consider in designing projects for transit-dependent communities. The methodology taken in this investigation sought to activate insights and conclusions applicable to Boyle Heights and various communities in, across, and outside of Los Angeles. See Appendix A for a complete list of interviewees and interview questions.

Table 1: Interviewees

Interviewee	Title
<i>Guillermina Quezada</i>	Resident
<i>Pánfila Rodriguez</i>	Resident
<i>Elvira Sánchez</i>	Resident
<i>Fanny Ortiz</i>	Resident
<i>Minerva Villa</i>	Resident and business owner
<i>Carlos Ortiz</i>	Business owner, President of First Street Business Coalition, comm. organizer
<i>Anonymous Community Organizer</i>	—
<i>Anonymous Metro admin</i>	—
<i>Anonymous Metro admin</i>	—

Policy Analysis

This study regards three documents that guide Metro's Joint Development program: Joint Development Policy and Process, Boyle Heights Joint Development, and the *Guide for Development: Mariachi Plaza*. These policies were published in January 2017 and accessed online for analysis in this study. As Metro noted in the *Guide*, community stakeholders implored Metro in 2014 to design a TOD site to “[serve the] unique and eclectic identity of the neighborhood and Plaza” (*Guide* 2017, 23). While Los Angeles has a strong history of “constructing the identity and place” of non-white groups in official City Planning processes (Cruz 2006), the historic and communal fight for equitable policy in Boyle Heights is the center of analyzing local TOD policy. For this reason, this study is situated in Boyle Heights to analyze the impacts of Metro TOD policy on its working-class, non-white, and transit-riding groups.

Limitations

While I intended to speak with community interests involved with planning at Mariachi Plaza, I was unable to find participants who were less involved with planning at the project site. I reached out to mariachis at the Plaza, but met unwillingness to discuss topics regarding Metro and consequent effects on their business. While I reached out to various other directors of Metro JD and representatives at the Los Angeles Department of City Planning, the two individuals who responded requested that our conversations were not recorded or included in this paper. I followed up with them to include key concepts from our conversations and was approved to include only those concepts. The lack of participation of Metro administrators hindered a broader analysis of perceptions of equitable TOD within the agency. In this report, I do not make any

claims as to any level of unwillingness at Metro to engage with discussions around transit-dependence, the JD process, or its projects in Boyle Heights.

Findings and Analysis

Introduction – Evaluating Metro Joint Development

Effective transit-oriented development (TOD) for at-need, transit-dependent groups requires a community-driven process to determine and define project purpose, design, and location. For example, my discussions with participating Metro administrators centered on the authority's stance on transit equity and Boyle Heights-specific projects. Various themes in the interview conversations align with issues presented in Metro's Joint Development (JD) and community engagement framework. Metro states that JD projects should be compatible with the immediate community, which is why community engagement is required throughout the JD process. With reference to JD, a Metro administrator shared the following description of equitable development for at-need groups:

Construction of major transit projects can be disruptive, but JD sets major investments in low-income and transit-dependent communities. JD around new transit projects is an additional opportunity to encourage equitable economic development and bring new resources in to meet neighborhood needs. (Anonymous phone interview with Metro administrator, February 16, 2018)

JD creates a method of economic redevelopment for underserved communities through specified approaches to land use. In this design, the priorities of one JD area are likely to differ from those of another. Yet, JD intends to integrate equitable TOD with worthwhile investment in services and real estate for Metro. Mariachi Plaza is overseen by three JD processes: Metro JD Policy and Process, Boyle Heights JD, and the *Guide for Development: Mariachi Plaza*. See Table 2 for a description of these three levels of joint development (continued description in Appendix B).

Table 2: Varying levels and purposes of Metro Joint Development

Policy	Purpose
JD Policy and Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Link public and private sector interests in the development of Metro-owned parcels in service territory • Allow community organizations and developers to apply for Exclusive Negotiation (ENA); local firm selected to JD Agreement • Increase ridership, integrate community stakeholders, and create fiscally responsible land uses
Boyle Heights JD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carry out Metro JD in Boyle Heights • Assign a Transportation Planning Manager to the community. • Create the Design Review Advisory Committee to involve a variety of community stakeholders (residents, organizations, businesses) in project design and priorities
<i>Guide for Development: Mariachi Plaza</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Guide</i> acts as a site-specific application of JD, compiling DRAC Development Guiltiness for vision, design, and desired land use • Present Metro and LA DCP policy and regulatory framework to DRAC vision/ desires for development • Compile summaries of community meetings, workshops, and charrettes leading up to publishing of the <i>Guide</i>

Throughout this investigation, I found that Boyle Heights residents are likely to engage with programs like Metro JD because of the community’s tradition to resist disruptive development. This quality of the community became apparent early in the research process and was considered throughout the course of the investigation. All resident participants spoke to the importance of culture, race, and family when fighting for equitable policy change. Community organizer and local business owner Carlos Ortez posited that the neighborhood has a “cultural cohesion that allows for effective resistance” (Ortez, pers. comm., March 29, 2018). Resident Fanny Ortiz noted that current fights in Boyle Heights are intergenerational: “Everyone’s doing their own thing, but at the end of the day our lives all interconnect intergenerationally. We all have that space to share” (Ortiz, pers. comm., February 14, 2018). In a unique sense, community members view culture and space as one; effective engagement implements the spatial identity of

Boyle Heights in the design and purpose of TOD. When spatial identity is integrated in the design, purpose, and infrastructure of urban development projects, the authority implements place-based identity for unique projects with community-specific uses (as noted in “Little San Salvador: Identity of Places/Places of Identity” by Marcelo Cruz [2006]). Community leaders like Ortez and Ortiz expect local leadership to grow across generations. Metro JD and TOD thus concern place-based identity and community wellbeing as much as they manage land use and provide public transit services.

Representation through Community Engagement

Community members who are involved in engagement at Mariachi Plaza represent the demographic makeup of Boyle Heights. Community-based organizations, business owner coalitions, youth groups, and urban agriculture organizations exemplify some of many stakeholders among involved in policy-based organizing and action in Boyle Heights. Resistance to unjust transit policy is a long-lasting battle in the community, existing amidst movements for street vendor rights, affordable housing, food access, and anti-displacement developments. ELACC leads and has led various policy-based fights in Boyle Heights. The organization ensures that local fights are inclusive and representative of Boyle Heights as a whole.

i. High Turnout, High Representation

The two community organizers that participated in this study explained that resident turnout at Metro-led workshops is often low. As follows, low turnout translates to the need for a more accessible community engagement process. When mobilizing the community, ELACC prioritizes community awareness of engagement programs like Metro JD. However, both organizers suggested that Metro expand its outreach methods. This could include more

comprehensive notification of meetings (e.g. by phone, email and social media, canvassing), community check-ins on perceptions of impacts, successes, and improvements in the JD process, and notifying the ridership of JD events on rail and in buses (e.g. window stickers of schedules and upcoming events).

Community organizations like ELACC therefore play a direct role in highlighting experiences of local inequities for policy-based action (See the Spiral Model, Fig. 1). Yet, under the Exclusive Negotiation Agreement (ENA, see *Informing Capacity Building*), ELACC and Metro are both responsible for scheduling meetings that residents can attend. One of the two interviewed organizers said scheduling is often difficult because Boyle Heights residents generally work one or more jobs and are only available in the evenings. With sufficient turnout, ELACC can effectively organize to educate residents on their rights as facilitators within the JD policy framework. Two resident interviewees who have experienced inequity spoke to ELACC’s role in empowering them to know their rights and voice their concerns. They expressed following responses when prompted “What role does community engagement play in Boyle Heights?”:

- “We get involved when organizations awaken the interest [to participate.] Campaigns only raise so much awareness — when you’re engaged, you see how your efforts bring change and benefit to your community” (Quezada, pers. comm., January 26, 2018).
- ”Eight years ago I was displaced and was looking for a home. I applied to ELACC housing and got accepted. Since then, [the organization has] shown me the world of community organizing and the opportunities to show Metro my needs and the needs of my community through participation” (Sánchez, pers. comm., February 16, 2018).

When residents are displaced, the community “understands its collective trauma”; historic fights for equitable policy in Boyle Heights signify to Fanny Ortiz that her community is “sustaining itself” through the collective effort. The fight for equitable policy change through local organizing

and mobilizing activates at-need groups to specify and facilitate local policy; it is key to understand that re-activated voices are often those that would be excluded by a non-participatory planning process. The five community members that participated in this investigation shed light on the communal and emotional aspect of community engagement. The fight for equitable, anti-displacement policy — and the facilitation of Metro JD by and for locals — is a community-wide effort to preserve family, culture, and place-based identity.

ii. Community Engagement Brings Mutual Benefits

Metro has “learned its lesson” from resistance efforts led by Boyle Heights residents and organizations for the “mutual growth” of both community and agency (Ortiz, pers. comm., February 14, 2018). As the community has mobilized around the desire for transit and housing equity, it has demonstrated a local effort to understand the system of urban transit planning. It is key for Metro to understand the communal nature of life in Boyle Heights. As Metro reinvests in its six other JD areas, the authority should consider that mobilizations at Mariachi Plaza have standardized community engagement for transit-dependent communities across Los Angeles. Community stakeholders expect Metro to listen to them, but effective community-based facilitation of new policy necessitates mutual willingness for residents to learn about Metro’s policy framework as well.

Metro’s Role for Community Engagement

i. Boyle Heights Between City and County — The Need to Create Local Routes

Seven of the nine interviewees described Boyle Heights’ proximity to Downtown as an important aspect of the neighborhood's identity. Some interviewees elaborated upon Boyle Heights as a sociopolitical barrier between the politics of the city and the unincorporated

Eastside communities of LA County. “Boyle Heights has Downtown right next door,” noted an anonymous community organizer. “Residents see their oppressors in the skyline. They are close, but far enough to fight” (pers. comm., March 23, 2018). The neighborhood acts as an informal border between the Eastside and the rest of Los Angeles. While Eastside communities have been a cultural and political center for Latino/a and Chicano identities, Boyle Heights residents are inequitably figured into the demographics of the City of Los Angeles. The oppression mentioned by the organizer sheds light on local perceptions of the impacts and disruptions caused by urban policy unique to Boyle Heights on the fringe of city and county. Organizing for locally-desired transit routes suggests a movement to relieve the environmental and political strain that interregional transit systems have historically imposed upon the Eastside neighborhood.

Light rail, Metro Local and Rapid routes, various freeways, and major railroads pass through Boyle Heights (see Background: *The Fight for Boyle Heights*). Residents have further expressed concern that the community depends on — but lacks — direct, short-line connections. Guillermina Quezada, a resident involved with JD, suggested that being underserved means the transit authority presumes uniform dependence on transit across the service territory: “There are so many similarities and differences between one street and the other in our neighborhood, but public transport assumes equal need. This shows the inequity in transit” (Quezada, pers. comm., February 9, 2018). Youth, elderly folks, and non-car-owning households are those most dependent on direct, short-line routes. These transit-dependent groups would be better connected to their community and city with short-line routes that would take them to transit hubs, such as stations along the Gold Line and other regional transit service connections.

Quezada further explained the need for at least one or more Metro Local or LA Department of Transportation DASH routes to pass through the intersection of First Street and Boyle Avenue. This would attract local bus riders to Mariachi Plaza for the use of the Metro Gold Line, while first creating short-line routes for better mobility within the community. DASH utilizes small buses that run on lesser-traveled routes; 70% of DASH riders belong to minority groups and DASH routes are popular in non-white, urban communities like Boyle Heights (LADOT 2016, 4). DASH provides the Boyle Heights/East LA route at the neighborhood's eastern border; Boyle Heights/East LA connects to the Gold Line at Indiana Station, albeit on the



Figure 4: LADOT DASH route Boyle Heights/East LA. Note: This route serves the eastern edge of Boyle Heights from North to South. Mariachi Plaza is located at the left of the map, underneath legend. DASH route connects at Indiana Station, on the border of City and County limit. Source: LADOT

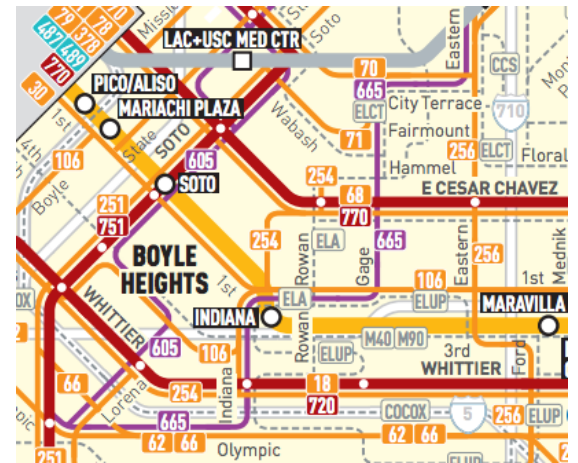


Figure 5: Metro bus and rail services in Boyle Heights. Note: Lines 30, 106, 251, 254 751, 770 serve Boyle Heights along with the Gold Line. Source: Metro Interactive Map

city-county border. Residents desire similar routes to the west of the community, centralized around hubs like First Street, Soto Station, and Mariachi Plaza. As Metro JD intends to increase its ridership, reconnect JD communities with the service territory, and streamline Metro services with other regional transit systems (*Metro JD Policy and Process 2017*, 6), short-line routes in Boyle Heights would serve both the community and Metro in achieving their desires for TOD. Figure 4 and 5 illustrate public transit services in Boyle Heights; Figure 4 shows the Boyle Heights/East LA DASH line, which is routed north to south along the eastern edge of Boyle Heights with unincorporated East Los Angeles; Mariachi Plaza is located beneath the legend, showing a mismatch between this short-line service and the Metro Gold Line and bus routes.

ii. Accounting for Inequity, Improving Joint Development

Through JD and the recently adopted Equity Platform, Metro is working to prioritize the needs of underserved communities. Under JD Policy, Metro takes on the following three objectives: one, community-led development of open Metro-owned parcels; two, collaboration with community partners and the Design Review Advisory Committee; and three, the maximization of project revenue with the least financial risk to the authority (4-5). In addition to these three JD principles, the authority has taken an internal position to address its past inequitable policy practices. The Metro Equity Platform demonstrates a recently formulated policy framework for community-specific policy. The Platform presents the following priorities to carry out equitable transit policy: establish a “common basis” of equity and inequity; listen to and learn from communities how Metro has carried out “problematic” policies in at-need areas; and define where Metro “leads” and “partners” with regards to its role as a transit planner and

facilitator of community-based capacity building (Metro Equity Platform, 5-10). Because the Platform was published in February 2017, it has yet to achieve a tangible application at a project site. With regards to JD communities, an anonymous Metro administrator suggested the following summary of JD:

Construction of major transit projects can be disruptive, but these are also major investments in low-income and transit-dependent communities. Joint Development around these new transit projects is an additional opportunity to encourage equitable economic development and bring new resources in to meet neighborhood needs. (Anonymous email interview of Metro administrator, March 3, 2018)

JD policy and process allows for equitable leadership on both the Metro and ELACC sides of the JD process. Thus, those involved in the decisions-making process “have to know when to lead and when to be lead” (Ortiz, pers. comm., February 14, 2018). JD achieves this dynamic through the DRAC, along with the equity platform and agenda to locate and prevent displacement and gentrification.

Interviewees expressed concerns for the disruptive nature of transit and urban development projects. One of the most recurring issues expressed by interviewees was for Metro to ensure a wider variety of options for land use and development, as led by community-based stakeholders. While the JD Policy and Process is structured to inform community engagement in Metro’s ultimate decisions for the development of its parcels, this issue was not as clearly articulated in the JD policy at the local and site-specific levels. The three documents analyzed in this investigation sufficiently speak to Metro’s role in creating and sustaining an adequate affordable housing stock in its transit-dependent communities. With regards to Metro’s role to create spaces for civic engagement and policy education, interviewees suggest Boyle Heights JD and the *Guide for Development: Mariachi Plaza* fail to include language for continued local

engagement and capacity building to a significant extent. See **Table 3** for an evaluation of how these levels of Metro JD meet or disregard the concerns expressed by participant interviewees.

Table 3: Interviewee Concerns as reflected in Metro JD Policy

Interviewee concerns	<i>JD Policy and Process</i>	<i>Boyle Heights JD</i>	<i>Guide: Mariachi Plaza</i>
JD should ensure community-based land use options	All levels	Inadequate	Occasional
Metro is an affordable housing developer	All levels	All levels	All levels (JD at MP seeks 100% affordable units)
Metro should awaken the interest for residents to participate	All levels	All levels	All levels
New development should create local jobs for residents	Occasional	Inadequate	Occasional
JD should prioritize local routes	All levels	Occasional	Occasional
JD should sustain Metro’s transit-dependent ridership; provide new services for underserved groups	All levels	Inadequate	Inadequate
Metro and the joint partner should educate the community on policy	All levels	Inadequate	Inadequate
JD is a space for capacity building; engaged residents should be recognized as facilitators of policy	All levels	Inadequate	Inadequate

Legend: “All levels” indicates the policy accurately and frequently describes the corresponding concern; “Occasional” suggests the document occasionally describes the corresponding concern, with room for improvement; and “Inadequate” suggests the policy document inadequately describes the corresponding concern, with the recommendation that it is redrafted to include the concern.

iii. Exclusive Negotiation: Informing Capacity Building and Realistic Planning

The Interviewee Concerns listed above highlight which JD policies successfully or unsuccessfully effectuate the community’s vision and desires for development within the

partnership. Metro describes community partners as “essential” to effectively address displacement, gentrification, and the creation of an accessible affordable housing stock (JD Policy 2017, 10). Under JD Exclusive Negotiation (ENA), Metro selects community partners based on the partner’s application (Request for Proposal) and involvement with policy-based action, reputation within its constituency, and competency to be a worthwhile joint developer (JD Process 2017, 6). An anonymous Metro administrator urged JD, at all levels, to create a collaborative dialogue, “whatever the outcome. The joint developer serves as an on-the-ground community base for the authority to be open to the community’s desires” (Anonymous phone interview with Metro administrator, February 16, 2018). Yet, two community organizers expressed the concern that the JD process has made community leaders responsible for the “leg-work” in expressing desires for development. As shown in the table, this concern regards Boyle Heights JD and the framework for Mariachi Plaza. ENA is designed as a two-way effort; while the selected community organization is responsible to mobilize the community base, Metro should offer the community policy-based resources and recommendations on effective community engagement from other JD zones, as specifically rewritten into the Boyle Heights JD framework. In practice, the joint development process has redefined Metro’s responsibility to directly serve its transit-dependent base at the neighborhood level. Effective community-led facilitation of the TOD process will inform meaningful capacity building — by and for transit riding groups.

Meaningful collaboration between ELACC, its constituency, and the authority indicates facilitation by both JD partners. As JD administrators listen to and effectuate community interests, they are at the liberty to ensure that local desires can be realistically carried out by

Metro. According to an anonymous Metro administrator, “individual accountability” of JD administrators is what stipulates an effective ENA (Anonymous, phone interview, February 16, 2018). Boyle Heights resident Pánfila Rodríguez further values community engagement, stating that “Metro can not develop in [her] community without communication, outreach, and [involvement]” (Rodríguez, pers. comm., March 6, 2018). Inclusive, engaging policy processes allow for residents like Ms. Rodríguez to translate her voice, through her own facilitation, into a public service that will suit her needs. In practice, authority-to-community partnerships prioritize spatial justice (see Freudenberg et al. 2011) and civic engagement to limit the displacing effects of transit and urban development projects.

Equity or Access to Opportunity?

As an authority, Metro has taken the initiative to address its past inequitable policies and practices. The Metro Equity Platform defines social equity as the equal access to opportunity for groups in its ridership that have demonstrated disparate benefits from transit services. Ensuring access to opportunity — to housing, jobs, education, health, and safety — is “a core concern to public decision-making, public investment, and public service” (Platform 2018, 2). The platform contrastingly defines inequity as the “fundamental disparity” of access to opportunity. To evaluate the effectiveness of Metro’s stance on equity, I asked interviewees to elaborate upon their perceptions and definitions of equity, access to opportunity, and equality. Interviewees were prompted: “How effectively does Metro promote equity and ‘access to opportunity’ in your community?”

Several interviewees suggested that “access to opportunity” inaccurately presents the concern and fight for equity in Boyle Heights. For these residents, equitable practices inform the redistribution of decision-making power from the authority and its administrators to the community partner and its constituency. TOD lead by community stakeholders and Metro jointly accomplishes equitable and effective community engagement. Community resident Guille Quezada explained the following critique of Metro’s definition of equity:

‘Access to opportunity’ takes away the advantage of the fight for equity. Equity in our community gives us the tools we don’t have, that other communities do have, to receive the services we need. (Quezada, pers. comm., February 9, 2018)

Community engagement with equity in mind allows at-need groups to differently define the tools and services they deserve for a higher quality of life. In Boyle Heights, affordable housing is a top priority. However, equity may be differently interpreted in other JD communities. As such, Metro administrators have supported a broad approach to defining equity — such as access to opportunity — in the varying contexts of its dependent communities.

i. Partnering for TOD

A resident interviewee noted that community engagement in TOD projects concerns her community’s collective sense of security in their neighborhood. In Boyle Heights, ELACC has mobilized its constituency to define and facilitate the best practices for equity tailored to local benefits. In this sense, the engagement process and policy framework has offered underserved, transit-dependent residents a tool to directly illustrate their needs to Metro administrators, panels, and development teams. The partnership aspect of JD has offered Boyle Heights residents a platform to cohesively convey their desires for TOD projects as well as fundamental visions for

equity and social progress. The unification and widespread engagement seen in Boyle Heights models effective community-drive facilitation of specialized transit policy.

Through the JD partnership, Metro is held accountable to translate the community's desires for development into the authority's overlying policy framework. Boyle Heights resident Pánfila Rodríguez stated that "Metro can not develop in [her] community without communication, outreach, and [involvement]" (Rodríguez, pers. comm., March 6, 2018). She explained Metro has satisfactorily enacted community engagement at the local level; yet, Metro JD has been designed to hold the authority and the community partner accountable to continue with their partnership as the community's tool for equity and self-sustainability. JD administrators acting as on-site Metro liaisons fulfill a role that executes the community's agenda for equity within the authority's development framework(s).

Recommendations

Metro Joint Development aims to bring the most transit-dependent groups in Los Angeles to the transit planning table. The involvement of these groups is essential for Metro to reconcile past inequitable practices, increase its ridership and public trust in its services, and change the narrative of transit dependence. While JD was enacted by the mobilization for Metro to engage communities, interviewee concerns point to discrepancies in the JD process when compared to the goals set by the Metro plan for JD. According to resident and administrator interviewees, JD should further integrate the following objectives, among others, at Mariachi Plaza and in every active JD community: **one**, create short-line routes within the community; **two**, explicitly define methods for capacity building in underserved communities; and **three**, hold JD administrators accountable to articulate the community’s desires when convening internally with Metro. I have compiled the following set of recommendations to further improve Metro’s framework for local planning and project design:

Table 4: Recommendations for Metro Joint Development at Mariachi Plaza and Beyond

Category	Recommendations
<i>Transit and Equity</i>	<p>Update Metro Goals for Transit-Oriented Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Metro TOD intends to connect service territory as a whole — Boyle Heights JD should specify goals for locally-led TOD • JD must implement Metro Local routes, DASH, and other short-line services to meet the community’s needs • JD transit prioritization is to “preserve properties for transit use”; JD at neighborhood level should allow for land use options compatible with local needs

<p><i>Metro Accountability</i></p>	<p>The Role of the JD Administrator</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • JD administrators should be held accountable to lead and be led in the engagement process • Metro broadly defines equity; admins must understand how the community has been inequitably impacted <p>Capacity Building</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define capacity building as per the partner organization (e.g. in its mission and campaigns); implement community engagement early in new/updating projects • Apply Equity Platform to JD and Mariachi Plaza; Hold Metro accountable to fulfill its internal stance on equity • Truly assess when Metro leads and should be led
<p><i>Community Organizing</i></p>	<p>Highlight the Fight for Boyle Heights</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design the community engagement process to uphold communal way of local life • Prioritize anti-displacement policy/practice • Integrate community vernacular into policy; educate residents on policy “lingo” • Create a bilingual system of civic engagement and empowerment
<p><i>Transparency</i></p>	<p>Develop Periodic Community Reports</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community reports on housing security, businesses, local perceptions of effectiveness at project site/in community • Plan more public events, workshops, etc. with the community partner to increase turnout and local representation • Promote local businesses and events at transit stops and on Metro services <p>Design JD Framework for Local Representation and Compatibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create more opportunities for increased engagement and membership in the joint planning process • Update priorities at project site(s) as needed

Transit

- i. Update Metro’s Goals for Transit-Oriented Development

Metro TOD intends to create new development projects that will increase and serve its countywide ridership. In line with the desires for equitable TOD presented by stakeholders in

Boyle Heights, the first priority of these projects should foster community-to-authority dialogue. With this dialogue, the community engagement process highlights the specific needs of each community with a JD process in practice. Those interviewed in this study overwhelmingly expressed the need for local, short-line, and low-occupancy bus routes. Residents are highly dependent on local bus routes and use interregional rail when their destinations are outside of their neighborhood boundaries; for the youth, elderly, and non-car-owning households in Boyle Heights, destinations are generally within the neighborhood boundaries. Community interviewees support connections between JD areas and the service territory as a whole, as put forth by JD Policy and Process. Yet, the foremost priority in enhancing transit services through JD is to create and sustain dialogue with the authority.

While Metro is a public transit provider, the JD framework rewrites the authority's stakes in at-need communities. JD frames Metro's transit prioritization to "preserve properties for transit use" (JD Policy 2017, 4). However, the most compatible use for Metro parcels in at-need communities may implement affordable housing, local business, and open spaces for public use. Through JD, Metro's roles are expanded from providing public transit to contributing to the overall wellbeing of its ridership. The Objectives/Goals section of the JD Policy document should be updated to reflect the social dimension of Metro's services, as well as its transit-centric priorities.

Metro Accountability

i. The Role of the JD Administrator

Individual JD administrators are on-the-ground representatives of Metro. Residents expect these individuals to be well-versed in the community's history, current issues, and active

local groups and organizations. In the Metro JD Policy and Process documents, community outreach is described as a broad, agency-wide process: for example, “Metro will consult and work cooperatively with local jurisdictions and developers” (JD Policy 2017, 6). In addition, titles for JD administrators (such as “Transportation Planning Manager”) can be easily found online but are not as readily presented in the JD framework. This may pose a barrier to maximizing transparency of policy and process between community stakeholders and Metro. Language is also vague with regards to internal expectations of on-site administrators of JD. The process could be streamlined with clear language explaining the role, qualifications, and deciding power of these individuals. In turn, this will offer community’s a clear definition of their role and hold them more accountable to their service to the community.

ii. Explicitly Define Capacity Building

Public authorities with stakes in transit, housing, and urban development should identify their most at-need groups through JD-like programs. Community engagement should be implemented early in the process of development visioning and design, to ensure that development starts and ends with the community’s involvement. Through a sustained community-to-authority partnership, transit-dependent communities are empowered to formulate the best project for their needs and build their local civic capacity for development going forward.

While the Equity Platform has yet to be applied to a JD community or site, the authority’s most recent publication of capacity building dates back to a 2010 citywide TOD toolkit (Metro and CTOD). In Boyle Heights, Metro and ELACC collaborate to carry out the vision for development as expressed by community members. Local residents feel generally satisfied with Metro’s community engagement structure, but expressed feelings of being overwhelmed by

written transit policy. ELACC is a trusted source of local mobilization and education of public policy; organizers and residents would benefit from a close integration of the organization's mission, vision, and campaign structure into the Boyle Heights JD framework. The Equity Platform will further the authority's mission for equity, but has yet to be fully approved by the Metro Board of Directors for agency-wide implementation. In the mean time, JD administrators should be urged to dialogue with local organizers and residents with regards to the partner organization's mission and current campaigns.

Community Organizing

i. Highlight the Fight for Boyle Heights

The tradition of civic engagement in Boyle Heights has contributed to high local representation in the JD projects local to the neighborhood. According to a Metro administrator, "Boyle Heights is the most engaged JD community in which I've been involved" (Anonymous. Phone interview of Metro administrator, January 29, 2018). This suggests that the fight for Boyle Heights is to secure the community in its place, without displacement, and For ELACC, outside developers (e.g. non-locally-based affordable housing agencies) are highly discouraged. With regards to displacement and gentrification, Metro should do more than articulate the need to locate and prevent community changes (such as through its Equity Platform or in various sections in the JD framework). The agency should report on community shifts and the wellbeing of local businesses, to be presented to the community on a periodic basis and to be open for community perceptions of combating disruptive development practices through representative engagement (see *Transparency*). With ELACC as the community partner, the JD process achieves key principles of equity, such as representative policy, environmental justice, fair and

affordable housing practices, and securing licenses for street vendors. The need to make up for a history of inequitable policy practices may differ between JD communities, but the implementation of a community partner — and, effectively, community leaders and experts — will uphold an inclusive, representative engagement process.

With community engagement principles specified to collective organizing in Boyle Heights, the JD policy and process can integrate in writing and practice community vernacular. This would ensure effective interpretation of JD policy by community-specific terms. For example, the cohesive culture of Boyle Heights has inspired members to “throw down” for their community. Throwing down, as expressed by two interviewees, denotes an individual or communal willingness to fight for the benefit of their peers and their neighbors. This term was described with an element of possible tradeoff, for community members have experienced conflict with administrators and, at times, law enforcement when fighting for social change. A community-specific term like “throwing down” could be easily integrated within the JD policy framework: for example, “The Boyle Heights community base is “down to throw down” for the benefit of their neighborhood. JD seeks to preserve this core element of life in Boyle Heights.”

The integration of community vernacular into the policy language could enhance the community’s interpretation and willingness to understand more formal terms utilized in urban planning and transit policy. Policy language often includes abbreviations for titles, programs, and processes. In Boyle Heights, the community understanding of Metro’s framework requires a bilingual setting for community engagement. Direct interaction with the policy language will educate residents on policy terminology, yet with proper translation of terms into Spanish. With a

better understanding of the policy language, the JD process can further prioritize local capacity building and representation in the engagement process

Transparency

i. Develop Periodic Community Reports

In my interviews with participating community stakeholders, I noted a recurring desire for Metro to report on the local impacts of JD projects. These impacts would focus issues such as affordable housing, local business, and perceptions of project effectiveness. Community reports will allow both sides of the JD partnership to better interpret the progress of the project. At Mariachi Plaza, Metro should reach out to the various businesses along First Street on a regular basis; this practice is applicable to all other JD sites. In addition, the JD administrator should be urged to speak with residents of nearby affordable housing developments for updated desires and interests in the project vision; ELACC would be directly responsible to carry out this method of outreach because of its significant stake in affordable housing developer. An added benefit of increased community outreach and reports would allow for more opportunities for resident participation and, consequently, representation in the planning process.

To ensure that JD benefit the community's local businesses, Metro has been urged to illustrate and map out businesses directly integrated within its JD sites. Minerva Villa, the owner of J & F Ice Cream Shop at Mariachi Plaza, supports the idea of maps, posters, and stickers of local businesses and points of interests at transit stops and on Metro's vehicles (e.g. window stickers; pers. comm., March 23, 2018). Villa added that she is concerned for the changing demographics of her community, but envisions her business to benefit from spikes in Metro's

ridership. Yet, Taylor and Morris discuss how getting drivers off the roads and into public transit may generate an increasingly wealthier, whiter transit ridership (Taylor and Morris 2015, 357; see Literature Review: *Race, Transit-Riders, and Equitable Development*). For a more equitable, non-displacing JD framework, Metro should be urged to periodically drive reports on community demographics, housing, and economic wellbeing. With this system in mind, Metro can ensure its development will meet the needs of its at-need communities without their consequent displacement.

ii. Design JD Framework for Local Representation and Compatibility

Metro and ELACC can prioritize local representation and encourage better turnout by planning more meetings in various locations. As a majority working-class neighborhood, Boyle Heights residents who desire better transit and housing services are more likely to become engaged with frequent opportunities to meet with organizers and transit planners. To ensure the highest level of community compatibility between residents and the development, the JD process should enforce a system of continually updating project priorities, as per updating DRAC Development Guidelines. These guidelines, as the listed priorities for Mariachi Plaza and other projects, should be open to update on an at-need scheduled basis. The reprioritization and periodic assessment of how Guidelines are being carried out could follow a schedule similar to that described in *Transparency*.

Conclusion

In sum, this study serves as a progress report for current Metro Joint Development in Boyle Heights and at Mariachi Plaza. This study compiles comprehensive interviews of community members, community organizers, Metro administrators, and other stakeholders involved with or impacted by Metro's services in Boyle Heights. Every interview participant has been involved with engagement at Mariachi Plaza to a significant extent. In this progress report for best practices, local and administrative facilitators of JD expressed their perceptions of equitable development a year and two months after the JD framework and *Guide for Development: Mariachi Plaza* was published in January 2017.

Overall, the perceptions of equity and concerns for improvement gathered in this study affirm the importance and integration of JD in Boyle Heights. That is, with JD, Metro has communicated to community members that its individual administrators are listening to local concerns and are translating community desires for development into a sound policy framework for continued equitable development. Metro should consider a system to frequently report on community wellbeing regarding housing, the local economy, transit dependence, and other factors. This will allow for better local representation in the planning process and will encourage members to continue their involvement in civic engagement.

Through interviews and frequent communication with Boyle Heights residents and leaders, I found that community engagement at Mariachi Plaza standardizes joint development for Boyle Heights and, in turn, Metro's most transit-dependent communities. As a result, the recommendations put forth in this study focus on enhancing JD, community engagement, and Metro's Equity Platform as a whole. I find it important, however, to return to Mariachi Plaza to

evaluate Metro's effectiveness of popularizing transit-oriented development. Residents have redefined the process of urban transit planning as an opportunity to organize, mobilize for, and facilitate socially and spatially just policy. Facilitation in this context allows the urban landscape to develop according to community-led desires, visions, and campaigns. A meaningful and representative civic engagement plan activates voices and narratives that have been historically excluded by non-localized policymaking and impacted by urban sprawl.

Direction for **Future Research**

Metro JD has four active sites in Boyle Heights and various others across Los Angeles County. JD is a dynamic framework for TOD and participatory planning and should implement various plans and goals for each JD community. Further research into Metro, TOD, and community engagement will regard the implementation of the Equity Platform in practice. The Platform has yet to be applied to a JD community, but will initiate an authority-wide stance on equity through community engagement and specified transit uses.

In addition, community engagement in Boyle Heights can be used as a model for further investigation. ELACC is spearheading a Metro-based campaign to create more momentum in other local JD projects. At Mariachi Plaza, ELACC and Metro are set to start a yearlong process of community workshops to further specify the community's vision for development at Mariachi Plaza. Between April of 2018 and August of 2019, JD at Mariachi Plaza will implement Phase I of the development; Phase II is expected after 2019, and will also serve as a lever for further research to evaluate and enhance equitable TOD practices for transit-dependent communities.

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Appendix A

List of interviewees

Interview date	Name	Personal Background/Title	Boyle Heights Resident?
3/29/2018	<i>Carlos Ortez</i>	Business owner, El Solo Sol, President of First Street Business Coalition	No
3/23/2018	<i>Minerva Villa</i>	Boyle Heights resident; business owner, J & F Ice Cream Shop at Mariachi Plaza	Yes
3/23/2018	<i>Anonymous Community Organizer</i>	ELACC community organizer	—
3/6/2018	<i>Pánfila Rodríguez</i>	Resident; ELACC member	Yes
2/16/2018	<i>Elvira Sánchez</i>	Resident; ELACC member	Yes
2/14/2018	<i>Fanny Ortiz</i>	Resident; ELACC member	Yes
2/9/2018	<i>Guillermina Quezada</i>	Resident; ELACC member	Yes
2/1/2018	<i>Anonymous Metro admin</i>	—	—
1/29/2018	<i>Anonymous Metro admin</i>	—	—

Interview questions:

The following list compiles all interview questions. This list was open-ended and subject to change throughout the interview process.

1. **Personal Background**

- a. What is your name? How old are you?
 - b. What is your gender identity and what are your preferred pronouns?
 - c. What is your occupation?
2. Do you live in Boyle Heights? If so, for how long?
 3. What is your primary mode of transport? (Estimated percentage)

- a. How much do you use public transportation (Metro rail, Metro, Montebello Bus Lines, DASH routes, etc.?)
- b. How does public transportation serve you and your community?
4. Do you ride any LA Metro services?
 - a. If yes, what are they (bus, light rail, bus rapid transit, etc.)?
5. **Community Member Questions:**
 1. How do you define equality and equity in your community?; in Boyle Heights?
 - a. Do you feel that transit services are distributed equitably for you and other transit riders?
 2. Has LA Metro engaged with you and your community?
 3. Has the LA Department of City Planning engaged with you and your community?
 4. Do you know about outreach from public transportation agencies in your community? This could include signage, mailers, and collaboration with community-based organizations.
 - a. Have you been personally contacted for community engagement?
 5. LA Metro has facilitated community engagement in Boyle Heights. To what extent have you been involved, if any?
 - a. How do you view Metro's role in promoting equity in Boyle Heights?
 - b. Do you feel your voice is heard in the community engagement process?
 - c. How does Metro's participatory planning process make you feel?
 6. Do you feel your community has a sense of shared values and identity?
 - a. If so, what are they?
 - b. How does the identity of your community influence the community engagement process?
 - c. Do you feel Metro's plans for the community enforce a sense of identity for your community?
 7. What entities do you feel inspire participation in public transportation planning in your community?
 8. What role do community-based organizations have in engaging you and your community with Metro transit development?
 - a. What is its role, if any, in creating an equitable environment in Boyle Heights?
6. **Administrator Questions:**
 1. What is your connection to Boyle Heights?
 2. How have you been involved with planning at Mariachi Plaza?
 3. How do you define equity? What role does equity play in the decision-making process?
 4. What is the perception of the community input and voices you have received on this project?
 5. What have you learned about community planning since working with Boyle Heights community stakeholders?
 - a. How, if at all, has your approach to transit/city planning changed?
 6. How do equity and community identity play out in the planning process?
 7. Do you know anyone who would be interested in participating in this investigation?
 8. Do you have any questions?

Appendix B

The Guide for Development at Mariachi Plaza

The Guide for Development: Mariachi Plaza (“Guide”) was published by Metro in January 2017. The Guide summarizes the “desires” for joint development at Mariachi Plaza between Metro and community stakeholders in Boyle Heights. Metro defines the project as a “mixed-use, joint development of Metro-owned property” (Metro 2017, 49). Affordable housing, local business, and pedestrian access are three among many criteria presented by community members for equitable development of Metro’s land adjacent to Mariachi Plaza. A key element to Metro development at Mariachi Plaza illustrates the “public realm,” describing accessibility of the space to and for all members of the community; the “realm” denotes the project in the physical, visual landscape of Boyle Heights (Metro 2017, 21).



In 2012 and 2014, Metro proposed a plan for upgrading three parcels of land adjacent to Mariachi Plaza. This would have included the remodeling of the Mariachi Plaza center, a well known public space for on-hire mariachis, street vendors, and mobility in Boyle Heights, and a high-end shopping center. The plans were presented to the community at a Metro-led workshop in Boyle Heights, but were met with frustration because the community had not been notified of the authority's plans for development prior to the workshop. The East Los Angeles Community Corporation, along with other public mobility groups, mobilized community members to resist these plans. This effort pressured Metro to design a locally-led Joint Development plan to shape plans for development at Mariachi Plaza. Leading up to the creation of the Guide, ELACC and its constituency produced a proposal for community-based visions for land use of two vacant Metro-owned lots adjacent to the transit site. This proposal was accepted, reviewed, and redrawn through the community planning process in Spring 2016.

The Guide outlines Boyle Heights as a transit-dependent, predominantly Latino community. Though Metro presents the Guide as a “partnership” with DCP and the community, the text is a product of Metro JD, with ELACC as the approved joint partner. In incorporating accessible, affordable housing in TOD, Metro explains that current city zoning codes would limit the “Affordable Housing” element of the Project Site to 29 units, with the “maximum density bonus granted by DCP”; the standard number of Affordable Housing units would be 22 (34). The Boyle Heights Community Plan, expected to go into effect in 2018, will rezone at-need communities to maximize affordable housing development and allow for specific-needs engagement within the Design Review Advisory Committee (DRAC) (35). In sum, Metro JD and the DRAC is designed with an essential aspect of community engagement. DRAC is unique to Boyle Heights, positioning the community as the benchmark for JD across the service territory.

Community Desires for Development

Affordable housing, local business, and pedestrian access are three among many criteria presented by community members for equitable development of Metro's land adjacent to Mariachi Plaza. A key element to Metro development at Mariachi Plaza illustrates the "public realm," describing accessibility of the space to and for all members of the community; the "realm" denotes the project in the physical, visual landscape of Boyle Heights (Metro 2017, 21). In sum, the Guide is a recommendation of Metro policy put forth by the community-led Design Review Advisory Council. Below is a summary of stakeholder aspirations for Mariachi Plaza, compiled in the "Vision for Development" and "Community Feedback" sections (Metro 2017, 211-19):

- Keep local business in Boyle Heights
- Provide and enhance diverse and affordable amenities for local residents
- Promote equitable housing models in the community
- Implement a density-based plan at the Project Site; balance density with open, public space
- Provide safety and security around the plaza and Metro station
- Provide adequate parking for local business demand, residents, and influx of demand at the Project Site
- Promote access to healthy, affordable food while embracing the history of street vendor culture
- Honor the history of Mariachi Plaza and other historic landmarks in the community

Metro JD and the Department of City Planning

Table 1 specifies the purpose of each level of JD as a plan for community engagement and locally-led project design. Together, these three frameworks enforce Metro’s role in engaging its administrators with community-based stakeholders in JD, and often transit-dependent communities. JD Policy and Process oversees Metro’s plans for community engagement across its entire territory, to link the authority with local development and/or leadership organizations toward local, well-invested TOD projects. Boyle Heights and six other active JD communities are guided by a Metro Transportation Planning Manager; the DRAC is made up of community residents and oversees projects specific to Boyle Heights to create a approve and executer guidelines for each project site. According to high-level Metro JD administrator, the DRAC in Boyle Heights has been “one of the most engaged” group of residents on Metro projects (Anonymous, phone interview, April 3, 2018). As previously extricated, the *Guide* is an example of site-specific JD policy to set locally-led guidelines at Mariachi Plaza.

Table 1: Levels of Metro Joint Development in Boyle Heights

Policy	Purpose
JD Policy and Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Link public and private sector interests in the development of Metro-owned parcels in service territory • Allow community organizations and developers to apply for Exclusive Negotiation (ENA); local firm selected to JD Agreement • Increase ridership, integrate community stakeholders, and create fiscally responsible land uses
Boyle Heights JD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carry out Metro JD in Boyle Heights • Assign a Transportation Planning Manager to the community. • Create the Design Review Advisory Committee to involve a variety of community stakeholders (residents, organizations, businesses) in project design and priorities

<i>Guide for Development: Mariachi Plaza</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Guide</i> acts as a site-specific application of JD, compiling DRAC Development Guidelines for vision, design, and desired land use • Present Metro and LA DCP policy and regulatory framework to DRAC vision/desires for development • Compile summaries of community meetings, workshops, and charrettes leading up to publishing of the <i>Guide</i>
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Metro operates within the regulatory and policy framework of DCP (Los Angeles Department of City Planning). DCP is currently convening with Boyle Heights residents to produce a Community Plan that will update zoning policy and land use regulation for mixed-use development and affordable housing. The *Guide* notes that “[DCP] is exploring options to increase the density of major transit nodes and commercial corridors while also providing various zoning and density options” (Metro 2017, 7). Ideally, Metro JD at Mariachi Plaza and the DCP Community Plan for Boyle Heights will align to streamline the goal for 100% affordable housing on Metro parcels in Boyle Heights.

Active Boyle Heights JD Sites

Site	Status
First Street and Soto Street	Completed; was not a process of JD, awaiting land use approval by LA DCP
Chavez Avenue and Soto Street	Completed; was a process of JD and DRAC
Chavez Avenue and Fickett Street	In progress; this is a JD and DRAC project with Metro Board-approved conceptual plans, awaiting full approval by LA DCP
First Street and Lorena Street	In progress; awaiting land use approval by LA DCP