

2022 Event Series

Actualizing Equity in Transit Planning

Insights from the Blue Line Coalition

For many neighborhoods, light rail lines have played a concerning role in pushing out low-wealth residents, immigrants and communities of color from their homes and businesses. For nearly a decade, the Blue Line Coalition has been working to integrate community voice into the planning process and create a different outcome for the Bottineau Corridor light rail extension project from Minneapolis to Brooklyn Park. As the project moved into critical decision-making stages, members of the BLC shared insights from their work and uplifted their new Community Report at our January 2022 Actualizing Equity event.



is rooted in the BIPOC and immigrant communities that will be most impacted by the Blue Line light rail extension project. Since 2013, we have been working together to ensure government leaders recognize this project is a racial justice and regional equity issue and that community inclusion and leadership must be central to ALL planning and outcomes.

OUR VISION

Having safe, affordable and efficient transportation choices are the avenues to our freedom, dignity and connection to community – especially for those of us who have been denied these options for far too long. That's why...

Together, we envision a vibrant future where fast, reliable transit options make it possible for a mother to go to her daughter's soccer game instead of waiting on multiple bus transfers.

Together, we envision train stops that serve and grow immigrant and BIPOC business districts that create wealth and stability in our cultural communities.

Together, we envision safe street crossings that make it possible for elders to walk to their community-owned grocery store.

Getting from one place to another cannot be a given for some and a daily challenge or impossible barrier for others. That's why the Blue Line extension project is so important. And why it MUST be different from past transit projects in the region and nationwide.

OUR VOICES

For our communities, our lives are on the line. The impact of this project will have significant and lasting impacts for generations to come. Some of the concerns we have experienced and heard from our communities include...

"We brought together Hmong elders and a woman shared that she's very worried. She's worried because her family used to live in St Paul, but the Green Line light rail project came through and it changed the community. They had to move to Minneapolis and now they've heard the Blue Line is coming, and they don't want it to change their community again. They want to feel safe. We're refugees who have already been forced from Laos to Thailand and then the United States. Why is it that us Hmong people can't have a place to call home?"
Amanda Xiong, CAPI USA

"Four years ago, I bought my first home and it's six houses off the Lowry proposed route. I'm concerned about what that means for me -- if they decide on that route will they buy out buildings next to me? I'm one of two or three homeowners on my block; the rest are all rental housing. I'm worried, if they choose the Lowry route, that new owners will buy out those buildings, raise the rents and displace my neighbors."
Karla Arredondo, Pueblos de Lucha y Esperanza

"We're still trying to gain back some of the businesses that have already been lost due to land acquisition along the corridor. We don't want a route that focuses on the usual suspects, like the Caribous and the Starbucks. Our BIPOC small businesses are the economic engines for a lot of these cities. We welcome redevelopment but gentrification continues to happen."
Denise Butler, African Career, Education and Resource Inc (ACER)

ADVANCING EQUITY INCLUDES...

Because of decades of deep relational organizing and years of engagement on this project, BLC partners successfully advocated for community-centered approaches, including:

- **ANTI-DISPLACEMENT WORK GROUP:** The BLC has long called for anti-displacement approaches that focused on the creation, preservation and protection of affordable housing and building tenant power through organizing. After receiving a report from the BLC in 2021 urging the adoption of anti-displacement policies before construction, Hennepin County created a working group to provide policy recommendations to address anti-displacement across the corridor.
- **ROUTE SELECTION ENGAGEMENT:** With the project realignment announced in 2020, BLC expressed public concerns that the speed of the new route selection process was moving faster than the adoption of policies to protect communities of color and authentic engagement from directly impacted residents. The route selection process was extended.
- **FUNDING FOR ORGANIZING:** The BLC has secured and will continue to advocate for adequate funding to resource community organizations in building trusting relationships with people who have vital expertise but have been blocked from participation due to cultural, language, financial or other barriers.

ACHIEVING EQUITY REQUIRES...

Government and transit planners have a duty to address with great urgency the disinvestment and lack of transit options in our neighborhoods. But a different outcome – a project that does not displace but rather benefits our communities – requires a different planning approach. It requires a process that doesn't simply name or *aspire* to equitable outcomes but takes the *intentional steps* at the *appropriate time* to achieve a different result. This means...

- **MOVING AT THE SPEED OF KNOWLEDGE:** Despite the late stage of the project, coalition organizers often encountered community members who knew nothing about the project, despite their geographic proximity and potential impact on their lives. In addition, some who did engage in planning or input sessions found that the project team didn't have the answers to some of their most pressing questions around displacement and other impacts. Timelines must be connected to the *pace at which community can get the information they need to make informed decisions*, not driven solely by institutional deadlines.
- **RECOGNIZING AND REPAIRING HARM:** At the start, the Blue Line extension was framed as a restorative project to address the destruction of Olson Highway in the Harrison neighborhood. But, because of a lack of intentional framework to ensure the current community members would benefit once the proposed route was announced, residents were asked to design their own displacement. The *responsibility to address past and current harms remains* even if the project itself changes.
- **PREVENTING DISPLACEMENT:** Too often the solutions our communities need come too late to have the intended impact. It is essential that *before a route is selected* that government leaders in the corridor cities adopt the proven policies advocates have been putting forward for decades to build wealth in our communities and prevent the displacement from our homes and businesses. Waiting until construction or development begins is too late. We have seen this time and time again. A commitment to equity means passing these policies *first*.