

# 2021 Event Series

## Actualizing Equity in Transportation

From the freeway through Rondo to the absence of reliable transit in the northwest suburbs, generations of transportation investments have bulldozed or bypassed communities of color. But coalition organizing has put equity at the forefront of major transportation projects in the Twin Cities. At our March 2021 event, Keith Baker (Reconnect Rondo), Denise Butler (African Career, Education and Resource Inc), Melvin Giles (Urban Farm & Growers Alliance) and Qannani Omar (Harrison Neighborhood Association) discussed approaches and strategies for **equitable** and **restorative** transportation projects.

Cultivating project objectives and policies that intentionally direct the benefits and outcomes toward those primary, community beneficiaries

Clearly identifying the primary, secondary and tertiary beneficiaries of this project; *for instance, a restorative project centers residents of the current community and those historically harmed over housing developers who might capitalize on the investment*

Recognizing and honoring that community members are policymakers — those spaces cannot be limited to government staff or elected officials

Specifically and publicly articulating the project as restorative and oriented to address and repair racial inequity and injustice

Acknowledging the history of the land and the past and ongoing harms caused by transportation and infrastructure projects



Implementing anti-displacement policies to protect current residents and business owners from being pushed out by public investments' increasing rents and property values

Ensuring that any new assets created by the project benefit the community and provide opportunities for community and cooperative ownership

Working on timelines that are transparent and also push systems and processes to move with a sense of urgency to meet the needs of disinvested communities

Taking individual responsibility and agency accountability to make real the recommendations of community and actively working across organizational silos to create safe, self-sustaining neighborhoods

Committing to intergenerational input and leadership to center the wisdom of elders and youth in the ongoing dialogue about the vision and impact of projects

How do we create **restorative transportation projects**?

## Blue Line Coalition

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The Blue Line Coalition has united powerful organizations with deep connections to and trust within the immigrant, low-wealth and Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) communities along the Blue Line Extension Project to ensure those most impacted have a strong voice in the development process. *Learn more at [blcoalition.wordpress.com](http://blcoalition.wordpress.com).*

### Housing and Anti-Displacement Policies

For years, the BLC has been advocating for a six-point policy platform for the preservation and creation of affordable housing along the light rail corridor. The coalition is also developing additional policy recommendations to prevent displacement.

### Equitable Development Scorecard

The BLC draft scorecard outlines expectations for new development in our communities with the goal of securing community benefits and preventing involuntary displacement.

## Reconnect Rondo

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Reconnect Rondo is leading the effort to revitalize the Rondo community with a land bridge that reconnects Rondo and reignites a vibrant African American cultural enterprise district in Saint Paul. *Learn more at [reconnectrondo.com](http://reconnectrondo.com).*

### Acknowledging and repairing harm

The vibrant Rondo neighborhood was shattered with the 1956-1968 construction of Interstate 94. More than 700 family homes were demolished and 300 businesses were closed or torn down — with inadequate compensation to the families for their losses.

### Building a bridge to restoration

A feasibility study on the proposal to build a land bridge over I-94 between Chatsworth Street and Grotto Street found that the area would create 468-576 housing units, 1,304-1,872 jobs, 87,750-108,000 square feet of retail space and \$3.8 million-\$4.2 million in increased revenue to the city annually

### Prioritizing Black ownership

By creating an African American cultural enterprise district the land bridge will help to restore wealth and control for African Americans and the Rondo community; support prosperous new opportunities for African American businesses; and cultivate African American leadership ensuring greater equitable outcomes.

## Urban Farm & Garden Alliance

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The UFGA is a collaboration community gardens and Backyard Box Gardeners that promotes reconciliation, healing, peace, social and environmental justice through the cultivation and sharing of food in the Summit-University (Rondo) and Frogtown communities. *Learn more at [urbanfarmandgardenalliance.org](http://urbanfarmandgardenalliance.org)*

## Harrison Neighborhood:

Restorative transportation or designing our own displacement?

In 2012, the Alliance published a report outlining how a series of policy decisions created systemic barriers to opportunity for people of color in the Harrison neighborhood of North Minneapolis — including transportation.

As Qannani Omar, housing organizer for Harrison Neighborhood Association, shared during the event, the Blue Line extension was first described as a restorative justice project for Harrison residents who had been harmed by the construction of the Olson Memorial Highway, which had destroyed Black businesses and created a dangerous arterial that threatens the safety of residents every day. Residents were assured that bringing light rail to the neighborhood would not only provide additional transportation options but include safety improvements, a grocery store and affordable housing.

So, for nearly a decade, HNA organized community members to engage in the development process. However, because of a lack of anti-displacement policies or intentional framework around community benefit before construction, Omar said that many feel that the process asked residents to “design their own displacement.”

“Since the announcement of the Blue Line, we’ve seen about 500 [housing] units added to the Harrison neighborhood and only 28 of them are affordable to people who live here now,” she said. “So those units were not built for the Harrison or North Side community.”

In March 2021, project leaders announced new route options that will bypass Harrison neighborhood. But HNA is continuing to work with the Blue Line coalition to push for anti-displacement policies that will protect residents along the line.

“As we move forward,” Omar said, “there needs to be an explicit framework when we talk about who is this light rail for and who are these opportunities for?”