

District 3–SACOG MTP 2035 Update Environmental Justice Focus Groups

Project Summary

District 3 Planning and Local Assistance engaged MIG on behalf of the Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG) to assist as they update their Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) 2035, which addresses the new SB 375 mandates for a Sustainable Communities Strategy. As part of SACOG's innovative outreach for the MTP 2035, MIG conducted eight focus groups with environmental justice (EJ) community representatives throughout the SACOG region. The goal was to increase the breadth and depth of community participation from those typically not engaged early in planning processes. The input gleaned from these focus groups will be compared to responses from a similar effort in 2007 in order to analyze changes in perception and attitudes toward travel options within ethnic, low-income, and limited-English proficiency communities since the economic downturn.



Project Success

The focus group process drew participants who would likely not have attended a conventional community meeting, and yielded rich, detailed in-depth information regarding the transportation needs of communities who have very specific needs but fewer options, due to income and other factors.

In addition to informing SACOG's MTP 2035 Update, the comparative analysis will be extremely insightful for Caltrans, SACOG, and other agencies throughout the state working with EJ communities on the state highway system and local transportation planning; looking at land use and transportation patterns; assessing how to rescale investments; and contributing to decisions on how to address access to employment and housing, reduce greenhouse gases, and improve air quality.



Outreach Methods

- Focus group recruitment ads on Craigslist
- Flyers distributed through local community-based organizations (CBOs), tribes, and key community leaders
- Collaboration with a CBO representative to recruit English as a Second Language class participants



Public Involvement Tools

Focus Groups

Using Craigslist and working with local CBOs, MIG recruited participants for focus groups held in Sacramento, Yuba City, Placerville, and Woodland. MIG carefully screened participants to ensure each group had participants reflective of the diversity within each targeted community. Each focus group included 7-15 participants.

Mapping and Dot Voting Exercises

Group exercises allowed participants to provide feedback on desired transportation improvements. Using county-wide and region-wide maps of essential services and current public transit routes as a reference, participants were encouraged to mark where they lived and the places that are essential for them or their families to get to on the map. Participants were also asked to use colored dots to indicate their preferred priorities for local and regional transportation funding from among a list of options. In both exercises, color coding was used to distinguish those who drive from those who are reliant on other transportation modes.

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Transportation Funding Priorities Group Worksheet	
Priorities	Rating
Improve public transit services: Bus Service	
Improve public transit services: Light Rail	
Improve public transit services: Commuter Bus (or rail?)	
Improve public transit services: Neighborhood Shuttles	
Projects to provide bicycle lanes, sidewalks	



Deliverables

Project Team Meeting Summaries
Outreach Strategy
Focus Group Summary Report and
2007-2010 Comparative Analysis

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Environmental Justice Community Involvement

The project was specifically designed and geared to soliciting input from representatives of EJ communities within the SACOG region, including minority, low-income, and limited-English proficient communities. The recruitment message included an on-line survey that MIG used to assess income level, primary language, and ethnic background and reach participants with specific demographic characteristics. These included low-income populations; Spanish-, Mandarin-, and Vietnamese-speaking communities; as well as Asian, African American, Native American/American Indian, and Hispanic/Latino participants. The survey also enabled MIG to ensure gender balance and age diversity within the targeted demographics. Working through CBOs also drew several disabled participants who could speak specifically to the transportation needs of people with disabilities, especially as they relate to wheelchair users and Dial-a-Ride services.



Lessons Learned

Doing outreach through local CBOs enabled SACOG to engage participants from EJ communities who otherwise were unlikely to hear about the focus group opportunities. MIG worked closely with SACOG and a variety of CBOs to supplement its recruitment activities. The refreshments provided and the \$60 stipend paid for participation were very attractive to the participants, and proved to be an extremely cost-effective way to ensure participation from these communities.

The venue and availability of transit were also very important, and recent evening transit service reductions had a very real impact on some participants' ability to participate. Also, different cultural groups have different communication styles, so the energy and level of discussion in the groups may vary.



Results

Conducting outreach in communities that are traditionally underrepresented in transportation planning efforts helped engage participants who had never before attended community meetings. These participants were most interested in having their immediate transportation needs addressed, especially given the service reductions and fare increases experienced by those who relied on public transit. Some participants were less optimistic of longer term transportation planning, given current economic conditions.

In the future, Caltrans and SACOG can build on partnerships with CBOs to increase opportunities for EJ community involvement. Results from these focus groups will be available on SACOG's website (www.sacog.org); they will also inform SACOG's MTP 2035 and future funding decisions.