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November 2022

Project Title:Measuring Equity in Public Transit
Service: LA Metro and the Post-
Decree Era**Task Number:** 3454**Start Date:** January 1, 2022**Completion Date:** November 30,
2022**Task Manager:**Bradley Mizuno,
Transportation Engineer (Electrical)
bmizuno@dot.ca.gov

Measuring Equity in Public Transit Service: LA Metro and the Post-Decree Era

Explore what extent the arguments made in the 1994 legal case, *Labor/Community Strategy Center, et al vs. Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority*, continue to remain in the post-decree era (2010-2020).

WHAT WAS THE NEED?

California transit agencies have made equity and racial justice a major transportation goal. This research examined the implicit biases against very low income and bus riders of color that led to the 1994 landmark case, *Labor/Community Strategy Center, et al vs. Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority*. The case resulted in a settlement between the parties in October 1996 and a federal civil rights consent decree that limited fare increases and expanded bus service in Los Angeles, among other negotiated community benefits. The concerns raised in the 1994 case remain salient concerns empirically and among transportation advocates in light of national discussion about race and privilege and the disparate impact of COVID-19 communities of color.

WHAT WAS OUR GOAL?

The research used a mixed method approach broken up in four tasks.

1. Engaged with agencies interested in this research and collected background research on the case, including identifying and assessing relevant arguments and data used in the court case.
2. Produced a descriptive analysis of annual demographics and service characteristics of Metro bus and rail service in Los Angeles County from 2010 to 2020.
3. Conducted a small set of interviews with those involved in the original case and just transportation equity efforts in Los Angeles.
4. Produced a white paper and summary 2-page policy brief.

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WHAT DID WE DO?

The project used a mixed-method approach that drew on three primary sources of information.

1. The first source included case and legal records to identify the legal arguments and data sources used by the plaintiffs against the defendant to inform subsequent data collection efforts.
2. The second data source came from a small set of interviews with individuals knowledgeable about the legal actions and racial equity policies with Los Angeles Metro (LA Metro) today.
3. The final source of information used data from various sources to provide a descriptive analysis of demographics and service characteristics in the periods before, during, and after the consent decree in Los Angeles County.

WHAT WAS THE OUTCOME?

The research concludes that many arguments made in the case that led to the consent decree remain concerns for advancing transit justice in Los Angeles today, as evidenced by the themes within the legal summary, interviews, and data analysis.

The legal summary outlined the main arguments advanced in the legal actions, which relate to the need to ensure all transit patrons, without regard to race, color, or national origin, have equal and equitable access to LA Metro's public transit system. This decree re-committed LA Metro to ensure that they met the letter of the law for Title VI. The impetus for the decree was the civil rights lawsuit that alleged that fare increases approved by the LA Metro board created an unfair burden and disproportionately discriminated against minority bus riders. LA Metro agreed to meet numerous objectives during the ten-year monitoring period. The primary victories included maintaining fares and passes at pre-increase levels, improving bus service, and reducing bus crowding by purchasing new buses.

Whether LA Metro had met the agreed-upon expectations was a significant source of conflict throughout the monitoring period, especially at the end of the ten-year window. After the Labor Community Strategy Center appealed the decision to end the decree, the court ultimately decided that LA Metro had complied with the consent decree terms and allowed it to expire in 2006. Similar arguments of racial discrimination continued as plaintiffs filed a Title VI complaint with the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) following the decree's end. The FTA concluded that LA Metro needed to strengthen its approach to analyze the impacts of construction projects on low-income and communities of color and to create quantifiable service standards for all transit modes. Similarly, the FTA required LA Metro to adopt new definitions for service changes requiring a Title VI analysis.

The interviews highlighted these past issues and how they remain in today's context, including how some issues have evolved. For example, organizations are now advocating for fare-free transit. Bus service concerns largely remain, and interviewees suggested that bus service standards focus on setting and meeting standards about service reliability, frequency, accessibility, and affordability.

All interviewees agreed that the case was an inspiring and historic victory for advocates across the country. Legal changes at the federal level about who can sue on civil rights grounds changed the ability of other organizations to follow the path that led to the consent decree. Nonetheless, the momentum from the lawsuit, consent decree, and FTA complaint laid much of the groundwork and leadership development for people and organizations that continue to advocate for transit justice today.

Finally, the data analysis of the decree and post-decree years further demonstrates the connections between issues raised in the early 1990s and today. The rail system continues to carry



a greater proportion of white, higher-income riders, and people of color are much more likely to be bus riders. Transit ridership on LA Metro remains largely comprised of low-income people, but bus service continues to serve a very low-income base, especially relative to rail riders.

WHAT IS THE BENEFIT?

This research synthesized findings into a policy brief and will use/develop a transportation equity framework (race and class equity). The final report provided an overview of transport equity issues raised in the 1994 case, summarized to what extent these same issues remain, and provides recommendations to better incorporate equity and justice concerns into transit service allocation.

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View the complete report: https://www.metrans.org/assets/research/psr-21-51_final%20report_brozen_gonzalez.pdf