CHAPTER 8
ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE
Environmental Justice seeks to ensure that no one population group receives an unfair burden or benefit from local policies, decisions, and investments, and that all are given the opportunity to be involved in the transportation planning and decision-making process. In 1994, President Bill Clinton signed Executive Order (EO) 12898, which required that all federal agencies identify and address “disproportionately high and adverse human health environmental effects of its programs, policies, and activities on minority populations and low-income populations”. EO 12898 and Environmental Justice emerged as a regulatory issue from Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Civil Rights movement, which called for social equity.
INTRODUCTION

StanCOG must address two aspects of Environmental Justice in its planning process. First, the process must ensure there is equity in the distribution of potential benefits and burdens resulting from the proposed transportation investments identified in the Plan. Secondly, the Plan must also provide an equal opportunity for all segments of the population to provide input into the transportation planning process.

This chapter details StanCOG’s efforts to address the Environmental Justice (EJ) process and provides results from six (6) performance measures evaluating the equity of the Plan’s decision-making and investment strategy. It also provides an overview of the outreach efforts associated with the 2014 RTP/SCS.

PROCESS OVERVIEW

StanCOG uses demographic and travel data from the transportation demand model to analyze whether identified environmental justice (EJ) populations have an equitable share in the 2014 RTP/SCS’s transportation investment benefits, and are not disproportionately impacted by such investments. This analysis describes how EJ communities are considered in the transportation planning process and investment strategies, compared to non-EJ Communities. Four key components are required as part of this analysis:

1. Identify and locate EJ communities (low-income and minority populations)
2. Identify the transportation needs of target populations
3. Document and evaluate the agency’s public involvement process
4. Quantitatively assess the benefits and burdens of the transportation plan with respect to target populations

Target Populations

Identifying the extent and location of low-income and minority population groups is an important first step in assessing environmental justice. Using available data from the US Census and American Community Survey (ASC), StanCOG identified areas of Stanislaus County that contained minority populations and/or persons below the poverty level (low-income populations), as defined by the Census. Census and ACS data provides a diverse demographic profile at the census-tract level, which approximately corresponds to the Traffic Analysis Zones (TAZs) used in StanCOG’s travel demand model.

StanCOG identified those census tracts that contain a higher proportion of low-income and/or minority populations compared to the countywide average. Subsequently, any census tract with a population density below 1,000 people per square mile was removed from consideration as an EJ tract so as not to skew the analysis and misidentify EJ populations. A map of the identified EJ tracts can be seen in Figure 8.1.
Transportation Needs for Low Income and Minority Populations

The 2014 RTP/SCS considers the transportation needs of all populations; however, the needs of target populations are of particular importance because EJ populations are more likely to not own a car compared to non-EJ populations. Understanding transit needs is particularly relevant when considering low-income and minority populations. StanCOG uses and maintains a transportation demand model, which helps to analyze the region’s transportation needs. This model is frequently updated to include new travel and demographic information. In addition, StanCOG has recently enhanced the travel mode choice component of the model, which helps to measure and evaluate the number and types of trips that use alternative modes of transportation.

StanCOG also determines transportation needs through an annual Unmet Transit Needs (UTN) Assessment process, pursuant to the California Transportation Development Act (TDA). Both US Census and ASC data is used in this process to analyze the location of the region’s transit-dependent populations, such as seniors, the disabled and low-income individuals. This assessment further involves collaboration with the region’s four public transit operators, the CTSA, representatives of public and private social service agencies, and members of the general public. StanCOG typically conducts at least four public hearings during the UTN Assessment process to allow members of the public to identify any potential unmet transit need, which is then analyzed for reasonableness to meet based on criteria established by the StanCOG Policy Board. If an unmet transit need is identified, and determined to be reasonable to meet, StanCOG then must work with the region’s CTSA and transit providers to determine how to best address that need with a new transit service.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT EFFORTS

StanCOG, as part of the 2014 RTP/SCS planning effort, created a robust public engagement plan that provided opportunities for all segments of the population to participate in the process. The engagement plan further sought out the low-income and minority communities that are typically underrepresented in the region, particularly the Hispanic population, the region’s largest minority population.

StanCOG continued its commitment to public engagement by developing a multi-level outreach program using conventional outreach methods, but supplemented these efforts with new methods as well. Historically, StanCOG has distributed fliers to stakeholders and other agencies, provided public notices, and identified information on our website as part of the public outreach process. The 2014 RTP/SCS public engagement plan sought to grow StanCOG’s network through partnerships with community and faith-based organizations. These partnerships allowed StanCOG to reach a broader segment of the population, which would have been unachievable in the past. This approach also allowed for a more focused message that would encourage specific hard-to-reach, and socio-economically disadvantaged population, to participate in the planning process. Furthermore, StanCOG used a mix of in-person presentations, workshops, causal meetings, and other electronic outreach methods to maximize engagement opportunities for all. While StanCOG will continue to extend and improve its outreach efforts, this approach proved successful in terms
of the number of participants compared to previous RTPs’ planning efforts and public involvement input in the process. For more information on public involvement efforts see Chapter 4, Appendix P, and Appendix Q.

ASSESSING THE TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM FOR TARGET POPULATIONS

Once environmental justice populations were identified, a regional assessment was prepared to determine whether or not the benefits and burdens of the existing, and proposed, transportation system are distributed equitably among the County’s EJ and non-EJ populations. Six performance measures were developed to determine equity impacts within EJ and non-EJ areas. Where EJ populations were unable to be separated from non-EJ populations (such as in the evaluation of housing affordability) the Plan scenario was evaluated against the Historic Trend scenario which best represents a “business-as-usual” approach to land use and transportation planning. Each of these performance measures is discussed below. Table 8.1 presents a summary of the environmental justice performance measures.

1. Percentage of low-income housing/population within ½ mile of frequent transit. For low-income and minority populations, convenient access to transit is critical due to a lower likelihood of having access to a vehicle for these populations. To measure access to transit, the percentage of the target communities with access to frequent transit (two or more buses per hour) within ½ mile was evaluated to assess whether the target populations were receiving adequate transportation choices. Between the BAU conditions and 2014 RTP/SCS, the percentage of low-income population within ½ mile of frequent transit service was relatively stable with a small increase under the 2014 RTP/SCS. The percentage of low-income housing within ½ mile of frequent transit service is greater in both scenario than the countywide percentage of all housing within ½ mile of frequent transit service indicating greater accessibility for identified EJ populations than the general population.

2. Percentage of low-income and/or minority population benefiting from roadway expenditures. It is important to ensure that identified improvements under the 2014 RTP/SCS provide equitable benefits to low income and minority populations. The 2014 RTP/SCS benefits EJ populations slightly more than the BAU conditions. Approximately 50.2% of the benefit from the selected roadway improvements went to EJ populations, providing slightly more benefit to EJ populations than the non-EJ population.

3. Percent of housing within 500 feet of a major transportation corridor. Given that a large share of low-income housing is located near major transportation corridors, where vehicle emissions of health-based criteria pollutants are most concentrated, the percentage of households within 500 feet of a major transportation corridor (i.e., roadways that carry over 100,000 daily trips) is a key environmental indicator for EJ communities. Under the 2014 RTP/SCS, EJ populations represent 71% of the population within 500 feet of a major transportation corridor. This percentage indicates that EJ communities are more likely to be exposed to emissions of health-based criteria pollutants.
4. Disparity in countywide housing-type stock. Providing a greater mix of housing types allows for a greater range of options for all populations, including the target populations. Additionally, a greater mix of housing options provides for a greater range of housing affordability, with the provision of small lot, townhomes, and multifamily housing. The 2014 RTP/SCS provides a good mix of housing types, with approximately one-third of new housing dedicated to multi-family housing, and one-third dedicated to small lot single-family homes. The Plan reduces the number of large lot, conventional lot, single-family homes in favor of more affordable housing benefitting EJ and non-EJ communities equally.

5. Availability and variety of housing at all economic levels. In addition to providing a greater mix of housing, it is important to also provide a wide range of housing choices that provide access to affordable housing for low-income and minority populations. The 2014 RTP/SCS provides a greater percentage of access to housing for lower income households. Under the Plan, 50 percent of all new housing is available to households earning less than $75,000 per year, and 28 percent of all new housing is available to households earning less than $50,000. This scenario compares to the only 27 percent available housing for households earning less than $75,000 per year, and 9 percent for households earning less than $50,000 per year identified in the BAU conditions. Additionally, the Plan also reduces the average income needed for single-family and attached housing, with a reduction of nearly $4,000 for single-family housing, and over $8,000 for attached housing, compared to the BAU conditions.

6. Financial Analysis. Finally, a comparison of investments by minority versus non-minority, and low-income versus not low-income populations was undertaken utilizing the commute mode splits for each respective population. This analysis considers all low-income households in the Stanislaus County region, both within and outside of identified environmental justice areas. Investments are categorized by mode type. The population group’s means of transportation to work is then used to proportion out investments based on that specific population’s percentage use of each commute mode. Additionally, the same analysis was undertaken looking only at federal and state transit funding sources. These sources were used to evaluate the Plan’s investment strategy for any disparate impacts on the basis of race, color, or national origin to comply with MPO-specific Title VI requirements. This analysis indicated that EJ populations benefit from transportation investments more than non-EJ populations, with overall funding providing 1.66 times the benefit for EJ populations than non-EJ populations and EJ populations receiving over 400% more benefit from transit expenditures due to their higher usage of transit for everyday commuting.
CONCLUSION

The region-wide EJ analysis indicates that no disparate impacts are present within the identified EJ communities, which would result from the implementation of the Plan. Regionally, the amount of benefits to low-income and minority populations was high, with EJ Communities actually receiving better access to frequent transit service than non-EJ communities. Additionally, a greater mix and more affordable variety of housing options (both single-family and attached) was seen in the 2014 RTP/SCS compared to business-as-usual conditions. Furthermore, the 2014 RTP/SCS also reduced congested lane miles, vehicle hours of delay, and average trip length for all users of the transportation system, while increasing the amount of funding available for alternative modes of transportation, such as transit, bicycling and walking, improve transportation choices for all users.

The inclusion of environmental justice consideration in the 2014 RTP/SCS will be an ongoing process. StanCOG is committed to the continual improvement of EJ measures that better assess the benefits and burdens of the planning process on environmental justice populations within the Stanislaus Region.

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<th>Table 8.1 Environmental Justice Performance Measure Summary</th>
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<td>% EJ population benefiting from roadway expenditures</td>
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<td>% EJ population with 0.5 miles of frequent transit</td>
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<td>Average income for single-family housing</td>
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