

# Memorandum

To: CHAIR AND COMMISSIONERS

CTC Meeting: January 27-28, 2021

From: MITCH WEISS, Executive Director

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Subject: Commission Racial Equity Statement Adoption

## **Recommendation:**

Staff recommends the California Transportation Commission (Commission) adopt the racial equity statement included in Attachment A.

## **Issue:**

Throughout California's history, improvements to the State's transportation system have disproportionately benefitted some population groups and burdened others. In response to the inequities and racism that have occurred in transportation over the years, the Commission is working to further promote equitable outcomes in its policies and programs, including by developing a racial equity statement (Attachment A).

The Commission condemns all forms of racism. Our statement acknowledges historical and present racial inequity in the transportation sector and outlines the Commission's commitment to addressing racial inequity in our work moving forward. The statement was developed by drawing upon expertise and feedback from Commissioners and the Commission staff's internal Equity Working Group.

## **Background:**

The statement included in Attachment A reflects the Commission's acknowledgment of historical and present racial inequities.

While the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment, ratified in 1868, provided equal protection under the law, and the 15<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment, ratified in 1870 and 1920 respectively, guaranteed citizens the right to vote, Black, Indigenous, and people of color, as well as low-income individuals, have not consistently seen the full benefits of these rights. In 1896, the United States Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of "separate but equal" laws in the case of Plessy v. Ferguson, ushering in the Jim Crow Era of racial segregation and disenfranchisement.

During this era, California also undertook a major expansion of transportation infrastructure aided by an influx of federal funding. The California Highway Commission (Highway Commission) was established in 1911 and operated during a period in which Black, Indigenous, and people of color, as well as low-income individuals, were disenfranchised, lacked voting rights, and were underrepresented in government decision-making. The Highway Commission was instrumental in implementing federal policy direction toward the creation of the Interstate Highway System, including the 1921 and 1944 Federal Aid Highway Acts.

While the Federal Government appropriated the funds for the creation of the Interstate Highway System, the Highway Commission determined project locations. State and local officials frequently routed new freeways through communities of color, displacing thousands of households. Much of this freeway construction was in service of a suburban housing boom that was explicitly segregationist. Racist policies and decisions also influenced the siting of other types of transportation infrastructure, such as commuter railways, and the delivery of transit services.

The “separate but equal” doctrine was enforced until 1954. The United States Supreme Court rejected the “separate but equal” doctrine by ruling racial segregation in public schools violated the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment of the Constitution. This ruling paved the way for civil rights demonstrations, such as Rosa Parks refusing to give up her seat and the Montgomery Bus Boycotts, as well as civil rights legislation, such as the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1968 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

In order to create and maintain a unified transportation policy, the California Transportation Commission (Commission) was established in 1978. The Commission replaced and assumed the responsibilities of the California Highway Commission, the State Transportation Board, the State Aeronautics Board, and the California Toll Bridge Authority. The Commission recognizes the collective history that has shaped our transportation system—a system shaped in part by racial segregation and the disinvestment of transportation funds in communities of color. Unfortunately, these racial inequities still exist today.

Californians who live in historically underserved communities are more likely to be negatively impacted by increased exposure to air pollution from cars and trucks, roadway noise, and be struck or killed by drivers when walking and biking. These vulnerable communities may have limited access to safe and affordable transportation options to connect residents to jobs, education, and healthcare.

The Commission is uniquely structured where we can mitigate or exacerbate racial inequity through decisions about which projects to fund and what policy priorities to elevate. For example, the authority to approve new alignments of the State Highway System lies with the Commission. The Commission is committed to addressing these potential inequities in its planning and programming efforts to support a transportation system that allows all Californians to thrive.

## **California Transportation Commission Racial Equity Statement**

The California Transportation Commission recognizes that throughout California's history, improvements to the State's transportation system have disproportionately benefitted some population groups and burdened others. The Commission condemns all forms of racism and is actively working to promote equitable outcomes through our programs, policies, and practices.

In the mid-Twentieth Century, California undertook a major expansion of transportation infrastructure aided by an influx of federal funding. While infrastructure improvements were being planned, designed, and constructed, Black, Indigenous, and people of color were disenfranchised, lacked voting protections, and were underrepresented in government decision-making. New highways were frequently constructed through predominately Black, Latino, Asian, and low-income neighborhoods to meet the needs of primarily white suburban commuters. Racist policies and decisions also influenced the siting of other types of transportation infrastructure, such as commuter railways, and the delivery of transit services. The results of racial segregation and disinvestment of transportation funds in communities of color are still visible in cities today.

Californians who live in historically underserved communities are more likely to be negatively impacted by increased exposure to air pollution from cars and trucks, roadway noise, and be struck or killed by drivers when walking and biking. These vulnerable communities may have limited access to safe and affordable transportation options to connect residents to jobs, education, and healthcare.

The Commission vows to create mobility opportunities for all Californians, especially those from underserved communities, to thrive in all aspects of life. The Commission will:

- Work to build and strengthen relationships with community-based organizations, non-profits, advocacy organizations, and other equity experts and practitioners through the Commission's forthcoming Equity Advisory Roundtable and other efforts;
- Strengthen understanding of community transportation needs and challenges through the forthcoming Community Listening Sessions;
- Ensure equity, public health, and robust public engagement via our planning and programming guidelines;
- Provide expanded opportunities for staff training related to diversity, equity, and inclusion; and
- Feature equity topics and elevate diverse perspectives in public meetings of the Commission.

We uphold our dedication to serve and improve the quality of life for all Californians by continuing to prioritize transportation equity issues and ensuring all experience safe, affordable, and efficient transportation.