

**Board Report**

---

**File #:** 2022-0275, **File Type:** Informational Report**Agenda Number:** 32.

---

**EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE  
MAY 19, 2022****SUBJECT: 2022 EQUITY FOCUS COMMUNITIES UPDATE****ACTION: RECEIVE AND FILE****RECOMMENDATION**

RECEIVE AND FILE status report on 2022 Equity Focus Communities Update.

**ISSUE**

In the July 2021 Executive Committee Meeting, Chair Hilda L. Solis requested that Metro revisit the agency's Equity Focus Communities (EFC) definition and map to consider redlining and impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic as part of the EFC criteria.

**BACKGROUND**

In February 2018, the Metro Board adopted the Equity Platform, a policy framework for addressing disparities in access to opportunity resulting from historical disinvestment in low-income communities and communities of color. The Equity Platform includes four key pillars to guide the agency's work. The first of these pillars, Define & Measure, is foundational for all equity work at Metro and led to the development of the EFC definition and map used to identify communities most in need of improved access to opportunity from a mobility standpoint.

Before the Office of Equity and Race (OER) was formed, Metro Long Range Planning (LRP) staff worked with the USC Program for Environmental and Regional Equity (PERE, now the USC Equity Research Institute), Cambridge Systematics, and the Metro Policy Advisory Council (PAC) to develop the EFC definition. A working definition was presented to the Metro Board as part of the 2020 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) development in June 2019. This definition identified two demographic factors that have historically been determinants of disinvestment and disenfranchisement: household income and race/ethnicity. A third factor, households with low vehicle ownership, presented an opportunity to target new mobility investments in neighborhoods with a higher propensity to take full advantage of them.

In June 2019 the Metro Board approved Motion 18.1 adopting the EFCs, which included Directive A: direct the CEO to adopt EFCs as a working definition under the first pillar of the Equity Platform (Attachment A - Motion 18.1, Directive A). Each of the three factors was given a threshold and

considered together to identify census tracts with high concentrations of historically disinvested and disenfranchised households and populations that might benefit from new mobility investments.

The EFCs adopted in Motion 18.1, and reconfirmed in the adoption of the LRTP in September 2020 (“Original EFCs”), consist of census tracts that contain the following:

- 40 percent of households are low-income (defined as having an annual household income of \$35,000 or less), AND
- 80 percent of people are non-white/Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (BIPOC), OR
- 10 percent of households have zero vehicles.

The resulting map captured approximately 30 percent of the Los Angeles County population in order to identify the highest concentration of need. The 2020 LRTP contains nine (9) EFC specific performance measures to evaluate the benefits of the Metro investments as a whole. Additionally, this map has been used by staff to assess potential impacts from individual Metro projects, programs, and services to EFCs since September 2019.

## **DISCUSSION**

Staff has worked with LRP, Information Technology Service (ITS), and other Metro departments along with a consultant team (Esri and Cambridge Systematics) to complete the requested update to EFCs. The project team reviewed several factors, including those requested by Chair Solis, to integrate into the EFC definition and found that the three factors in the Original EFC definition continue to be the best indicators to identify areas with high concentrations of historically disinvested and disenfranchised households and populations that are anticipated to most benefit from new mobility investments. Development of the 2022 EFC Update included:

- Updating the Original EFC factors with the latest available data;
- Adjusting low-income definition to align with other agency programs;
- Using an index methodology to assign a relative equity need designation to each census tract in the county;
- Initiating development of topical overlays for focused equity analyses; and
- Establishing a three-year cycle for future updates to the EFC definition and map.

The resulting map (Attachment B) for the 2022 EFC Update divides all census tracts into five percentile tiers: Very High Need, High Need, Moderate Need, Low Need, and Very Low Need. The two high need tiers (Very High Need and High Need) are defined as Equity Focus Communities and capture 40 percent of the population in the county. Additional details, considerations, and findings related to the 2022 EFC Update are outlined below.

Approximately 87 percent of the Original EFC census tracts continue to be captured in the 2022 EFC Update. Attachment C shows a comparison of the two maps and respective EFC designations.

### **Data Update**

The 2022 EFC Update will retain the three sociodemographic indicators from the Original EFC definition: income, race/ethnicity, and household vehicle ownership. These indicators have proven to

---

be a simple yet comprehensive representation of geographic disparities and opportunity gaps in Los Angeles, while not being redundant indicators that “double count” equity-seeking populations. These indicators have been updated to the most recent data available (American Community Survey 2016-2020 5-Year Estimates).

#### Low-Income Definition

The new definition changes from a static threshold (annual household income of \$35,000 or less) to a relative threshold (U.S. Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Department’s “Very Low” income designation for Los Angeles County). Metro’s LIFE program utilizes this HUD income definition and Metro’s Joint Development program uses the range of HUD income definitions, which brings the EFC in alignment with these Metro programs that serve and measure equity for low-income populations. Because Los Angeles County has an exceptionally high cost of living compared to the rest of the country, the 2021 “Very Low” annual income threshold for a family of four is \$59,100. The 2022 EFC Update uses the American Community Survey (ACS) income tier that closest captures these households: “less than \$60,000 per year” tier.

#### Index Methodology

The Original EFC definition used a binary methodology to identify EFCs: if a census tract met the thresholds for each indicator, it was designated an EFC; if it did not meet the thresholds, it was not designated an EFC. While a binary method provides clear designation of highest need EFC census tracts (based on the 30% population target) there are several limitations to using this method for equity analyses, including “hiding” nuances and variation within EFC and non-EFC designated neighborhoods.

For the 2022 EFC Update, the project team considered several methodology options before selecting an index methodology, which provides optimal opportunities for both granular comparisons as well as countywide and/or subregional analysis (see Attachment D). The 2022 EFC Update will categorize all census tract percentile rankings into an index of five percentile-based tiers: Very High Need (80<sup>th</sup> to 99<sup>th</sup>) and High Need (60<sup>th</sup> to 79<sup>th</sup>), defined as EFCs; and Moderate Need (40<sup>th</sup> to 59<sup>th</sup>), Low Need (20<sup>th</sup> to 39<sup>th</sup>), and Very Low Need (below 20<sup>th</sup> percentile), defined as non-EFCs.

#### Toolkit of Overlays

In response to the Chair’s direction, staff consulted with the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (DPH) to identify data indicators most closely associated with COVID-19 vulnerability, such as overcrowded housing, sustained transit ridership, and COVID-19 comorbidities. Staff also analyzed alignment of redlining designations, as determined by the Homeowners Loan Corporation (HOLC) in 1939, with existing EFCs. Lastly, the project team reviewed additional indicators related to historical inequities and economic impacts of the pandemic. Attachment E summarizes this analysis. This research proved the need for additional time and resources to incorporate a comprehensive historical inequity analysis into the EFC definition. This historical analysis is a goal to be incorporated into the next EFC update in three years.

Further, while the three sociodemographic indicators of the Original EFC definition remain optimal measurements of equity need, staff will build upon the Chair’s request and develop a toolkit of topical overlays that can support additional equity analyses. These overlays may include data to analyze environmental justice/land use conditions and impacts, neighborhood-level income, community

vulnerabilities to future public health crises, and/or to track community change over time.

Since September 2021 staff met with the Policy Advisory Council (PAC) four times, including two special PAC meetings, to present and receive feedback on the 2022 EFC Update. Staff have incorporated early PAC feedback to review other geographic equity analysis tools, such as University of Southern California's Neighborhood Data for Social Change, CalEnviroScreen, and Healthy Places Index. During the most recent Special PAC Meeting in April, PAC members provided ideas for future overlay datasets on topics including intersectional gender-based analysis, non-commute trips, traffic violence, climate resiliency, disability justice, park equity, and health care access.

### Three-Year Cycle

The 2022 EFC Update is being completed three years after the Original EFCs were first defined in 2019, which has proven to be an update cycle that balances data relevance with staff capacity. For example, staff found that the concentration of low-income households in the county declined significantly in the time between the Original EFC development and 2022 EFC update, demonstrating that community conditions and characteristics are anything but static in Los Angeles. Further, a three-year update cycle would also align with Metro's Civil Rights Title VI program low-income definition updates, scheduled for a 2022 update and every three years after.

The project team also explored the feasibility, benefits, and challenges of four- and five-year update cycles. Though both a four-year and five-year interval have the potential to align with regional planning efforts or with Census data availability cycles, these external timelines are out of the agency's control and are not considered ideal for Metro's equity efforts.

## **EQUITY PLATFORM**

Metro's definition of Equity Focus Communities (EFCs) was the agency's first equity tool to assess socioeconomic disparities and gaps in access to opportunity. This update is the first of regular iterations of the tool to further refine Metro's ability to prioritize resources for people and communities with the highest need in Los Angeles County. The 2022 EFC Update data is better aligned with other Metro department low-income definitions, the updated methodology allows for both granular and broad analysis, and a three-year update cycle ensures the tool is flexible in the face of demographic changes, including those accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, yet stable enough for the agency's various planning, policy, and programming efforts that require long-term analyses of equity and impacts.

OER has regularly engaged the PAC at various stages of development and will continue to work with internal and external partners to develop future EFC baseline analyses and supplemental equity tools, such as the proposed toolkit of topical overlays.

## **IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS**

This receive and file supports strategic plan goal #1.1 by further refining a geographic equity analysis tool that can be implemented to target infrastructure and service investments toward those with the greatest mobility needs.

## **NEXT STEPS**

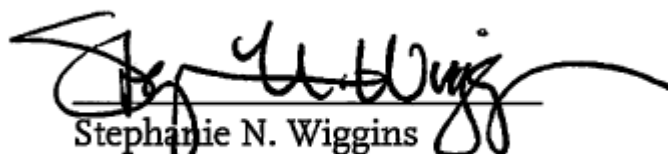
staff will continue to engage internal and external stakeholders on historical impacts analysis and overlay dataset toolkit development, including research on other equity mapping and index industry best practices. Staff is also planning an agencywide rollout of the updated definition, including accessible online and shapefile maps, staff trainings and support, and a defined “grace period,” for staff to complete existing analysis using the Original EFC definition before transitioning to utilize the 2022 EFC definition. This rollout will replace utilization of the Original EFC map with the 2022 EFC Update map.

## **ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment A - Attachment A - Motion 18.1 Defining EFCs 2019  
Attachment B - 2022 EFC Update Map  
Attachment C - Original EFC and 2022 EFC Update  
Attachment D - 2022 EFC Update Methodology Research  
Attachment E - 2022 EFC Update Data Analysis Summary

Prepared by: Jessica Medina, Manager, (213) 922-3086  
Naomi Iwasaki, Senior Director, (213) 922-3085  
KeAndra Cylear Dodds, Executive Officer, (213) 922-4850  
Teyanna Williams, Acting Deputy Chief of Civil Rights, Racial Equity and Inclusion,  
(213) 922-5580

Reviewed by: Nicole Englund, Chief of Staff, (213) 922-7950



Stephanie N. Wiggins  
Chief Executive Officer