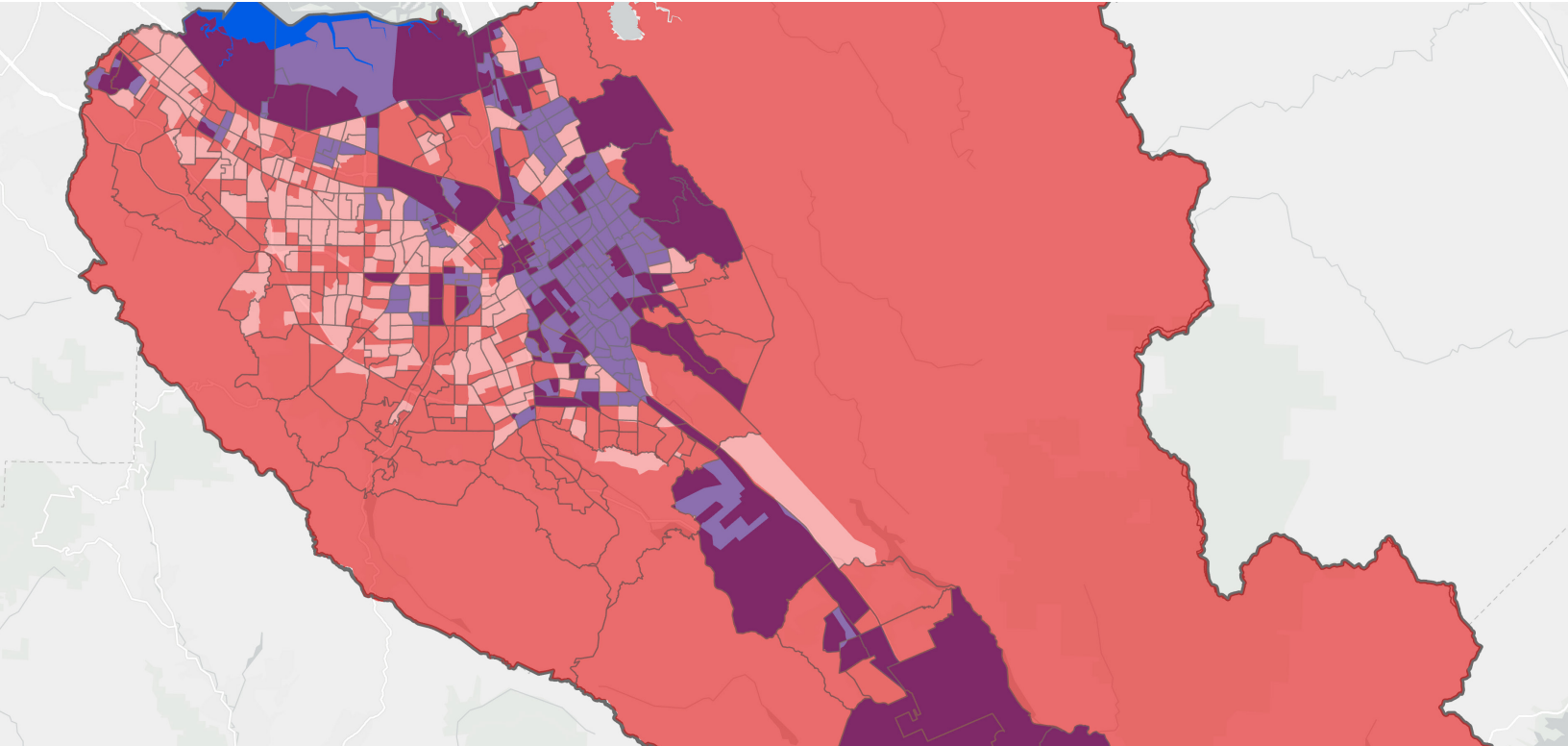


# Exploring Equity Frameworks for a Cross-Jurisdictional Vehicle Miles Traveled Mitigation Program in Santa Clara County

Project 2346  
May 2024

Serena E. Alexander, PhD   Luana Chen   Maxwell Belote-Broussard



## Introduction

New developments like housing, office buildings, and stores generate vehicle trips. The Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) is working with partners to develop a new program called the Equitable Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) Program for Santa Clara County with goals of reducing driving from new developments and bringing transportation solutions to communities that need it most. The proposed program would provide a VMT mitigation option for local government agencies and developers, which would improve travel options for the community with an emphasis on cross-jurisdictional collaboration and equity. VTA enlisted the help of San José State University (SJSU) graduate students and a Mineta Transportation Institute (MTI) research team to identify ways to develop the program with equity in mind.

## Study Methods

Student efforts unfolded during Phase 1 of VTA's community engagement and focused on identifying ways to advance program equity through the following: 1) a literature review to identify best practices for building equity into the program design, 2) mapping and spatial analysis of different inequities and burdens (in areas of income, health, pollution, and transportation) experienced throughout the county, 3) community engagement observations of Phase 1 community engagement events to assess VTA's community engagement approach, and 4) stakeholder interviews to gather in-depth community feedback on transportation needs, thoughts on new development, and the level of support for developments funding transportation solutions to reduce driving. Each student group had different methods for data collection and analysis to form recommendations for their respective focus areas. At the end of the semester, each group produced a policy report and presented preliminary recommendations to the VTA project team. The MTI research team continued

and refined student analysis using the same methods and linked findings from the student reports to develop a set of equity-focused recommendations for the VTA project team.

## Findings

The analysis revealed that equity should be incorporated early and at multiple points throughout the program development and implementation phases. From the literature review, best practices identified for developing a program equity framework included defining program equity in a locally relevant way, embedding equity into the project selection process and program evaluation criteria, and developing an informative and implementable accountability plan. From the spatial analysis, additional areas to consider for community engagement and VMT mitigation measure selection were identified in northern Sunnyvale, Morgan Hill, and near Gilroy. Community engagement observations revealed that the VTA project team's approach to public meetings, focus groups, and surveys was excellent, but public engagement and program informational materials could be simplified for non-technical audiences and the VTA project team could better leverage social media to foster dialogue with the community. Stakeholder interviews revealed that improved transit and enhanced feelings of safety for alternative travel modes are top transportation priorities and needs identified by the community. The interview responses also revealed that most community members are conditionally supportive of development contributions to VMT mitigation measures and the main concerns are transparency and accountability in the project selection and funding processes.

## Policy/Practice Recommendations

The following are key recommendations from the report:

- Develop and adopt a localized definition of VMT equity that reflects inequities experienced in the community and aligns with the transportation needs and priorities of the community. This is a best practice identified in the literature review and the process of developing a definition can be informed by this project's spatial analysis and stakeholder interview findings.
- Develop an informative and implementable accountability plan to promote good governance, strengthen relationships between VTA and the public, and measure the progress of program equity goals.

This is a best practice identified in the literature review and would address concerns voiced by interviewees regarding transparency in the project selection and funding process.

- Embed equity at key decision-making points, including project prioritization and evaluation metrics. This is a best practice identified in the literature review that advances equity in the program framework by building equity considerations in the program.
- Prioritize public transit investments to improve the availability, frequency, reliability, and speed of transit to make this a more attractive mode. Improved public transit was a major transportation need identified by the community during Phase 1 of the community engagement. Interviewees voiced a need for public transit to be more competitive with travel by car in order to shift away from driving as a primary travel mode.

## About the Authors

**Dr. Serena Alexander** is an Associate Professor of Public Policy and Environmental Engineering at Northeastern University. Her research focuses on developing cutting-edge strategies to address climate change and climate justice.

**Luana Chen** and **Maxwell Belote-Broussard** are graduate students in San José State University's Urban and Regional Planning Program.

## To Learn More

For more details about the study, download the full report at [transweb.sjsu.edu/research/2346](https://transweb.sjsu.edu/research/2346)



MTI is a University Transportation Center sponsored by the U.S. Department of Transportation's Office of the Assistant Secretary for Research and Technology and by Caltrans. The Institute is located within San José State University's Lucas Graduate School of Business.