SJSU SAN JOSÉ STATE UNIVERSITY

MTI MINETA TRANSPORTATION INSTITUTE

# Are California's Local Jurisdictions Disproportionately Directing Growth Toward Existing Disadvantaged Communities? Evidence from the Southern California and San Francisco Bay Area Regions

Shishir Mathur, PhD
Christopher E. Ferrell, PhD

Project 2235
October 2024

## Introduction

Communities across the United States are striving to promote smart urban growth through compact urban infill residential development, and in California, to meet greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction targets. This study examines whether some CA jurisdictions are pursuing these goals in part by planning disproportionately large amounts of new urban development in disadvantaged communities (DACs), as empirical evidence is lacking. This study uses the two most populated regions of the state—the San Francisco Bay Area (S.F. Bay Area) and Southern California (SoCal) —as case studies.

## Study Methods

This study adopted a variety of research methods using a six-step methodology. First, it reviewed data for all 18 of the state's Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) to identify the top two regions—S.F. Bay Area and SoCal—that are planning large numbers of housing units in already urbanized areas, primarily as multi-family houses.

Second, it reviewed literature and off-the-shelf metrics that measure community-level disadvantage to identify its various dimensions and sub-dimensions and the data needed to operationalize them. The study developed a DAC Index (DACI) that comprises five dimensions—demographic, economic, educational, environmental, and transportation. These dimensions were then subdivided into two or more subdimensions.

Third, the variables comprising the subdimensions were identified. Fourth, the DACs were spatially located using the Geographic Information System (GIS). To do this, the study first identified disadvantage for each subdimension at the U.S. Census block group level. Next, it aggregated up the disadvantage at the dimension level. Finally, if a block group was disadvantaged on two or more dimensions, it was considered disadvantaged overall. A separate GIS layer comprising such disadvantaged block groups was created for each of the two case study regions.

Fifth, locations of planned new housing were identified for the two case study regions. The Plan Bay Area 2050 and Connect SoCal serve as these regions' regional transportation plans. These plans identify areas for targeted future growth, called Priority Development Areas (PDAs) in the S.F. Bay Area region and Priority Growth Areas (PGAs) and Spheres of Influence (SOIs) in the SoCal region.

Finally, the study overlaid the GIS files showing the PDAs, and the PGAs and SOIs, on the GIS layer of the disadvantaged block groups of the S.F. Bay Area and SoCal regions, respectively to identify the extent to which new growth is planned in DACs and the top local jurisdictions in each region where it would occur in disadvantaged block groups.

New growth is disproportionately planned in the disadvantaged communities of the S.F. Bay Area and SoCal regions.

**Findings**

The study finds that new housing is being planned disproportionately in the disadvantaged communities of the case study regions. For example, while only 14% and 26% of the S.F. Bay Area and SoCal regions, respectively, are disadvantaged; a much larger proportion of areas identified for future growth is disadvantaged in these regions—close to a quarter (22%) of the area under PDAs in the S.F. Bay Area and close to half (48%) of PGAs+SOIs in SoCal. In summary, the areas targeted for growth are more disadvantaged than the regions as a whole.

**Policy/Practice Recommendations**

Four unincorporated counties—one in the S.F. Bay Area region and three in the SoCal region—are among the top eight jurisdictions across the two regions that plan to accommodate a disproportionately large amount new housing in DACs. This is a concerning finding, as county governments might not be well-equipped to mitigate the ill effects of concentrating new housing in DACs (such as burdening communities with already low-performing schools, poor transportation accessibility, and polluted environment). Furthermore, to the extent that the top four jurisdictions in each region are not the wealthiest (e.g., Oakland, Pittsburg, and Fairfield in the S.F. Bay Area region and the city of Los Angeles in SoCal), their ability to mitigate negative impacts of this housing concentration is questionable as well. More research is needed to assess the impacts of concentrating new housing on the DACs of these top-impacted jurisdictions. For example, a jurisdiction-level examination that documents the negative impacts of housing concentration and whether plans, policies, and funding programs are being developed or are in place to mitigate these impacts is required.

## About the Principal Investigator

**Dr. Shishir Mathur** is an MTI Research Associate and professor of Urban and Regional Planning at San Jose State University. He has authored three scholarly books and more than 35 journal articles in the fields of transportation finance, urban and real estate economics, affordable housing, international development, infrastructure and development finance, and growth management. For more details, go to: https://www.sjsu.edu/people/shishir.mathur/

## To Learn More

For more details about the study, download the full report at transweb.sjsu.edu/research/2235

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.