

Research Report

Reconnecting Communities

Recommendations for Caltrans Excess Land

November 2025

Technical Report Documentation Page

1. Report No. UCLA ITS-LA2527	2. Government Accession No. N/A	3. Recipient's Catalog No. N/A	
4. Title and Subtitle Reconnecting Communities: Recommendations for Caltrans Excess Land		5. Report Date November 2025	
		6. Performing Organization Code N/A	
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9. Performing Organization Name and Address Institute of Transportation Studies, UCLA 3320 Public Affairs Building Los Angeles, CA 90095-1656		10. Work Unit No. N/A	
		11. Contract or Grant No. UCLA ITS-LA2527	
12. Sponsoring Agency Name and Address California Department of Transportation Division of Research, Innovation and System Information 1727 30th Street, MS 83 Sacramento, CA 95816		13. Type of Report and Period Covered Final Report (March 2024 – October 2025)	
		14. Sponsoring Agency Code UCLA ITS	
15. Supplementary Notes DOI:10.17610/T66901			
16. Abstract What changes to policies and procedures at the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) would increase transfers of agency-owned excess land to California Native American Tribes and groups negatively impacted by freeway development? Using case studies on LandBack and reparations and qualitative research with Caltrans staff and community advisory groups, the research team developed recommendations for Caltrans' excess land process, community performance measures, an overview of relevant policies, and examples of land return around the state.			
17. Key Words Freeway development, land return		18. Distribution Statement No restrictions.	
19. Security Classification (of this report) Unclassified	20. Security Classification (of this page) Unclassified	21. No. of Pages 62	21. Price N/A

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Acknowledgments

This study was made possible through funding from the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans). The authors would like to thank Caltrans and the State of California for their support of university-based research and especially for the funding received for this project. Additional support was provided by the UCLA Institute for Transportation Studies and Sacred Places Institute for Indigenous Peoples.

The authors recognize the invaluable contribution of our Community Advisory Groups members: Sharon Marcos, Deja Gould, Morning Star Gali, Ashley Rojas, Maryellen Gleason, Tribal Chairman Valentin Lopez, Tina Calderon, Nicole Johnson, Cutcha Risling Baldy, Demetria Murphy, Roxy Rivas, Gem Montes, Dezaraye Bagalayos, Tia Taruc-Meyers, Mohit Mookim, Maurissa Brown, Maya Iñigo-Anderson, Wendy Avila, Deja McCauley, and Ms. Margaret Gordon. We also thank Caltrans staff for advising us on agency procedures regarding tribal consultation, excess land, and community engagement, including Lonora Graves, Vivienna Orcutt, Abteen Kashkouli, Alexis Lantz, Sinara Pheng, Tyler Monson, Becky Frank, Nailah Pope-Harden, Carolyn Abrams, David Price, and Emily Castano. At SPI, Ciara Belardes and Jessa Calderon gave feedback on project materials.

The Institute of Transportation Studies at UCLA acknowledges the Gabrielino/Tongva peoples as the traditional land caretakers of Tovaangar (the Los Angeles basin and So. Channel Islands). As a land grant institution, we pay our respects to the Honuukvetam (Ancestors), ‘Ahiihirom (Elders) and ‘Eyoohiinkem (our relatives/relations) past, present and emerging.

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Reconnecting Communities: Recommendations for Caltrans Excess Land

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November 2025

Project ID: UCLA ITS-LA2527

DOI:10.17610/T66901

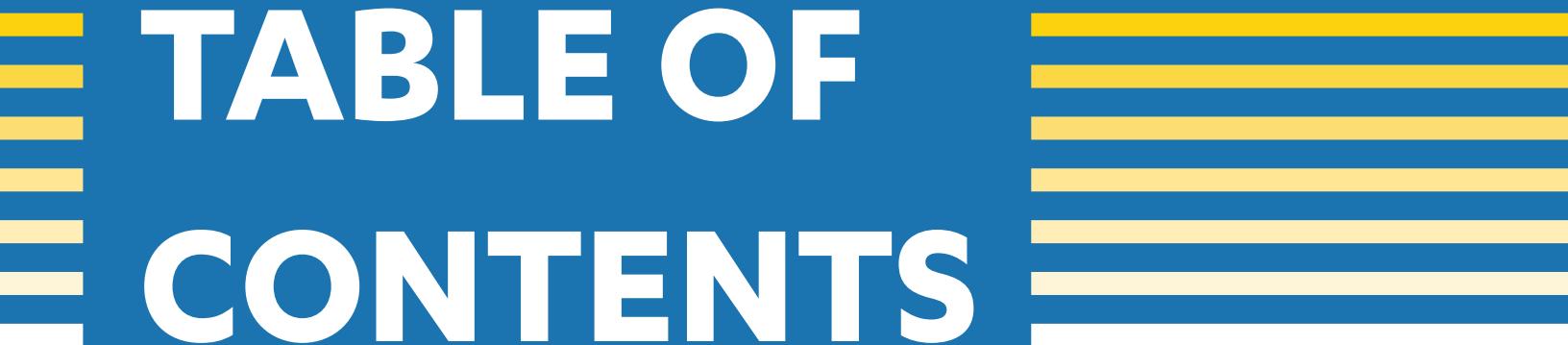


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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Executive Summary

This report contains recommendations for how to increase Caltrans excess land transfers to priority populations. These were compiled from a UCLA-based team's qualitative research with California Native American Tribes, California Indigenous-led land conservancies, and frontline environmental justice communities. The recommendations are organized around two courses of action:

1. Create more public-facing resources regarding excess land, and
2. Foster relationship-building between staff and priority populations.

The report includes policy and procedure recommendations for Caltrans' excess land process, community performance measures for those recommendations, California case studies, and themes from Community Advisory Group meetings we used to create the recommendations.



CONTENTS

1. Introduction

Against the backdrop of both a state task force advancing the most comprehensive attempt at reparations strategy in the nation and a statewide Truth & Healing Council tasked with producing findings regarding the historical relationship between the State of California and California Native Americans, the work to determine how Caltrans can help heal communities who experience the violence of mobility injustice is more pressing than ever (Brown, 2023; Karlamangla, 2023; Rector, 2022). To achieve transformative change, trust in the wisdom of community members beyond academic and institutional knowledge is necessary (Collins, 2009). Transportation practitioners, academics, and advocates cannot begin to approach reparative planning with frontline communities and Native American Tribes without incorporating Indigenous theories and scholarship on sovereignty and the harmful use of federal and state law to take land and destroy communities (Smith, 2021; Harjo, 2019; Porter, 2017; Schwanen, 2018; Cidell et. al, 2021). As such, we have co-created this policy memo with Community Advisory Group (CAG) members and have solicited their feedback about which policies and case studies may be the most promising as Caltrans explores how to dispose of their excess land.

Led by Amar Azucena Cid, the inaugural Caltrans Office of Race & Equity (now Director's Office of Equity & Tribal Affairs, or ETA) developed this research need for a call for proposals that went out in 2022. Caltrans contracted a research team at UCLA to create model procedures and policies that will support and prioritize the sale or release of excess land to Tribal Governments and communities or individuals that have been impacted by state transportation development. Before the project began in early 2024, the research team met with key current and former Caltrans staff to gain a better understanding of their goals. In the kickoff meeting in April 2024, the team identified an **overall aim of creating the guidance that, if adopted, would allow a group to go to a Caltrans district with an excess land request with a clear process to follow**. The project team pursued this aim through research activities in three areas:

1. A GIS inventory of Caltrans excess land;
2. Community-engaged qualitative research with organizations led by tribal members and environmental justice (EJ) communities; and
3. Research and guidance on programs or policies that support access for priority populations to economic resources and amenities on public land such as land trusts, greenspace, public charging stations, the expansion of high-speed internet, mitigating environmental hazards, and access to employment in sectors that build and maintain the state's infrastructure.

The GIS inventory was sent to Caltrans in a separate file; this report summarizes the team's qualitative research and guidance. The first section of this report provides recommended policies and procedures for Caltrans to consider in excess land efforts, based on input from the Community Advisory Groups as well as Caltrans staff. These Policy and Procedure Recommendations are structured in two sections: those relevant to Caltrans' current practices and those that may require agency policy changes or legislative action. When needed, we have separated actions related to California Native American Tribes and those related to frontline EJ communities. This is because California Native American Tribes are sovereign entities that Caltrans interacts with according to government-to-government consultation laws, while frontline EJ communities may be individuals and/or organizations. The recommendations that apply to Caltrans' current practices include performance measures we developed with CAGs that can be used to evaluate effectiveness of the proposed interventions.

Following the recommendations, we have included a glossary of terms, an overview of research methods, and case studies exploring how the state of California has leveraged legislation and policy to redistribute land from government to communities. The case studies include examples of reparative policy in progress to highlight how to make reconnecting communities to land actionable, and examples from each Caltrans district. At the end of this document you will find an appendix that includes all notes and materials from the meetings with the CAGs. While this document prioritizes feasible recommendations that can be implemented by Caltrans, the notes from the CAG meetings contain unfiltered descriptions of CAG member suggestions, questions, and critiques.

No one set of recommendations can resolve all of the struggles that our tribal and frontline environmental justice community partners identified through this process, but consistent and transparent practices can be reparative. While each Caltrans district follows statute, their approach may differ. For example, all districts consult with the relevant functional units to review the properties that may become excess. What differs is one district may send an email to all the functional units for review, while another district may send an email but also hold a meeting to discuss. The lack of clear and consolidated documentation on the process means that in practice, many internal Caltrans staff members across levels lack clarity or an ability to assist or articulate how excess land might be made available to California Native American Tribes and frontline environmental justice groups. Thus, **clarifying the excess land availability and sales process is of central importance**. Key District **staff should strengthen relationships with priority groups** so they can get the word out about opportunities like excess land. We believe that actions in these two key areas will amplify Caltrans' effort to be a good steward of public land.

1.1. Methods

The project team conducted background research (see California Case Studies section below), created two expert panels representing priority populations (Community Advisory Groups, or CAGs), and collaborated with a panel of Caltrans staff from various divisions to understand internal processes.

We knew that research engagement with vulnerable populations would require special care. The study was reviewed by UCLA's Institutional Review Board, and authors Lugo and Butler drew on pre-existing relationships with leadership at Sacred Places Institute for Indigenous Peoples, a California Indigenous-led, community-based organization that builds the capacity of Native Nations and Indigenous Peoples to protect sacred lands, waters, and cultures. We sought their advice regarding research with members of California Native American Tribes, and were fortunate to have Lassos and Mooney D'Arcy partner on the project, with other staff contributing as well. Sacred Places Institute sponsored staff time and expertise on the literature review, recruited research participants, and facilitated research meetings with tribal partners. This project benefited greatly from Sacred Places Institute's record of trust and collaboration within California Native American Tribal networks.

The CAGs were formed through collaboration with Caltrans staff in the Director's Office of Equity & Tribal Affairs and with Sacred Places Institute. CAG members contributed to our review of LandBack and reparations in California and shared their knowledge of transportation and land use. The research team met with the CAGs four times between January and July 2025. As agreed in the project scope of work, one CAG had a tribal focus and the other focused on communities negatively impacted by previous state infrastructure construction. We identified tribal CAG participants who were members of California Native American Tribes or who had extensive experience working alongside tribes. For the other CAG, we identified organizations engaged in work with frontline environmental justice communities. See the notes from our CAGs meetings in the Appendix.

In alignment with equitable transportation planning practices, studies based at the UCLA Institute of Transportation Studies regularly compensate research participants for their time, usually through honoraria or gift cards. The purpose of this compensation is to recognize the value of lived experience to transportation research, especially in studies focused on priority populations. As this compensation for research participants was not allowable in the Caltrans budget, UCLA ITS used internal funds budgeted for such engagements to offer CAGs members \$1,000 each.

Finally, because the research team aimed to create recommendations that would be actionable within Caltrans' internal processes, we also met regularly with Caltrans staff who had special knowledge of matters relating to tribes and other priority populations and/or excess land.

2. Policy & Procedure Recommendations

The overall goal of each of these recommendations is to facilitate the identification and sale of excess state-owned land to tribal entities and communities harmed by transportation infrastructure.

2.1. Recommendations for Internal Processes

These recommendations were designed to fit within Caltrans' existing ways of working with priority populations and administering excess land.

Table 2.1. Recommended Caltrans Excess Land Process Changes

1. Throughout this research process, we saw a need to **create a clear, uniform, and transparent process for excess land disposal** at Caltrans. Members of both CAGs and internal staff at Caltrans agreed that this would be most helpful in the pursuit of land transfer reparations to tribal governments and other communities or individuals who have been impacted by the state for transportation development. We recommend that Caltrans internally audit, district by district, their current practices for excess land identification, clearance, and relinquishment and/or sales. After the agency determines the differences and similarities in those district processes, we recommend that Caltrans adopt a uniform process across districts. Standardizing this process and posting it publicly would increase access for priority populations interested in excess land.
2. **Analyze past transfers and sales** to develop a baseline understanding of what kinds of entities typically receive excess land. We recommend compiling general parcel information for at least the past 20 years to allow for future evaluation of whether there is an increase in transfers to California Native American Tribes and Frontline EJ Communities.
3. **Create a complete and updated map of properties, with excess land as a layer**, and make it available to the public either online, at district offices, or through a transparent request process. District 4 maintains such a map and their process could be a model for other districts. The aim would be to create a tool similar to what [AB1255 \(2019\)](#) mandated: a “public, searchable online inventory of all surplus and excess lands owned by cities or counties, to identify potential housing opportunities.” This inventory should include details about what funds were used to make the purchase, who owned the parcel prior to the Caltrans acquisition, and who resided on the parcel at the time of the Caltrans acquisition if different from owner (for example, if a tenant lived on the property). Properties determined to be excess should be marked as such in the inventory as soon as possible. We advise providing twice yearly updates to the public on the progress of their mapping project until it is completed.
4. **Create pathways for priority populations to request prioritization of parcels** in excess land management databases. Either before or after Real Property Retention Review meetings where staff identify excess parcels that should remain in Caltrans' possession, we recommend that districts prepare a public-facing annual report that details excess land parcels available, transferred, and sold.

	<p>4.a. California Native American Tribes: Given these entities' heritage relationship with land, we recommend that Tribal Affairs, the Cultural Studies Office, and DNAL/DNACs coordinate with the Division of Right of Way and Land Surveys to develop a process for tribal involvement in the identification of parcels for possible transfer or sale. Note: If two tribal entities present conflicting claims to a parcel, additional research and coordination among all relevant parties is warranted. We recommend that Caltrans develop specific guidance for this scenario.</p>
	<p>4.b. Frontline EJ Communities: Establish a district-level process for local organizations to review excess properties and submit proposals for prioritizing their sale. If it's preferable to have them go through a local government, as in the case of the airspace lease program that facilitates park access, work with local staff to develop this process.</p>
<p>5.</p>	<p>We recommend that district staff develop and maintain relationships with California Native American Tribes and frontline EJ communities outside of a particular excess land process. This would be the most effective way to support priority populations learning about excess land opportunities.</p>
	<p>5.a. California Native American Tribes: DNAL/DNACs should stay in regular communication with California Native American Tribes in their district identified on the Native American Heritage Commission (NAHC) contact list.¹ We recommend that DNAL/DNACs keep track of tribes' land stewardship and access needs and goals. If a district does not have these roles staffed, we recommend that other appropriate district or Tribal Affairs staff play this role.</p>
	<p>5.b. Frontline EJ Communities: We recommend that the Director's Office of Equity and Tribal Affairs coordinate with the Division of Right of Way and Land Surveys to review and enhance district-level engagement within the excess land disposal process. All PIOs and Excess Land staff should go through community engagement training that clarifies why building relationships with community-based organizations will support the agency's goals.</p>
<p>6.</p>	<p>Designate a public point of contact for excess land at each district. Clearly identifying Caltrans contacts by district would make the process more accessible and easier to navigate. Districts could also develop a bench of organizations interested in receiving excess land to make it easier for them to buy parcels when available. These public points of contact will coordinate internally with Right of Way staff.</p>
	<p>6.a. California Native American Tribes: We recommend that DNAL/DNACs or equivalent staff be the point of contact.</p>
	<p>6.b. Frontline EJ Communities: We recommend that District Public Information Officers (PIOs) be the public point of contact. When excess land is identified, PIOs should share this information with local and regional transportation agencies to send to their community partners.</p>

¹ While we are aware of concerns raised by some California Native American Tribes regarding the NAHC contact list, we recommend utilizing this list as a starting point to maintain consistency with other state agencies' processes.

7. During Caltrans' internal review to determine the appropriate disposal of an excess property, follow government-to-government consultation policies. There should be a list of departments and external agencies that will be reviewing and regularly coming together to ensure that government-to-government consultation is ongoing throughout the process. Local tribes should have the opportunity to conduct a survey of land during the excess land clearance process. If possible, tribes should have access to funded technical assistance.
8. For the next five years, we recommend that Caltrans hold a recurring internal workshop with DNAL/DNACs, Equity and Tribal Affairs, the Cultural Studies Office, ROW and Land Surveys, and other relevant staff to establish communication and workflow practices based on these recommendations, and to identify opportunities for application. For example, ETA staff's work on Climate Action Plan for Transportation Infrastructure 2.0 (CAPTI) recommendation S3.3 could include actions from this report.

2.2. Community Performance Measures

These community performance measures were drafted through consultation with Community Advisory Groups. We asked for their input on how Caltrans would know whether the actions recommended in the previous section were effective, and the research team synthesized their responses into three measures.

Increase in Transfers to Priority Populations (Recommendations 1-4 from Table 2.1)

After adopting recommendations, there should be an increase in excess land transfers to priority populations. To measure this, there must be analysis of past sales and relinquishments to establish a baseline. For example, Caltrans could layer previously held parcels with the Transportation Equity Index (EQI) to identify where transfers have occurred within transportation-based priority population tracts and to what kinds of entities. This analysis will show which districts could be a focus of actions recommended in this report.

Public Satisfaction with Quality of Engagement (Recommendations 4-7 from Table 2.1)

There should be high quality community engagement throughout the process such that organizations representing priority populations would feel positively about engaging with Caltrans in the future. These members of the public should be recognized as having a legitimate claim to excess state-owned land. It is beyond the scope of this project to develop a tool that would measure community satisfaction with Caltrans processes, but this may align with community engagement work being undertaken within the Director's Office of Equity and Tribal Affairs.

Tribe-defined Performance Measure (Recommendation 7 from Table 2.1)

California Native American Tribes should have the opportunity to define what would constitute success for a given land transfer process. At the beginning of the process, plan for the tribal entity to define success. Then plan for their assessment of whether this was achieved at the end of the process so they can evaluate whether principles of free, prior, and informed consent were upheld throughout the land transfer.

2.3. Recommended Policy Changes

The following table summarizes possible legislative and governor's office actions that would make it easier for Caltrans districts to transfer excess land to priority populations.

Table 2.3. Recommended Policy Actions to Improve Equity Outcomes Related to the Disposal of Caltrans Excess Land

1.	Create <u>first right of refusal</u> policies for priority populations to acquire excess land.
1.a.	California Native American Tribes: Explore a pathway or legislation needed to allow Caltrans to prioritize bids on excess land from California Native American Tribes with ancestral ties to the land as outlined by the NAHC, and/or tribally-affiliated tribal land conservancies, land trusts, and Indigenous-led nonprofits. See California Public Utilities Commission Tribal Land Transfer Policy for example policy that could be adapted.
1.b.	Frontline EJ Communities: Explore pathway or legislation to create a first right of refusal for local residents intending to purchase excess property in freeway-impacted neighborhoods. SB 1079 (2020) , for example, created a mechanism to prefer sales of foreclosed homes to homebuyers rather than rental companies.
2.	Facilitate land transfer to tribal governments: Adopted in 2021, AB 1180 (Mathis) aimed to streamline the return of ancestral land to tribes who had been divested of their previously held rights by expanding the definition of government-to-government transfer of local agency-owned surplus land exempt from the Surplus Land Act to include federally recognized California Indian tribal governments. The state legislature or governor's office could advance similar legislation that would apply to state agencies and would include all California Native American Tribes identified on the NAHC list.
3.	Set land price at appropriate level: Where appropriate for transportation purposes, put cultural easements on excess land. Easements would facilitate co-stewardship with California Native American Tribes and could put the market price within reach for tribal governments and land conservancies.
4.	Explore pathway or legislation needed to allow Caltrans to consider <u>no-cost transfer of excess land to interested California Native American Tribes</u> with ancestral ties to the land as outlined by the NAHC, and/or tribally-affiliated tribal land conservancies, land trusts, and Indigenous-led nonprofits. Perhaps state funds from another agency could cover the fair market value. See examples below: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • California Department of Fish & Wildlife transfers land to Fort Independence Indian Community in 2024 (Listed as a "no cost transfer" to a group of four Owens Valley Paiute tribes) • State of California Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy transfers land to Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians in 2024 • State Lands Commission transfers land to the Lone Pine Paiute-Shoshone Reservation in 2020
5.	Develop a tribal collaboration model like 30x30: With the 30x30 Tribal Nature-Based Solutions Land Return Program , the California Natural Resources Agency committed to working towards meaningful partnerships with California Native American tribes in the implementation of the state nature-based solutions policies and programs. The Tribal Nature-Based Solutions program was committed to supporting tribes in multiple

ways, including via technical assistance and grant funds to assist California Native American tribes in advancing multi-benefit nature-based solutions priorities for their communities.

6. **Amend Article XIX:** A large majority of Caltrans properties were/are acquired with State gas tax funds, which means Article XIX of the California Constitution constrains how Caltrans disposes of them. Namely, these acquisitions must be sold at fair market value, unless the release is within the exceptions of Article XIX. The legislature could explore what would be needed in an amendment to Article XIX developing a pathway for nonprofit and community developers to acquire such lands for public purposes before it becomes cleared for public sale.

3. Glossary

“Surplus property” and “excess land” are common terms that are not interchangeable. This glossary defines them and other terms of art used in this report. These definitions are taken from SB 695 (2024), SB 572 (2024), SB 1079 (2020), and other sources

California Native American Tribe: “California Native American Tribe” shall mean a California Native American tribe on the list maintained by the Native American Heritage Commission (NAHC) for purposes of tribal consultation under Chapter 905, California Statutes of 2004. California State Law provides the means for both federally-recognized and non-federally recognized tribes to protect their respective tribal cultural resources.

Director's Office of Equity & Tribal Affairs (ETA): As part of Caltrans' commitment to eliminate barriers to provide more equitable transportation for all Californians, Caltrans established the Director's Office of Equity & Tribal Affairs (ETA). This office facilitates the development and implementation of equity and tribal initiatives and does this by collaborating and supporting work across the Department. The Director's Office of Equity & Tribal advances the fulfillment of Caltrans' value of eliminating disparities throughout California while improving outcomes for all per the [2024 – 2028 Strategic Plan \(PDF\)](#).

District Native American Liaison (DNAL): District Native American Liaisons (DNALs) serve as key points of contacts for California's Native American Tribes. DNALs help to effectively communicate and collaborate between Caltrans and Tribal governments, ensuring that Tribal transportation needs are fully considered in the planning and project development phase. They also play a vital role in strengthening and maintaining government-to-government relationships. DNALs serve in all Caltrans districts except Districts 7 and 12. If you are in a district that does not have a DNAL, please contact the Director's Office of Equity & Tribal Affairs.

District Native American Coordinator (DNAC): Caltrans' District Native American Coordinators (DNACs) are responsible for facilitating government-to-government consultation and outreach with California Native American tribes in support of each district's cultural and environmental studies as part of project delivery responsibilities, including maintenance and/or local assistance projects. DNACs are also integral in the planning/scoping of projects to engage in early tribal consultation to identify and address potential project impacts to tribal, cultural, and/or environmental resources. DNACs work closely with tribes in their districts, support district cultural resource project delivery staff, and have access to essential cultural heritage and environmental scoping tools and resources, which provides valuable insight regarding tribal and cultural concerns early in the project delivery process. [The DNAC contact list can be found at this link](#).

Excess Land: Excess land or excess parcel is property that Caltrans originally acquired for a transportation project or other operational need such as a maintenance station. The property becomes excess when the Department determines that it will no longer be necessary for a transportation project or other operational need (Source: [Caltrans Excess Lands](#)).

Frontline Environmental Justice Community: Describes communities of color, Indigenous peoples, and people with lower incomes who are impacted first and worst by environmental hazards and climate change due to discriminatory housing and planning practices. Specifically, in this context, Frontline Communities refers to communities who are most vulnerable to the environmental harms coming from freeway proximity. (Source: The

Climate Reality Project). For this project, the research team used frontline EJ communities as a proxy for state-defined priority populations besides California Native American Tribes.

Native American Advisory Committee (NAAC): The NAAC provides a framework for Caltrans to engage tribal leaders on a wide variety of transportation programs, policies, and projects, and to solicit Tribal feedback and guidance to strengthen government-government relationships to inform and improve future efforts. Members are nominated by Tribes throughout the state, with five each from Northern, Central, and Southern California. There are also representatives from intertribal organizations. The NAAC meets every quarter with high-level Caltrans management to discuss current issues and provide guidance.

Priority Populations: Defined by [California Climate Investments](#) as “disadvantaged communities, low-income communities and low-income households.”

Public Information Officer: This district-level role represents a Caltrans district and the agency to the news and general public. They implement internal media policy, prepare district leadership for media relations and public presentations, and serve as the public-facing district spokesperson to public groups, media, and individuals inquiring about the district's activities. They collect, evaluate, and distribute information from district sources to public and stakeholders.

Relinquishment: This refers to the statutory conveyance of all rights, title, interests, liability, and maintenance responsibilities of a State highway, or portion thereof, to another government entity. (Project Development Procedures Manual, Chapter 25)

Surplus Property: Surplus Property is state-owned real property identified as excess to the programmatic needs of the controlling department listed online for state use or for sale to local agencies, affordable housing sponsors, and the public pursuant to Government Code Section 11011 et seq. Surplus land is any land that is not needed to support the existing use but cannot be separated from the property and sold for another use. Unlike excess land, which has value because it can be divided and sold separately, surplus property adds no value independently of the property being appraised. Colloquially and in other agencies, the terms surplus lands and excess property have been used interchangeably, but the legal designation for property this project focuses on is excess lands, which is the term used in this report.

Tribal Consultation: Public Resources Code § 21080.3.1(b) the meaningful and timely process of seeking, discussing and carefully considering the views of others for the purposes, where feasible, of seeking agreement. Consultation between government agencies and Native American Tribes shall be conducted in a way that is mutually respectful of each party's cultural point-of-view. Consultation shall also recognize the tribes' potential needs for confidentiality with respect to places that have traditional tribal cultural significance.

4. California Case Studies

4.1. LandBack & Reparations Efforts

This section reviews reports and policies in the areas of LandBack and reparations.

4.1.a. Reports & Studies

Save California Salmon, California #LandBack Special Report, June 2024

We would like to acknowledge and uplift the work of a report published by [Save California Salmon](#) in 2024 and co-authored by Dr. Cutcha Risling Baldy, Carrie Tully and Karley M. Rojas. Their work on the [California #LandBack Special Report](#) provides in-depth analysis on the historic roots of land dispossession, current policies and procedures related to land return, and highlights the legislative and community successes in the State of California regarding the international LandBack movement. We encourage people to read the report for a more comprehensive discussion of the various laws, policies and procedures and case studies throughout California. The Report is an outcome of the [2023 Northern California LandBack Symposium](#), which was hosted in partnership with Save California Salmon and Native American Studies Department (CalPoly Humboldt).

California Reparations Task Force

The California Reparations Task Force was started in 2020 pursuant to California Assembly Bill 3121 (S. Weber). The Task Force was to study and develop reparation proposals for African Americans. Specifically, the “Task Force consisted of nine members charged with studying the institution of slavery and its lingering negative effects on society and on living African Americans, including descendants of persons enslaved in the United States” (California, 2020; Karlamangla, 2023).

The final report of the Task Force described the history of Blackness in America, describing the way the United States and California histories are intertwined with enslavement and racial terror (*The California Reparations Report*, 2022). The Task Force details 10 specific categories of racial atrocities and describes their historical causes, current drivers and gaps, and the impacts on the descendants of enslaved people (*The California Reparations Report*, 2022). Those 10 categories are:

1. Political Disenfranchisement
2. Housing Segregation
3. Separate and Unequal Education
4. Racism in Environment and Infrastructure (transportation is mentioned 80 times, including transit segregation and highways as tools of unjust property takings)
5. Pathologizing the African American Family
6. Control Over Creative Cultural and Intellectual Life
7. Stolen Labor and Hindered Opportunity
8. An Unjust Legal System
9. Mental and Physical Harm and Neglect
10. Wealth Gap

The final report also offered a calculation of suggested reparations, explained how their recommendations utilized the International Legal Framework from the United Nations, and contained a landscape of international and domestic reparations efforts (*The California Reparations Report*, 2022). In citing the United Nations Principles on Reparations, that Task Force noted that “a full and effective reparations program must include all of the following: (1) Restitution; (2) Compensations; (3) Rehabilitation; (4) Satisfaction; and (5) Guarantees of non-repetition (*Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law*, n.d.). Finally, the Task Force offered policy recommendations for each of the 10 categories of racial atrocities.

Final recommendations make several references to environmental justice communities including:

The Task Force recommends the Legislature require local governments to identify redlined and descendant communities within their jurisdiction and make plans to increase tree canopy coverage and access to greenspace to limit pollution exposure, ameliorate heat island effects, and improve air quality (*The California Reparations Report*, 2022, p. 713).

There is also recommendation about green space in Chapter 24 of the final report:

The Task Force recommends the Legislature fund the development of local parks in African American communities, with special consideration for descendant communities, to acquire land, build and renovate parks, purchase play equipment, support programming, and build indoor and outdoor recreation facilities.

This Task Force recommendation corresponds to existing law regarding leasing excess Caltrans lands to jurisdictions for development of parks (Streets and Highway Codes 104.15, 118.6). Caltrans could leverage the existing law and Task Force recommendation and look to replicate models like the [Los Angeles Neighborhood Land Trust](#), a non-profit community based organization that leases and buys land from local government and then stewards the land as a park for low-income communities of color in Los Angeles County. [Read the full report from the California Reparations Task Force](#).

Two relevant bills were being considered by the legislature during this report period:

- [AB 62 \(2025-2026\) Civil Rights Department: racially motivated eminent domain](#)
- [SB 518 \(Weber Pierson\) Descendants of enslaved persons: reparations](#) (signed in 2025)

California Truth & Healing Council

In 2019, Governor Newsom issued Executive Order N-15-19 which acknowledged and apologized for the state’s role in attempted genocide of California Indigenous Peoples. Governor Newsom apologized “on behalf of the citizens of the State of California to all California Native Americans for the many instances of violence, maltreatment and neglect California inflicted on tribes.” EO N-15-19 also established the California Truth & Healing Council. The purpose of the THC is to “bear witness to, record, examine existing documentation of, and receive California Native American narratives regarding the historical relationship between the State of California and California Native Americans in order to clarify the historical record of this relationship in the spirit of truth and healing.”

Many of the testimonies submitted have focused on the dispossession of land from California Indigenous Peoples and offered recommendations for redress. With support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation’s Policies for Action Program, researchers at UC Davis were able to draft the memo [On and Of Land: Statewide](#)

[Tribal and Native Views on Land Access, Land Returns and Emerging Land Use Policies Expressed During the CA Truth and Healing Council, December 2020 – November 2023](#) Based on the analysis of public testimony from Truth & Healing Council meetings throughout the state over the course of three years, this memo explores six policy areas and offers the following policy recommendations:

1. Land Back: Returning lands to Native ownership through title transfers and stewardship agreements.
2. Land Use Authority: Increasing tribal authority over land and ecosystem management, especially in ancestral territories, and expanding the boundaries where consultation should happen.
3. Funding for Tribal Recognition, Unrecognized, Urban and Landless Tribes - Allocating resources for unrecognized tribes and urban Native populations to access land and conduct cultural practices.
4. Education on California Places and Native History: Increasing public knowledge of Native histories and California's Indigenous cultures.
5. Incorporating Tribal Knowledge Through Hiring and Contracting: Enhancing Native representation in State land and resource management.
6. Public and Private Restitution: Encouraging restitution from organizations that have benefited from Native land dispossession.

4.1.b. Legislation & Policies

California Public Utilities Commission Tribal Land Transfer Policy

In 2019, the California Public Utilities Commission adopted a Tribal Land Transfer Policy (TLTP). The TLTP was adopted in furtherance of the directives outlined in Executive Order B-10-11 which directed all state agencies and departments to “encourage communication and consultation with California Indian Tribes.” The TLTP was one of the first policies in the state developed to address the issue of tribal land return. The TLTP allows for the transfer of land from investor-owned utilities to Native American tribes with a historical interest in the land. The policy “creates an expectation that the utility will work with the California Native American Heritage Commission to identify any tribes whose ancestral territory the land is on or adjacent to this particular land.” Once an interested tribe or tribes are identified, “the company is expected to negotiate a transfer to the tribe before putting the land on the market. This policy, which the CPUC developed after comment from utilities and tribes, furthers the CPUC's goals of recognizing and respecting native sovereignty, and of returning tribal lands to their rightful owners.”

Of particular note is that the TLTP explicitly names non-federally recognized tribes as eligible recipients for land return.

“California Native American tribe” means a Native American tribe located in California that is on the contact list maintained by the Native American Heritage Commission for the purposes of Chapter 905 of the Statutes of 2004. See Cal. Pub. Res. Code § 21073. California Native American tribes include both federally recognized tribes and tribes that are not recognized by the federal government. Nothing in the policy prevents tribes from consulting with other Native American groups that demonstrate an ongoing connection to a specific place or cultural resource, or issue falling under the jurisdiction of the Commission.

For more information, see the following links:

- [CPUC Tribal Land Transfer Policy](#)

- [CPUC Acts To Enhance Tribal Land Transfer Policy Implementation Guidelines](#)

Newsom Administrative Policy on Native American Ancestral Lands

In 2020, Governor Newsom released an administrative policy on Native American Ancestral Lands. The policy encourages State agencies, departments, boards and commissions subject to executive control to “seek opportunities to support California tribes’ co-management of and access to natural Lands that are within a California tribe’s ancestral land and under the ownership or control of the State of California, and to work cooperatively with California tribes that are interested in acquiring natural lands in excess of State needs.” The order then lists the actions aligned with this policy, including working with California tribes with ancestral ties to the lands and an interest in acquiring them when so-called “excess” State lands are identified.

For more information, see the following links:

- [California Indian Legal Services page on Governor Newsom’s Order Regarding Tribal Lands](#)
- [Governor’s Office Statement of Administration Policy: Native American Ancestral Lands](#)

AB 1180 (Mathis)

California law requires a local agency that wants to dispose of property identified as surplus land to follow specified procedures under the Surplus Land Act (SLA). Prior to the passage of AB 1180, exempt surplus land was defined as land that a local agency is transferring to another local, state, or federal agency for the agency’s use. Adopted in 2021, AB 1180 (Mathis) expanded the definition of “exempt surplus land” to include federally recognized California Indian Tribes.

For more information, see the following links:

- [New bill could make it easier for California tribes to reclaim ancestral lands](#)
- [Newsom signs bill aimed at restoring ‘land grab’ from California Indian tribes](#)

30x30 and the Tribal Nature-Based Solutions Program

30x30 is a global conservation initiative to designate 30% of the world’s oceans and lands as protected areas by 2030. More than 190 countries have committed to achieving the global goal via the adoption of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (also known as The Biodiversity Plan).

California established its commitment to 30x30 via Executive Order N-82-20. Established in 2020 by Governor Gavin Newsom, Nature-Based Solutions Executive Order N-82-20 commits to the goal of conserving 30 percent of California’s coastal lands and waters by 2030. An area is considered a 30x30 Conservation Area if it is, “Land and coastal water areas that are durably protected and managed to sustain functional ecosystems, both intact and restored, and the diversity of life that they support.”

Under the Pathways to 30x30 Initiative and Natural and Working Lands Climate Smart Strategy, the California Natural Resource Agency established the Tribal Nature-Based Solutions Program. The program established a 100 million dollar fund to support tribal initiatives “ranging from climate programs and workforce development to tribal conservation and land returned for tribally-led climate solutions.” In 2024, These funds were awarded to 33 projects and support the return of approximately 38,950 acres of land to California Native American tribes.

For more information, see the following links:

- [Pathways to 30x30 California Accelerating Conservation of California's Nature](#)

- [Tribal Nature-Based Solutions Program](#)
- [A Step Towards Healing and Restoration: California to Support the Return of Ancestral Tribal Lands and Lands Management Projects](#)

CA Proposition 4

On November 5, 2024, California Proposition 4—known as the Parks, Environment, Energy, and Water Bond Measure—was on the ballot as a legislatively referred bond act. Nearly 60% of California voters voted yes on Prop 4, authorizing the state to issue \$10 billion in bonds to fund environment, energy, and water projects throughout the state (*Proposition 4 [Ballot]*, n.d.; *SB 867- CHAPTERED*, n.d.). Of particular interest to many tribal and frontline environmental justice communities was that Proposition 4 required that 40% of the bond revenue had to be used to fund activities that would benefit low-income communities most affected by environmental changes, pollution, or disasters (*California Proposition 4*, 2024; *Proposition 4 [Ballot]*, n.d.; *SB 867- CHAPTERED*, n.d.). The proposition outlines that much of the bond money “would be used for loans and grants to local governments, Native American tribes, not-for-profit organizations, and businesses. Some bond money also would be available for state agencies to spend on state-run activities” (*Proposition 4 [Ballot]*, n.d.).

The California Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) released “The 2025-26 Budget Proposition 4 Spending Plan” on February 12, 2025 (*The 2025-26 Budget: Proposition 4 Spending Plan*, n.d.). [Read the full LAO report on the Governor's proposed multiyear spreading plan to implement Proposition 4.](#)

4.2. Review of LandBack & Reparations Projects in California

This section includes case studies of public land transfer or co-management, led by multiple state and local agencies. While not all projects were related to Caltrans, they have been divided geographically by Caltrans district.

4.2.a. Caltrans District 1

Blues Beach and Kai Poma (Caltrans)

In September of 2021, Governor Gavin Newsom signed Senate Bill 231 which transferred Blues Beach, formerly property of Caltrans, a qualified non-profit organization, organized by the Kai Poma, a CA Native American tribe consisting of three local tribal governments, the Sherwood Valley Band of Pomo, Round Valley Indian Tribes, and Coyote Valley Band of Pomo. The passage of this bill signified the first time in state history that land owned by the state and managed by Caltrans would be returned to Native American Tribes with ancestral ties to that land.

In September of 2023 the California Coastal Conservancy dispersed \$180,000 to Kai Poma to conduct cultural and archeological resource studies and environmental surveys and to prepare a resource management plan for Blues Beach.

For more information, see the following links:

- [SB 231 \(McGuire\)](#)
- [Press release from Senator McGuire's office](#)
- [State Coastal Conservancy project planning document for Blues Beach land return](#)

Yurok Tribe and Redwood National & State Parks

Co-Stewardship of Redwood National & State Parks

In March 2024, the Yurok Tribe, Save the Redwoods League, National Park Service, and California State Parks signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to facilitate the transfer of 'O Rew, a 125-acre culturally significant property, back to the Yurok Tribe. The agreement ensures cooperative management of public access and conservation efforts while recognizing Yurok stewardship of their ancestral lands.

Tribal Historic and Cultural Preservation

The Yurok Tribe works closely with California State Parks under a formalized agreement to protect cultural and natural resources within their ancestral territory. This includes renaming Sue-Meg State Park, co-managing the Stone Lagoon Visitor Center, removing colonial-era monuments, and establishing protocols for land preservation.

Land and Water Resource Management

The Yurok Tribe, in partnership with Western Rivers Conservancy, has acquired over 47,000 acres along the Lower Klamath River to enhance water quality, restore fish habitats, and ensure sustainable forestry practices. The land includes the Pecwan, Ke'pel, and Weitchpec watersheds and is managed for ecological and cultural benefits.

The Tribe also engages in fisheries management, including water quality monitoring and habitat restoration for endangered species like Chinook salmon, coho salmon, and spotted owls. [California Water Boards has more information about the Yurok Tribe's land acquisitions here.](#)

National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) Compliance

The Yurok Tribal Historic Preservation Office (THPO) plays a key role in managing historic preservation projects in accordance with the NHPA. When disputes arise between landowners and the THPO, a structured resolution process exists between the Tribe and the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) to ensure compliance with federal preservation laws.

Tuluwat Island Land Return to Wiyot Tribe (City of Eureka)

The Wiyot Tribe have a long history with Tuluwat Island with their first instance of land transfer being when the tribe bought 1.5 acres of the island in 2002. In 2004, the Eureka City Council passed a resolution to give approximately 45 acres of "Indian Island" to the Wiyot Tribe. In 2019, the city returned the remaining 200 acres that they owned to the tribe. This was the first time that a city had been voluntarily returned to a tribe. This land return was monumental as it informed the amendments made to AB 1180 adding federally recognized tribes expanded the definition of exempt surplus land to include federally recognized California Indian Tribes.

For more information, see the following links:

- [KQED: How a California Tribe Fought for Years to Get Their Ancestral Land Back in Eureka](#)
- [Tuluwat Project | Wiyot Tribe, CA](#)

Arcata Cap (City of Arcata)

The City of Arcata is in the beginning stages of planning efforts to redress the ways three state highways (US 101, SR 255, and SR 299) created mobility and access challenges, bisecting many parts of the Arcata community. They received the first round of Caltrans Reconnecting Communities grant which funds projects like these. The city plans to establish partnerships with Cal Poly Humboldt, Humboldt County Association of Governments (HCAOG), Arcata House Partnership, and the Wiyot Tribe to envision and design solutions through a community-driven process, which could include a new transit center, potential freeway cap or new crossings, and enhancements to active transportation. Possible developments could include housing, community parks and other resources, enhanced transit, and more.

This plan is a project initiated through a partnership between the City of Arcata and Cal Poly Humboldt and received initial grant funding from Caltrans. It is in the process of developing community connections, with the goal of launching a community design process to dream up what is possible.

For more information, see the following links:

- [Overview of Caltrans' Reconnecting Communities: Highways to Boulevards State Pilot Program and Reconnecting Arcata project](#)
- [Coverage of Arcata Cap plans from Lost Coast Outpost](#)

4.2.b. Caltrans District 2

Shasta Indian Nation Kikacéki (California Department of Fish & Wildlife)

The Shasta Indian Nation received the news that 2,800 acres of their ancestral homelands would be returned from California Governor Gavin Newsom, on June 18, 2024. The land, Kikacéki, was taken from them through eminent domain in 1911 for the construction of the Copco 1 Dam. With the Dam recently removed, Kikacéki will be returned to the Shasta Indian Nation once the Klamath River Renewal project is completed.

For more information, see the following links:

- [Shasta Indian Nation](#)
- [Project partner Resource Environmental Solutions \(RES\) project page](#)

Karuk Tribe (U.S. Forest Service)

On January 6, 2023, President Biden signed a bill into law for the Karuk Tribal Nation to receive their sacred land back in Humboldt and Siskiyou counties. 1,200 acres previously under the U.S. Forest Service's care was transferred to the Karuk under the Katimiiñ and Ameekyáaraam Sacred Lands Act.

For more information, see the following links:

- ['It Means the World': Legislation to Return Karuk Sacred Lands Awaiting President's Signature | News Blog](#)
- [S.4439 - Katimiiñ and Ameekyáaraam Sacred Lands Act](#)

4.2.c. Caltrans District 3

Tübatulabal/Wukchumni Tribe (California Wildlife Conservation Board)

In August of 2023, the Tübatulabal Tribe, headquartered in the southern Sierra Nevada community of Lake Isabella, California, acquired over 1,200 acres of land. The land, known to the Tübatulabal people as Kolo kam'ap, which means "the place of the duck," was part of the former Fay Creek Ranch. The acquisition was achieved through a partnership with the state Wildlife Conservation Board and the Sierra Nevada Conservancy, which funded the \$5 million purchase. This land transfer is significant because it is the first time the state Wildlife Conservation Board has returned land to a tribe. The land has a conservation easement attached to it which prohibits commercial development. Tribal members plan to create hiking trails and open up parts of the land for the public.

For more information, see the following links:

- [HOMECOMING: Tübatulabal Tribe and Community Celebrate Return to Ancestral Lands](#)
- [Tübatulabal Tribe acquires 1,240 acres of ancestral land](#)

4.2.d. Caltrans District 4

Sogorea Te' Land Trust (City of Berkeley)

Sogorea Te' Land Trust is an urban Indigenous women-led land trust that facilitates the return of Indigenous land to Indigenous people. Sogorea Te' has been at the forefront of the LandBack movement in California and has successfully facilitated the rematriation of multiple sites since its founding in 2015.

In 2024, the Berkeley City Council unanimously adopted a resolution to return a 2.2 acre lot, which includes portions of an Ohlone shell mound, to the Sogorea Te' Land Trust who will now hold title to the Land. Sogorea Te' plans to utilize this land as a hub for education, Ceremony and preservation.

Additional sites successfully rematriated by Sogorea Te' in collaboration with partners include, but are not limited to:

- 'Ookwe Park—rematriated through a collaboration with the City of Richmond and the Richmond Arts & Culture Commission
- Rinihamu Pulte'irekne (Sequoia Point)—rematriated via a grant from the City of Oakland of a cultural conservation easement in perpetuity to Sogorea Te' Land Trust and the Confederated Villages of Lisjan Nation

For more information, see the following links:

- [What is Rematriation? Page on Sogorea Te' Land Trust website](#)
- [Associated Press article about return of West Berkeley shell mound](#)

Vision 980 Study (Caltrans)

Connect Oakland formed as a community activist group calling for the removal of the highway (I-980). The I-980 was a piece of a larger plan that never came to fruition to build a second bridge connection between Oakland and San Francisco, but the I-980 initial leg was completed through the 1970's and early 1980's. The project's Right of Way involved the slating of many West Oakland homes for demolition, resulting in displacement of many West Oakland families and led to community disinvestment. Once completed, the small, 1.6-mile I-980 formed the last section of a loop of freeways that completely ensnared West Oakland. Connect 980 formed to advocate for the removal of the freeway and transform the area into a vibrant transit-oriented corridor which would also reconnect West Oakland, which has been bifurcated. In 2023, Caltrans launched the [Vision 980 Study](#) that launched a study to hear from the community about ways to reimagine the I-980 corridor and create new opportunities for land-uses like housing, businesses, open space, recreational, and cultural facilities.

Connect 4 South San Francisco (City of South San Francisco)

[Connect 4 South San Francisco \(C4SSF\)](#) is another recipient of the Caltrans Reconnecting Communities grant, awarded in 2022 to support the conversion of key underutilized highways in the State into multimodal corridors to reconnect communities divided by transportation infrastructure. In South San Francisco, the grant will fund efforts to connect communities, including bicycle, pedestrian, and transit improvements across four historic barriers to mobility in South San Francisco: El Camino Real, Colma Creek, the Caltrain Corridor, and US-101. Because of its history as "The Industrial City," South San Francisco has long been defined by its non-residential areas and highway systems, making these connective efforts all the more important. The project is working

closely with Caltrans, the City of South San Francisco, and OneShoreline as a way of connecting with local directly-impacted communities.

Wood Street Commons

[Wood Street Commons](#) is a community of unhoused people working to organize and support fellow houseless people in Oakland (Huichun). Wood Street folks built a large houseless community that lasted for ten years along the Caltrans-owned land in West Oakland that lasted for over 10 years before Caltrans evicted the Commons in 2023. Wood Street Commons has continued through a mutual-aid network that meets immediate needs while developing their own solutions to the housing crisis. They have worked with an architect to put together proposals for three Caltrans-owned lots they're seeking to be returned.

4.2.e. Caltrans District 6

West Fresno (City of Fresno)

In Fresno, the construction of the SR 99 highway caused massive destruction to the West Fresno neighborhood, specifically the Jane Addams neighborhood, which is the predominantly immigrant part of the highly segregated city, including Asian, Black and Latino residents. In the 1960's, the state transportation agency weighed different routes for where to place the new freeway, a continuation of a state route that spanned from the Canadian and Mexican border, and chose to locate the route along D Street, the commercial corridor of West Fresno. While the commercial corridor largely remained intact, this resulted in the demolition of an estimated four hundred homes, causing the displacement of over one thousand residents.

Today, in efforts to begin to redress this harm, Caltrans has awarded the City of Fresno with a planning grant to develop a pedestrian bridge that crosses SR 99, serving the Jane Addams neighborhood in West Fresno. This underserved neighborhood was decimated by the construction of the freeway, isolated from green space, community services, and economic investment, including lacking curbs, sidewalks, and street trees. The project would help to correct historic wrongs by reconnecting the Jane Addams Neighborhood to park land and services and increasing business opportunities that have been lacking for decades. This project is being ushered in by the City of Fresno.

For more information, see the following links:

- [UCLA Institute of Transportation Studies report about freeway development in Fresno](#)
- [Overview of Caltrans-sponsored Reconnecting Communities projects](#)

4.2.f. Caltrans District 7

Pasadena 710 Revisioning Process (City of Pasadena)

Caltrans relinquished the SR 710 Northern Stub transportation network to the City of Pasadena in 2022. The City received \$2 million in Reconnecting Communities planning funding to support their 710 Master and Specific Plans which includes: an oral history component centering those impacted by the harm and their descendants, a UCLA report on the history of the freeway construction led by Dr. Paul Ong, an assessment of harms from the

taking for the freeway, and a Restorative Justice Framework on the technical side of the project. The work is stewarded by a community-led Advisory Group, some of whom were directly impacted by the harm.

For more information, see the following links:

- [City of Pasadena 710 Revisioning Project page](#)
- [Reconnecting Communities 710 Advisory Group](#)
- [Community organization 710 Restorative Justice](#)

Bruce's Beach (City of Manhattan Beach)

Bruce's Beach was a Black-owned beachside resort on Manhattan Beach that was purchased by Willa and Charles Bruce in 1912 and provided a space for Black Angelenos to gather and recreate by the ocean. The establishment dealt with ongoing racism and harassment from white beachgoers and in 1924, in response to the indignity and outcry of the white residents, the City of Manhattan Beach moved to condemn Bruce's Beach and four other lots owned by Black families, seizing them under the legal guise of eminent domain. The land remained undeveloped for decades.

In 2007, advocates, including descendants of the Bruce family, helped rename the beach back to Bruce's Beach and erected a plaque, though the history on the plaque was heavily whitewashed. Then, in 2020, a community advocacy group formed, calling themselves Justice for Bruce's Beach, and launched protests, petitions, and marches, leading to the city of Manhattan Beach forming a task force meant to study the issue and make recommendations. The group learned that the land was actually owned by the county of LA, not the city, and shifted towards advocating to the county for the return of the land and for reparations. Supervisor Janice Hahn encouraged State Senator Steven Bradford to sponsor a bill that would transfer the land back to the Bruce family descendants. (Legal restrictions put in place when the land was handed over to the county in 1995 made these state-level permissions necessary.)

In September 2021, Governor Gavin Newsom signed SB 796 into law, returning the land to the Bruce Family. This advocacy effort led to the creation of Where Is My Land, a national advocacy group that works to reclaim stolen land for Black families. The organization is already working with at least 200 families across the country.

For more information, see the following links:

- [Bruce's Beach Task Force History Subcommittee Report](#)
- [SB 796 \(Bradford\)](#)
- [Where Is My Land website](#)
- [NRDC story about Bruce's Beach land return](#)

4.2.g. Caltrans District 9

Owens Valley Indian Water Commission (Governor's Office)

It was announced in June of 2024 via Governor Newsom's Tribal-Nature Based Solutions grant program that the Owens Valley Indian Commission was awarded \$1.75 million to purchase the 158 acre site known as Hogback Ranch. The Owens Valley Indian Water Commission consists of three member Tribes: the Bishop, Big Pine and

Lone Pine Tribes. In addition to purchasing the Ranch they plan to utilize grant funds to support land care, ceremonial work, and agricultural development.

The purchase of Hogback ranch is not the first instance of Landback for the Owens Valley Indian Water Commission. In 2023, the commission purchased Three Creeks, 5 acres of land, from the Coyle Family. Donations from individuals around the world were used to purchase the title to this land which is now a place for members of the Tribes the commission represents to hold ceremonies, tend to the land, support cultural revitalization and to contribute to food sovereignty.

For more information, see the following links:

- [Owens Valley Indian Water Commission](#)
- [Governor Newsom announces historic land return effort on the 5th anniversary of California's apology to Native Americans](#)
- [Step 2 of the Tribal-Nature Based Solutions Competitive Proposal Process Applicants](#)
- [California Tribal Members Are Reclaiming the 'Land of the Flowing Water' - The New York Times](#)
- [Three Creeks – Owens Valley Indian Water Commission](#)

4.2.h. Caltrans District 10

Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation (National Park Service)

On June 1, 2018, a 30-year term general agreement between the US Department of the Interior National Park Service (NPS) at Yosemite National Park and the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation (SSMN) National Park Service formalizing the partnership for the Indian Cultural Center was ratified. This agreement is now known as the Wahhoga Project, in which the Tribe is working with NPS to develop an Indian Cultural Center and rebuild their village on the land they were forcibly removed from in the 1850's. The responsibilities outlined in the agreement are split between NPS and SSMN. NPS agrees to do all compliance, establish utilities in Wahhoga Village, relocate a trail from the area, and protect the privacy of the Tribes while they are using the village. The Tribes' Wahhoga Committee is responsible for fundraising, constructing, and maintaining the facilities.

For more information, see the following links:

- [Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation's Wahhoga Committee](#)
- [NPS story about partnership on Wahhoga](#)

4.2.i. Caltrans District 11

Mundo Gardens (Caltrans, National City, and City of San Diego)

National City is in the Southeast of the San Diego area and was sliced up by the development of highways starting in the 1960's. The I-5 divides the city from its waterfront to the west, and the I-805 runs through the heart of the city's east side. As a result of these intersecting freeway developments, the National City community lacks green space, has high levels of diesel particulate matter exposure, and faces significant transportation and

mobility barriers. These challenges have eroded the community's quality of life, health outcomes, and well-being, particularly for those living in low-income households.

However, in the face of the overbearing highway structures, community members have taken it upon themselves to keep their relationships across these divisions. A National City resident began cultivating a pocket garden near his home for many years before moving away from the area in 2008. This pocket garden fell into disrepair and turned into a dumping ground until community members organized to save the garden and turn it into a community asset. In late 2009, community members engaged the National City City Council to reclaim the vacant and dilapidated garden into what is today the Joe's Pocket Farm. This advocacy and organizing ultimately led to the creation of Mundo Gardens, a local nonprofit, community garden, and social justice organization that is aimed at empowering youth and community members on cultivating solutions to address social determinants of health.

Mundo Gardens, alongside the Urban Collaborative Project and Groundwork San Diego, two other National City-based community-based organizations, as well as the City of San Diego and National City were awarded the third initial Reconnecting Communities grant from Caltrans that seeks to "holistically improve transportation options with the objective of reconnecting and reshaping land for the benefit of the community." The collaborative project will identify what will best serve the residents with facilities that could include bicycle and pedestrian connections, light rail enhancements, bus shelters, the creation of parks, and green and communal spaces.

For more information, see the following links:

- [Caltrans Reconnecting Communities: Highways to Boulevards State Pilot Program info page](#)
- [PBS story about National City project](#)
- [Smart Growth America story about National City project](#)
- [Transportation for America overview of National City Community Connectors grantee](#)

4.2.j. Caltrans District 12

Acjachemen Tongva Land Conservancy (California Coastal Commission)

In November of 2023, the Acjachemen Tongva Land Conservancy (ATLC) announced the first example of land transfer to Indigenous communities in Orange County. This 6.2 acre coastal tract, known as Mesa Bolsa Chica, is an area of great significance for both Tribes. This land was transferred to the conservancy via a 2016 legal settlement between the California Coastal Commission, Huntington Beach and the developer Signal Landmark.

For more information, see the following links:

- [Acjachemen Tongva Land Conservancy website](#)
- [Los Angeles Times story on ATLC](#)
- [Voice of OC op-ed by ATLC board member Dustin Murphey](#)

5. Conclusion

As we conclude, we want to come back to why this work is critical. Black, brown, and Indigenous people have been forced to endure the violence of “white slave owners and land stealers” (Mays, 2021, p. 160). Beyond that, all aspects of planning and the built environment occur on stolen Indigenous lands and are shaped by settler colonialism. Exploring planning that is reconnecting and reparative for frontline communities must also acknowledge tribal sovereignty and center the voices of Indigenous Peoples and communities. Through this project we hope to support the view of space and place making as relational projects that can improve the “livingness” of frontline and Indigenous communities (King, 2019; McKittrick, 2013).

We identified some research gaps that Caltrans should fill. First, we did not encounter internal guidance on how to handle the conflict should two or more tribal entities present claims to a parcel. If this guidance has not yet been created, we recommend redressing this promptly. Other future research should explore the long-term impacts of excess land relinquishment on Indigenous communities and frontline EJ communities, particularly in terms of land stewardship, community development, and economic mobility. A longitudinal study could assess how land transfers influence housing, access to public amenities, environmental justice outcomes, and community health. Particular attention should be given to evaluating how different models of land relinquishment, such as direct transfers or community land trusts, affect Tribal governments and frontline communities differently, and what processes most effectively promote equity and self-determination. Additionally, future work should investigate scalable models for integrating surplus land policy with broader environmental justice initiatives, climate resilience planning, affordable housing initiatives, community economic development, Land Back and reparations policy.

As this work progresses, it will also be important for Caltrans staff to share findings with CAG Members, thank and acknowledge them for their time and contributions, and keep them informed about how their input is shaping policies and practices.

Appendix. Notes from Community Advisory Group Meetings

Meeting 1: January 21, 2025

Caltrans/UCLA Reconnecting Communities Community Advisory Groups

On Zoom, 1:00-3:00 pm

Purpose	Outcome
Discuss the project timeline, outcomes, and requested commitment	So that we are aligned on responsibilities and outcomes
Begin building connections among our group	So that we have a foundation of trust

Los Angeles Area Disaster Reflections from representatives of Tongva Taraxat Pixaavxa Conservancy and Tongva Community Members

- Land has been impacted by the Eaton fires. Two of the buildings were very damaged/destroyed. Sacred oaks have been singed. Finally able to return to the land and assess the damage. The fires affected the Conservancy's plans for how to convene the community in the fall.
- Will soon send out a community survey to determine needs.
- This is a result of and continuation of colonialism. The state of CA ended the Tongva's ability to conduct cultural burns and manage homelands. We are in a constant state of devastation as a result of colonialism. Fire is an incredible tool to these lands.
- People are building homes in areas where there shouldn't be such high density inhabitation.
- Giving prayers to all of those who have lost their homes, their lives.
- TTPLC fire update page: <https://www.tongva.land/eaton-wildfire-recovery>,
- <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2025-01-19/tongva-ancestral-land-burned-eaton-fire>

Representatives of the following groups present:

- [Indigenous Justice](#)
- [Sogorea Te Land Trust](#)
- [Greenlining Institute](#)
- [The People's Collective for Environmental Justice](#)
- [Pacoima Beautiful](#)
- [Cal Poly Humboldt Native American Studies](#)
- [Physicians for Social Responsibility- LA](#)
- [Amah Mutsun Tribal Band](#)
- [Native American Land Conservancy](#)
- [Tongva Taraxat Pixaavxa Conservancy](#)
- [West Oakland Environmental Innovators Project](#)

Member groups not present:

- [Sustainable Economies Law Center](#)
- [Allensworth Progressive Association](#)
- [Estolano Advisors](#)
- [Communities for a Better Environment](#)

- [Acjachemen Tongva Land Conservancy](#)

Project Context and Timeline

- UCLA Team was contracted by Caltrans to provide research toward the goal:
 - To develop Caltrans agency-wide policy to transfer ownership of excess land to tribal entities and freeway-impacted environmental justice groups
- Caltrans is a very large department with 12 districts and headquarters in Sacramento. When it comes to having an agency-wide policy, there are at least 13 interpretations of what that policy entails. We are doing this as contractors for the headquarters, but each district has its own distinct processes.
- Contracted under Caltrans [Office of Equity and Tribal Affairs](#) (ETA)
 - ETA: where [Native American liaison](#), Lonora Graves, works, where the Native American Advisory Council is situated
 - Even though they have the Native American Liaison branch/ and district coordinators, Caltrans is not as familiar with engaging with tribal entities around issues other than cultural heritage matters
 - Land transfer is newer topic for them
 - This project was initiated by the office under a different name several years ago. It is an idea we know is important– how does a public agency that owns/seizes/has seized public land, how can they support land back, how can they increase community control by directly impacted folks?
 - It has taken close to 2 years to get this project started
 - Project team is in collaborative relationship with project staff
- Q: Will there be interest amongst the Community Advisory Group members in having direct engagement with the staff, opportunity to directly ask questions/gain information?
- The way that CalTrans identifies land as surplus or excess varies district to district. We don't currently have a map of statewide excess land
 - Q: How would a tribal entity find out about excess land in a given district? This is what we are continuing to research/might be something to include in the policy proposed
- Research will be asking what are the preferred policies for land relinquishment? Where are landback transfers happening? What can we learn from?
 - As we start to compile examples, the CAG will review what we bring to light and what policies to push forward to CalTrans.
- We want to ensure that the knowledge that comes out of this project has somewhere to land outside of just a report to Caltrans, subsequent meetings will involve some envisions for other political avenues to achieve our goals.
- Once Policy has been created, there will be the opportunity to conduct presentations to local communities that CAG members are a part of.
- \$1,000 to each member for participation in these meeting spaces and participation in the document review
- We will be sharing meeting minutes with caltrans staff; will include names of participants but will de-identify any comments. No intention to share identity. Critical comments are encouraged and protected.

Winter 2025	Spring 2025	Summer 2025	Fall 2025
January CAGs introduction meeting	April Review list of land relinquishment policies & procedures	June Review draft project report & performance measures	September Research team submits report
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Opportunities for Influence

- Report to Caltrans (Fall 2025)
- Presentation to Caltrans Native American Advisory Committee (Spring 2025)
- ETA team developing Caltrans Director's policy on anti-displacement
- What others?
 - How do we try to advance the knowledge developed here?

Q: What are your priorities for participation in this project?

- Person A: Interested in performance measures around land return, any relevant case studies we might be able to offer
- Person B: Would like to know what is Caltrans' definition of land back? What does that mean? What is the priority of land back to native tribes? Recently received a letter from the Department of Fish and Wildlife about a coastal parcel that was excess, would like to give to the tribe, but after 18 months, the tribe learned the Department of Fish and Wildlife were already in consultation with the county and had a deal in place. Breakdown of trust. So how legitimate and how sincere is this offer? With Caltrans, we dealt with an issue 10 years ago, they had excess land, they bought land for a freeway, and then decided not to build it. At that time, we tried to talk about it, but said they were going to sell it. These things are suspicious. Will they try to find a way to transfer the land? Will tribes need to raise funds to buy it? What restrictions will be on it?
- Person C: What kind of uses will be allowed in this space, also timeline. Applied for LA rezone grant, trying to see if they can build a community garden. How to engage with elected officials to make this happen in a seamless way?
- Person D: Interested in methods for land return, how to scale it for frontline communities impacted by freeways and other industrial land uses. Coordinate STAND LA, coalition, preparing for phase-out and clean up of contaminated sites that centers what the community wants. Property ownership is a challenge, advocating for cleaning up to highest standard (residential standard) but agencies are saying that aren't possible. Looking for alternatives to get land into community hands, transfer land back into communities that need it most. Housing justice, explore policies that promote stewardship. How can what's learned here apply to other state agencies that might have land. I would like to learn more about CalTrans as well, not very familiar with the history of the agency.
- Person E: Direct experience of being displaced by Caltrans. Is there going to be a way of doing a background of the people's voices who were displaced by Caltrans? Curriculum to support agencies like caltrans how their approach has been so racist. They have too many engineers and scientists who aren't trained to address/talk to/work with impacted communities.
- Person F: Priorities are to listen and learn more about land return, learning about what other methods of restorative justice for freeway impacted communities. What data is available around excess land and Caltrans owned homes? How can this impact programs and implementation? How can this have some teeth, some requirement for caltrans to adhere to what comes out of this research so we can stop the history of harm.
- What questions should we start thinking about?
 - What is the harm that caltrans has done?
 - Recent examples? Interaction with caltrans?
 - Do you have something you've participated in, from a different agency, that we can look at as an example process?
 - What are the important elements for a policy or process that you want to see in place? In doing work that attempts to be reparative, how should caltrans be expected to engage in communities?

Group Breakout Rooms

Tribal Notes:

Discussion prompt: What priorities for tribal communities do you have for this project?

- Does Caltrans produce a list of lands they want to dispose of? Encourage them to be transparent with this inventory, in order to be accountable to these groups.

EJ Notes:

- Some folks have actual experience being displaced by Caltrans→multiple experiences (60s, 90s, 2000s)
 - Displacement by highways is traumatic, agonizing to whole family
 - Communities often lack resources and knowledge of how to engage with Caltrans
 - Jobs are often used to try to persuade people to think highway projects are beneficial to community
- Need a sense of duty of care, cultural competency, and cultural humanity
 - Can't just come from frontline staff, needs to come from top down and Board
- Caltrans and CTC do have racial equity statement and goals, but they lack accountability measures
 - Equity committee can give recommendations, but no power
- Trade corridor enhancement project: have an equity supplement to help guide applicants
 - But it's not mandatory
 - Again, mechanisms to ensure health, safety, air quality, equity are NOT mandatory
 - Often just suggestion or non-decision making committee
- Not much movement to address past harm done by Caltrans as they took homes and expanded highways
 - Even when Caltrans ends up selling the homes they take
- Projects result in displacement of families, but also community spaces and resources
 - Ex: park getting cut in half to expand freeways. This happened a while ago, but people remember and it still comes up
- Legacies of mistrust and devastation to communities
 - Business and families and communities lose so much
- Being surrounded by freeways also has continuing ramifications around air quality and environmental impacts to most vulnerable communities
- These highways are harming Black and brown communities and these folks are often very misimproved and don't have streamlined way of communicating
 - No translation of materials
- Caltrans doesn't have the best history of knowing what properties they even have
 - This adds injury to insult
- Expands freeways without even being able to manage and know about what they have

Close out

- I acquired a broader perspective on a complex topic.
- I feel optimistic about what we can accomplish in this group with all of the knowledge and experience we have here.
- I feel excited to meet other participants and to see CalTrans commitment to return of surplus lands.
- I learned a lot from my peers, their experiences with Caltrans but also the important work that needs to continue. I am committed to continue joining these calls, learn and find ways to help these policies have teeth.
- I feel certain about the future of our collaborations 
- I hope Caltrans surprises us by returning land in a fair, equitable & just way giving priority to the local Tribes and displaced community.

- Important to have unity to make changes in Caltrans, disaster, our communities

Meeting 2: March 11, 2025

Caltrans/UCLA Reconnecting Communities Community Advisory Groups

On Zoom, 3:00-5:00 pm

Purpose	Outcome
Share updates on CA landscape of policies and case studies relating to environmental justice communities and tribal community land ownership	So that we can receive feedback from CAG members on information and anything we missed
Continue building connections among our group	So that we solidify trust to have open feedback with one another as we move towards recommendations

Check in: How are you staying grounded in these uncertain times?

Representatives of the following groups present:

- [Indigenous Justice](#)
- [Sogorea Te Land Trust](#)
- [Greenlining Institute](#)
- [The People's Collective for Environmental Justice](#)
- [Pacoima Beautiful](#)
- [Physicians for Social Responsibility- LA](#)
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Member groups not present:

- [Communities for a Better Environment](#)
- [Cal Poly Humboldt Native American Studies](#)

Set the Context from Caltrans

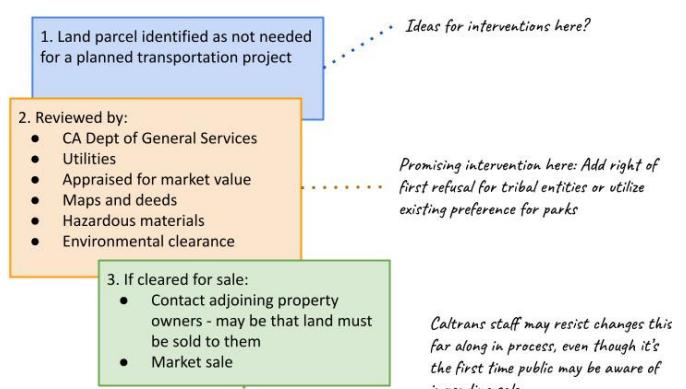
Research overview: Create recommendations for agency wide policy for transfer of ownership of excess land to tribal entities and environmental justice groups impacted by freeway.

March 12, UCLA and SPI will present about project to Caltrans Native American Advisory Committee quarterly meeting

What is Caltrans process for doing land transfers?

- Highlight connection between Caltrans not respecting community participation and economic equity
- Discuss history of eminent domain
- Most of excess land transfer is dealt within the Right of Way department, not community facing
- Caltrans is typically supposed to dispose of excess land
- There is no actual inventory for community to see where there is excess land for communities to request/advocate for
- They make it public information very late in process
- Identified land → send it to a number of reviews statewide
 - See if there is any special purpose to where this land must be used for based on any standing executive orders from the Governor
- Depending on what funds were used to purchase property, there may be restrictions for the purposes of what that land might be used for
- If it gets through everything and is cleared for sale, many of these excess land sites may be small slivers of property that might not be able to be used for another purpose, but if that's not the case, they'll go through a public process with the market rate
 - This is where it goes to public awareness

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Possible interventions

- What are some other ways that might be useful for the public to find out about excess land?
- Detailed review process – right of first refusal for tribal entities? Functional clearance
- If we leave interventions to the time when the parcel is made aware, it is basically too late to see the land transfer going into a different direction

Q+A

Research team will take these questions to Caltrans staff

Q: In Jan 2024, received a letter from Fish and Wildlife about 67 acres along the coast, they expressed interest, went back and forth, then got a letter from the County of Santa Cruz asking for a letter supporting a sale of that land to the county, they had been consulting with Fish and Wildlife for 4 years. FaW didn't disclose that. It

was so disappointing. Another issue a few years back of 140 acres, expressed interest, they were just putting it up for auction to make as much money as they could, had no interest in selling it.

- A: mixed responses/confusion from ROW staff about what happens when government entities get notified of land that's in the jurisdiction, not consistency, abused trust. What policy are they following/supposed to follow

Q: price the land is sold for– market sale, that would be a huge barrier, is there a legal requirement that they have to sell it for market value, or can it be for reduced price?

- A: they are supposed to sell it at market price, but they get to an adjusted price that's below market. It sounded like there were ways, through the review process, that would set the price to make it more accessible. When it's going to be listed, it will be market rate. Could be a potential site for intervention

Q: issue is that they don't have an inventory of the land they have taken, and the inventory will take a while to compile? AND if it's stolen land, why can't they give it back for free? Why are they selling it back? They don't deserve to profit off of it. Community land trusts, sold well below market value. **SB695– just went through data collection about how the state highway construction affects properties and businesses, Caltrans released the data. Has our team seen this?** This is the bill language

https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=202320240SB695 and this is the outcomes website <https://dot.ca.gov/programs/asset-management/select-state-highway-system-project-outcomes>

- There has not been an inventory about what has been categorized "excess", meaning land that is not planned to be used for transportation. They also don't have publicly available inventory of the land they have entirely. None of this at all is publicly available.
- Is there a way we can do a trial in a district to see if there's a workaround
- This data is not consistent across districts, and public availability is not consistent across district
- They have a multi-year process to make even an internal inventory
- Made publicly available once listed for sale, but disappears once it is sold

Q: barriers to the listing of excess land. Also, is there a public notice of sale that is issued once the parcel is cleared for sale? I've seen "fair value" noted when sale is intended to a CLT

- A: Nobody knows how much land is out there in the grey zone

Q: Where does the money from land sales go?

- A: Goes back into the question of how Caltrans purchased the property

Q: Is there some way to talk to regional planners? Do cities know how they find out about excess land?

- There are probably people who already know
- Caltrans is guarding this information, because there are so many restrictions for pieces of land, clearances, etc. they are very **reluctant** to have members of the public come and ask about land parcels
- What might these planners have to say? Is there tension with the city planners and the caltrans staff?

Q: sounds like a CEQA process (by design)... do they still have to pay taxes on these parcels? Some level of maintenance on these properties to some extent? What percentage is auctioned, is it all auctioned? it seems like they shouldn't make money off of it as that will only incentive them to hang on to it.

- If they find the property is so closely tied to a singular owner, that's not going to public auction, but pretty much everything else goes to public auction. We haven't tracked yet what their public auction/sale process looks like, will ask.
- They did say they have a list of folks they typically contact when things go to public auction. Once the lands are identified, and before they go to auction, could be a place of intervention

Q: Public Health is also an important factor. How is Caltrans bringing in fair value, how to define it? Caltrans needs to be more supportive of how to build capacity and resources for investment of these pieces of property, and to revitalize the community. They should be investing money along with the land to the communities. Make the steps towards it. If we have the land, how can we bring back prosperity for the communities?

Memo readthrough and General Q+A

Breakout Groups

Tribal:

- Sogorea Te Land Trust– a lot of the media amplified the language of return, but Sogorea Te had to **buy** they West Berkeley Shellmound back
 - Sogorea te website has article that clarifies
 - Highlight recent rematriate creek with affordable housing developer and caltrans (castro valley), 3 acres that was rematriated back
 - <https://www.sfchronicle.com/eastbay/article/indigenous-land-trust-castro-valley-19944164.php>
- In Southern CA territory, everytime they call it land back, its private entities that donate, many times there's still an exchange of money, even if reduced
- End point will be a final report submitted to Caltrans in October. We will be giving them highlights of this document soon. Opportunity to add corrections and context.
- Does Caltrans prioritize culturally sensitive and sacred sites? Do they depend on state archeologists, or do they work with tribes? Tribes have different understanding with respect to cultural resources. Tribes should be able to do survey work and study it with respect to cultural importance. Viewsheds, wildlife corridor, former indigenous trail/trade route? State archeology won't identify it, tribal people will. Make sure sacred and cultural spots are prioritized.
 - We can definitely ask questions about this survey as part of their environmental review, they also do cultural study. This is a key point of intervention. Should be able to get good specifics on what's already part of the process, what can be recommended as a more thorough review process.
 - Recommendations for policies would be helpful to reference– conservation + cultural easements, all of these can be built right in
- Uplift the importance of examples around successful land return to non federally recognized, especially given the proposed changes to AB 52 in this legislation <https://legiscan.com/CA/text/AB52/2025>
 - Would dramatically change relationship between state and non-federally recognized tribes
- Has anyone in the group engaged with the Native American Advisory Committee?

- still keep in touch, tribe worked with them a few years ago
- Lots of landback projects in the works, very exciting
- Make sure they are giving the land back to the appropriate tribe— a few years back, gave land back to a different tribe that had no connection to the land
- CDFW Swap: bit.ly/CDFWSWAP_Public2 this evening! Stipend for participation

EJ:

- Do you think our research missed anything?
 - SB 572 (Lola's bill)—passed at the end of last year, very site specific, but the bill designates state excess prop at 5401 Crenshaw, and says it needs to be sold at fair market. DGS must solicit proposals from Land Trusts. Also, specifically listed Black Workers Center has to be included in findings (across the street)
 - https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=202320240SB572
 - example with non-federally recognized tribe
 - <https://www.vox.com/climate/23906426/winnemem-wintu-land-back-run4salmon-chinook-california-indigenous-peoples-rights-sovereignty>
 - LA Metro and LA county land banking
 - Ask to have her add to the google doc or the form she shared
 - there is a spreadsheet of who has been displaced
 - <https://dot.ca.gov/-/media/dot-media/programs/asset-management/documents/appendixf-listing-of-projects-with-relocation-of-homes-and-businesses-2025-a11y.xlsx>
 - **Community Ownership and Stewardship Models**
- Any examples you want to highlight that are not in CA?
 - Scottish land reform movement is ongoing process that allows community to buy land against owners will. Have to show the owner is neglecting it
 - <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03066150.2022.2083506#abstract>

Other feedback

- Final doc should have glossary with all acronyms and meanings in the document so knowledge is built going forward
- Want to see more partnership with Caltrans when it comes to flooding and in fact Caltrans and BNSF railroad would unblock the water and call cops on them
- If Caltrans has land next to rural communities of color, provide opportunities for habitat restoration, trails, and other recreation
- Wants to know more about surplus land act
- Land banking policies
- Generally, how do we give land back to EJ communities, which may be harder than tribal communities
- What are structures of community ownership, stewardship
- Tighter tie between public health, freeway placement, and environmental justice
- Need a public apology (+1)
- SB 1079: Example of policy prioritizing the bids of a certain group (tenants/nonprofits) in foreclosure auctions: https://www.theselc.org/homes_for_communities
- What is the timeline between the notification of availability and the sale? Maybe we could extend it to provide more time for communities to weigh in.

Meeting 3 (EJ CAG): May 21, 2025

Caltrans/UCLA Reconnecting Communities Environmental Justice Community Advisory Group

On Zoom, 11:00am-1:00 pm

Purpose	Outcome
Spend time to dig in deeply on recommendations and receive feedback	So that we get direct feedback from EJ CAG members, other examples to elevate, and integrate that feedback before submitting next draft to Caltrans
Begin to discuss metrics for measuring progress	So that we begin to create performance measures for each policy scenario

Welcome + Grounding: As summer approaches, what are you doing to recharge and/or reconnect?

Questions for Caltrans

- If the land is contaminated, will Caltrans be offering any assistance to clean it up? Especially in LA, that can be really expensive, land is very toxic and contaminated
 - If they find out that remediation is needed, they do not have the funding so the land just sits there.
 - There may be a possibility that they do the land transfer with the liability, but it's just kind of a barrier
 - Usually what comes up as excess land is funky parcels, closely attached to some other piece of property, so offered to one property owner.
- Can Caltrans be transparent on how they initially purchased/otherwise came into ownership of the land? How do they quantify excess land? How do they determine the sale price? Where does the money from land sales go? Asking for transparency for the process.
 - Not clear what triggers the review of land about whether it meets a transportation purpose.
- If the diagram can be amended– for other city land, they may make a deal with the developer to sell public land with a developer for like \$1. Is there a compelling case for a public interest project, can that lead to a carveout for a reduction/negotiate a fair price.
- Does Caltrans have any intention if a land was taken through a “taking”-- thinking about first right of refusal, notify tribal lands, or those who were initially displaced from the land.
- Is it standard to do the offer to the landowner it was acquired from?

Caltrans guest speaker

Sinarath Peng, Affordable Housing Implementation officer, Caltrans Headquarters, Division of Right of Way and Land Surveys

Tyler Monson, Research Director at Caltrans HQ

- Brief Overview of Excess Land
- Slides:
 - Caltrans owned real property no longer required for a transportation project or other operational needs

- Division of Right of Way manages the inventory and process of disposal of these lands
- How it's created
 - Projects—downscoped or design change, landlocked parcel, or uneconomic remnant
 - decrets
 - Operation— that no longer needs
 - Legal obligation
- State and Federal Laws and Regulations
 - CA Constitution Article XIX—state gas tax funds
 - Market value is required if Federal funds are used to purchase the land
 - Set of procedures—consideration of a set of conditions
 - Exceptions:
 - State—dept of parks and recs purposes, dept of fish and game for protection of habitats, wildlife conservation board
 - Legislative authority is required for transfer under these exceptions
- Considerations
 - Notable environmental value
 - Usually with these, need to contact specific agencies
 - Affordable housing development
 - If gas tax, the districts move with disposal process as normal
 - Direct or public sale
 - Can be to adjoining owner
 - If none of these are valid, goes to public sale or bid
- General Process
 - Direct sale to public agency
 - Direct sale to adjoining property
 - Public sale
 - Transfer of jurisdiction
 - Less common
 - Internal transfer for another project
 - Exchange
 - Functional replacement
 - Direct conveyance

Questions

- Disposition piece along the process— for direct sale, there are a few parties involved— are all former owners notified? If property was acquired through a taking, owner is deceased, are descendants notified?
 - Former owners, caltrans staff determine whether the owner is eligible
 - Eligibility criteria?
- Does caltrans make it transparent how they came into ownership of these parcels?
 - Series of steps following laws and regulations when acquired
 - Required for the project
 - Is that made public? Not sure how public, but the applications go through commissions for approval
- Has this public facing acquisition process always been transparent?
 - The rules around acquisition and record keeping have changed over time. The further back you go, the higher chance you won't find everything. Each caltrans district have right of way staff dedicated to answering the public requests. Record retention only goes back 20 years, hard to



- find how the parcel was acquired. For the really old parcels (acquired in 30's and 40's), on paper maps, district ROW staff
 - Just FYI - The California state archives contain old transportation commission files, photographs, reports, etc. and are open to the public. In many cases records are only available on paper for viewing at the archives in Sacramento:

<https://www.sos.ca.gov/archives/collections/minerva>
- What triggers viewing something as excess land?
 - After a project completes construction, they review the boundaries they acquired, a mandatory process
- How is sale price determined?
 - Appraisal
 - Company?
 - In house appraisal
- Where does the money from the land sale go?
 - Goes back into state highway account for transportation purposes
- Land that has been purchased with gas tax funding cannot be used for affordable housing
 - Needs to be used for transportation purposes- that is the hurdle we're working through
 - Unless its used for transportation purposes
- If caltrans acquired the land using state gas tax money, could they sell it to a nonprofit that wants to build affordable housing?
 - It would be through a public bid
 - If a city wants to acquire it though affordable housing
 - Can only do a direct sale to a public agency if it's for a public purpose
 - Free housing a public purpose? Not at this time.
 - Is the goal to change this procedure document? The commission that makes amendments to them.
 - Ways for people to proactively express interest if there's a public interest project in mind.
- Has caltrans thought about digitizing the information? Its difficult to get all of it, keep updating a dashboard or GIS layer, for folks to see what excess land is owned by Caltrans
 - a Caltrans Excess Lands API could be helpful to get that info
 - Everything to digitize comes down to time and resources
 - <https://dot.ca.gov/programs/right-of-way/rw-maps-surveys-records>
 - Direct link to D4 web viewer, so it launches right into a CPU intensive GIS web viewer
 - <https://caltrans.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=04efb9a9f14c4da2aabd9ce36b7dda48/>
- VMT mitigation as part of CEQA, how can affordable housing be used as part of VMT mitigation as part of CEQA?
- Any example of relinquishment to a state agency and then held in trust?
 - Value of keeping land as open space, if that is a preference for that community
- Does the Program have a guiding document stating the goals?
 - Excess land program, goal is to dispose as soon as possible
 - Within subset, is affordable housing, add a process to research the funding and coordinate with DGS
 - ROW manual- high level of the objectives and the process
 - <https://dot.ca.gov/programs/right-of-way/excess-lands-properties-for-sale>
 - Chapter 16 (?)
- Storymap from Leila: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/5ab93d84f06f4aebbdcec2f714d8b33d>

Other thoughts

- I wonder if the sale price can be manipulated by legislation though with the state at large because there is precedent-ish (SB 572)
- California Transportation Commission
 - What are potentially viable ways to get available land transparently out there, for people who do want to move it towards affordable housing
- Culture piece
 - The culture of the department aren't quite there yet
 - An additional recommendation- demand an apology to the displacement
 - Could be a catalyst for the work that could be done
 - Is there a top-down piece that can potentially shift the approach
 - There is a state-wide committee – a “racial equity statement”
 - <https://catc.ca.gov/about/racial-equity-statement>
 - Caltrans has something similar
 - Interagency equity advisory committee, formed in 2022
 - <https://catc.ca.gov/programs/interagency-equity-advisory-committee>
 - Officially related to both caltrans, transportation commission, and CALSta (state transportation agency)
 - Good and close collaboration between staff in different agencies
- Inventory of excess land
 - Not a priority
 - Not a standard for this to exist across district
 - Amar Azucena Cid- this project is largely her brainchild
 - A good strategy that we're hearing, in order for the recommendations to be meaningful, we should be recommending actions that happen at the relationship level among district staff. Once a parcel of land, then there's dealing with the caltrans folks, and many other bureaucratic level.
 - Better to start early on.

Review Recommended Policies

<u>1. Parcel Identified as Surplus Land</u>	
Create a public Data Portal/Inventory of Caltrans-Owned Excess Land	Create a public Data Portal/Inventory of Caltrans-Owned Excess Land as part of the “Select State Highway System Project Outcomes” reporting required by SB 695 (2023) https://dot.ca.gov/programs/asset-management/select-state-highway-system-project-outcomes
Reinforce the Policy Recommendations from the Reparations Task Force.	In particular, the Task Force recommends that the state should work to “Prevent Highway Expansion and Mitigate Transportation Pollution” and details policies to help accomplish this recommendation in Chapter 24 of the report (p. 714). The Task Force also outlines what data state agencies could collect to increase agency transparency (p. 640). https://oag.ca.gov/system/files/media/ch18-ca-reparations.pdf

SB 572 (2024) – Senator Lola Smallwood-Cuevas' Bill	Determine if Caltrans has a role to play in facilitating the designation of specific surplus land (e.g. on Crenshaw Boulevard) towards Community Land Trust. If so, provide technical assistance to the community land trust that will steward this land—when that land trust has been identified. https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=202320240SB572
Easements	Where appropriate for transportation purposes, put easements on all the land when identified as excess. Easements might lower the market rate, making it more affordable for EJ communities. Make those easements be about co-stewardship with impacted communities.
<u>2. Agency Review</u>	
Habitat Restoration	If Caltrans has land next to rural communities of color, provide opportunities for habitat restoration, trails, and other recreation.
<u>3. If Cleared for Sale</u>	
Develop and implement policy similar to SB 1079 (2020)	Give a first right of refusal to tenants, buyers intending to purchase property for communities directly impacted by freeways. Prioritize non-profit purchasers, Community Land Trusts, tenants organizations, advocacy groups.

Notes

- Add some accountability metrics to the recs for district staff to engage with community groups on excess land available x times a year for example
- What are opportunities beyond this project? Legislation? Relationship building?
- I'd love to add priority for those impacted by government takings to the third group of recommended policies.
- Who do you reach out to to start up a conversation about a project on some land return project? Should not be ROW staff.
- Caltrans is currently overhauling their community engagement process. There is no shared guidelines or expectations across the districts
 - Identify who to reach out to district by district
 - What should we tell our CAG what is the first door to knock on—turn that into recommendation on a stream of communication
- Model for “community right to buy” from scotland’s land reform movement:
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03066150.2022.2083506#abstract>
- Community engagement materials—caltrans is creating training, playbook, engagement portal (not for all projects, but for other district projects), a portal to provide comments.

- Trying to start more visualizing efforts
- <https://dot.ca.gov/programs/esta/race-equity/race-equity-resources>
 - and there's a follow up study coming out this year to the first one there on the implications of freeway siting specific to the 710 case in Pasadena
- Making transparency a priority
- Caltrans Engagement Portal <https://engage.dot.ca.gov/>
- Caltrans Engagement Presentation has a lot of links on slide 5
<https://files.constantcontact.com/d715a4c6901/d0dc1dd9-1f54-4ea7-8150-0c96ece7307f.pdf>

Meeting Closing

- Up next: identifying performance measures if they will adopt these policies

Meeting 3 (Tribal CAG): May 13, 2025

Caltrans/UCLA Reconnecting Communities Tribal Community Advisory Group

On Zoom, 12:00-2:00 pm

Purpose	Outcome
Spend time to dig in deeply on recommendations and receive feedback	So that we get direct feedback from tribal CAG members, other examples to elevate, and integrate that feedback before submitting next draft to Caltrans
Begin to discuss metrics for measuring progress	So that we begin to create performance measures for each policy scenario

Welcome + Grounding: As summer approaches, what are you doing to recharge and/or reconnect?

News and Updates

- NAAC update
 - March Native American Advisory Committee Meeting– brief presentation (under 5 minutes)
 - Shared about the project, asked for examples that can be shared
 - Good reception, happy to know the project was happening
 - Heard from CalTrans Native American Liaison staff, had thoughts to share. Will follow up.
 - Many folks, including committee chairs, talked about the importance of not lumping tribal goals, consultation, government to government relationships with equity agenda. Came up with some workgroups that CalTrans has around priorities for the next transportation spending goal. CalTrans put tribal affairs within equity workgroup

- Tribes are getting lumped into disadvantaged communities, but it's different, not the rights of the sovereign. Need to separate from DEI. This would diminish understanding of tribal sovereignty.
- This has come up over time, reading through Lisa Murkowski's letter in response to executive orders. It always comes up- difference between sovereignty and interests of other "stakeholders" (<https://www.indian.senate.gov/wp-content/uploads/02.05.25-Indian-Affairs-Committee-Chairman-Murkowski-Letter-to-OMB.pdf>)
- Sovereignty is a huge difference.
- This is a much broader document but drives home the point of why recognition of tribal sovereignty is necessary and distinct from the rights of other California citizens.
https://www.csus.edu/college/education/engagement/_internal/_documents/indian_early_california_laws_and_policies_related_to_california_indians.pdf
- (10 mins) Time to discuss AB52 (Caltrans will support non-federally recognized Tribes)
 - We must be really strong in our recommendations to Caltrans that when it comes to landback, they need to treat federally + non federally recognized tribes the same
 - Tribes really are concerned with this growing, some recognized tribes want to put an end to non-recognized tribes. We need to intensify our efforts to fight back against this. It is much worse than initially thought.
 - Ongoing challenge because many on the outside don't understand these complexities

Caltrans guest speaker

- Sinarath Peng, Caltrans Headquarters, Division of Right of Way and Land Surveys
 - Brief Overview of Excess Land (Slides from presentation included in email that sent this notes document)
 - Caltrans owned real property no longer required for a transportation project or other operational needs
 - Division of Right of Way manages the inventory and process of disposal of these lands
 - How it's created
 - Projects- downscoped or design change, landlocked parcel, or uneconomic remnant
 - decrets
 - Operation- that no longer needs
 - Legal obligation
 - State and Federal Laws and Regulations
 - CA Constitution Article XIX- state gas tax funds
 - Market value is required if Federal funds are used to purchase the land (very small handful, around 5%)
 - Set of procedures- consideration of a set of conditions
 - Exceptions:
 - State- dept of parks and recs purposes, dept of fish and game for protection of habitats, wildlife conservation board
 - Legislative authority is required for transfer under these exceptions
 - Considerations
 - Notable environmental value
 - Usually with these, need to contact specific agencies
 - Affordable housing development
 - If gas tax, the districts move with disposal process as normal
 - Direct or public sale
 - Can be to adjoining owner
 - If none of these are valid, goes to public sale or bid

- General Process
 - Direct sale to public agency
 - Direct sale to adjoining property
 - Public sale
 - Transfer of jurisdiction
 - Less common
 - Internal transfer for another project
 - Exchange
 - Functional replacement
 - Direct conveyance
 -



Questions

- Agricultural restriction– native plants (food, medicine, etc) can and should qualify as agriculture for these purposes. In San Mateo County, recognize native plants for ag land conservation. When talking abt ag lands, include Native Plants as well.
- Difficulty with lands between Gilroy and Salinas– they had 140 acres, land was deemed excess, Amah Mutsun made an inquiry about it, never heard anything from them. Not sure if that property is still available, off of Horse Canyon
 - Sinara recommends contacting the District excess land to see if its still available
- Will send PDF of these slides
- Listed considerations– affordable housing, notable value (has statutory references). Can you include other non statutory considerations, like for tribal heritage for ex.
 - Legislation may be required to get legal consideration for other things
- Have there been cultural resource evaluations for caltrans-owned properties?
 - These properties have come from environmental analyses already
- Whenever they look at the archeological studies, if before 2005, they define the archeological sites very narrowly, not including the landscape around a certain archaeological site found. There should be a re-evaluation for cultural sites if they are older than 15 years.
 - Not sure about the extent of the environmental evaluation.

Other thoughts

- Many modern day freeways are on top of indigenous trade routes, and deserve to be protected by the state tribes
- We have many village sites where the freeway cuts right through.
- Not sure what to do with that, but there's something important there.
 - Mitigation– give other lands as mitigation for the destruction of the lands
 - Examples: 241 toll road by Portola Springs

Review Recommended Policies

<u>1. Parcel Identified as Surplus Land</u>	
First Right of Refusal: CPUC	When an investor-owned utility plans to dispose of Real Property within a Tribe's ancestral territory, the Commission will ensure that the Chairperson, or the

Tribal Land Transfer Policy	Chairperson's designee, of any appropriate Tribe receives notice of the planned disposition. The Commission will set forth specific notice requirements in the guidelines to be adopted later. This policy establishes a Commission preference for the transfer of Real Property to Tribes, consistent with specific considerations identified in Policy. California Public Utilities Commission Investor-Owned Utility Real Property- Land Disposition – First Right of Refusal
Extend Eligibility for Exempt Surplus Land	California law requires a local agency that wants to dispose of property identified as surplus land to follow specified procedures under the Surplus Land Act (SLA). Adopted in 2021, AB 1180 (Mathis) expanded the definition of “exempt surplus land” to include federally recognized California Indian Tribes. Caltrans should extend the surplus land exemption for California Indian Tribes instead of just for Federally Recognized Tribes.
Easements	Where appropriate for transportation purposes, put easements on all the land when identified as excess. Easements might lower the market rate, making it more affordable for Tribal communities. Make those easements be about co-stewardship with California Indian Tribes.
California Reparations Task Force	Adopt the California Reparations Task Force's policy recommendations where appropriate.
Tribal Involvement in Initial Evaluation	Include Tribal involvement in the initial evaluation to identify surplus/excess land, using the Native American Heritage Commission (NAHC) contact list to identify California Indian Tribes. Consultation to be carried out by the District Native American Liaison as recommended by the CalSTA Tribal consultation policy https://calsta.ca.gov/-/media/calsta-media/documents/docs-pdfs-2014-tribal-consultation-policy-as-adopted-june-2014-a11y.pdf
<u>2. Agency Review</u>	
Opportunity to Survey	Local tribes should have the opportunity to conduct a survey of land during the excess land clearance process. Determine if funding can be identified to provide technical assistance to tribes, if needed.

<u>3. If Cleared for Sale</u>	
Donation	Consider donation of surplus land to interested California Native American Tribes with ancestral ties to the land as outlined by the NAHC, and/or tribally-affiliated tribal land conservancies, land trusts, and Indigenous-led nonprofits.
Prioritize Bids	Prioritize bids on surplus land from California Native American Tribes with ancestral ties to the land as outlined by the NAHC, and/or tribally-affiliated tribal land conservancies, land trusts, and Indigenous-led nonprofits.
Follow 30x30 Model	Follow model set by 30x30 Tribal Nature Based Solutions Land Return Program . The California Natural Resources Agency committed to working towards meaningful partnerships with California Native American tribes in the implementation of the state nature-based solutions policies and programs. The Tribal Nature-Based Solutions program was committed to supporting tribes in multiple ways, including via technical assistance and grant funds to assist California Native American tribes in advancing multi-benefit nature-based solutions priorities for their communities.

Notes

- Put cultural easements over all freeways!!
 - If the freeway is ever not used, it goes to the tribe
- Consulting list the NAHC (Native American Heritage Commission) holds? Theres a lot of problems with that list.
 - There are a lot of illegitimate tribes on that list– a tribe has to be historic and continuous.
 - Not sure if making reference to the NAHC list is the right or smart thing to do for tribes.
 - Lots of non-existent tribes or tribes that do exist are not included
 - Register concern abt the accuracy of this list, though it is still a list that is used
 - Include in the report some extra discussion about this
- Brought up thousands of remains when building the freeway
 - Does caltrans have a report on the number of remains brought up in the freeways, if there are excess lands included in the area, the lands should be returned to the tribes as soon as possible
 - They likely don't have a good recording of where all of the remains come from– thats lost forever.
- Is cultural heritage already included in environmental review? Ask CalTrans
 - For known cultural sites, have an ethnographic study done to understand the cultural and spiritual importance to the location to the tribe.
 - What is different is it gives the tribe opportunity to produce new information
 - Not just caltrans determining cultural heritage but give tribe opportunity to tell the story
 - This should be paid for by caltrans
 - Amah mutsun newsletter– talks about the ethnographic studies:
 <https://www.amahmutsunlandtrust.org/nlsp25-ethnography-article>

Meeting Closing

- Up next: identifying performance measures if they will adopt these policies

Meeting 4: July 15, 2025

Caltrans/UCLA Reconnecting Communities Community Advisory Groups

On Zoom, 11:00 am-1:00 pm

Purpose	Outcome
Share draft of guide document	So that we can receive your final feedback on how to make it as useful as possible
Share progress on where we've come as a group and the contributions of the CAGs	So that we can exchange gratitude and fully appreciate the scope of the work we've done together

How We Got Here

- Kick off meeting was May 2024
 - What was initially planned was a GIS excess land inventory, but turned out that was not possible,
 - Clients were learning about how the agency fit together in real time
 - So needed to do a big pivot
- Forming the CAGs was going to be an important next piece of work
 - Invited everyone to be part of the CAGs in December 2024
 - Around the time of the first meeting was the devastating fires in the LA area
 - Pivoted the meeting to hear from native tribes in the area, hear more about the convergences, echoes
- Documents
 - The purpose of the CAGs has been around developing and defining recommended policies and procedures, specifically with govt to govt and with EJ reparations
 - Iterate the recommendations between CAG discussions and Caltrans discussion, feasible recommendations
 - Trying to figure out if our recommendations are feasible from within the Caltrans structure
- Next:
 - Project report work is still ongoing
 - Closeout is end of October, plan to send draft in September
- Takeaways for CAGs members
 - Guide for navigating Caltrans
 - Compensation

- Anything else?
- lots of land acquisition available through wildfire conservation lands
 - Dept of Parks and Rec: [Land and Water Conservation Fund](#)
 - SMMC [Prop 68 for SF Valley](#)
 - Wildfire Conservation Board: [Land Acquisition 2025](#)
 - Open up pathways for purchase
 - Our Water LA (OWLA) coalition
 - Push for a needs assessment that is parallel to parks needs assessment
- I wonder if there's something to learn (language, bill process) to learn from [AB 1255](#) (Robert Rivas, 2019) re: the database for surplus lands and specifically naming tribes as an audience for the database
 - Also plugging per Executive Order N-06-19 that actually created the digital database. AB 1255 mandated the inventory of surplus lands.
- What would the land be for? What should success look like?

Review Updated Recommended Policies and Guide

- Do tribes have any say into who they are engaging with? Selection of the team who will be working with the individual community, the site they are looking at
- Transparency

Community Guidelines as Performance Measures (Tribal Breakout Group)

- Does Caltrans have a tribal liaison?
 - CalTrans tribal consultation policy <https://calsta.ca.gov/-/media/calsta-media/documents/docs-pdfs-2014-tribal-consultation-policy-as-adopted-june-2014-a11y.pdf>
 - <https://resources.ca.gov/Initiatives/Tribalaffairs/TribalStewardshipPolicy>
 - Tribal Affairs— they do work with District Native American Liaisons (but only in districts with federally recognized tribes)
 - Cultural Resources Office— they are the District Native American Coordinators (but also only in districts with federally recognized tribes)
- Not really giving recommendations on how to do the engagement, rather, evaluating after the fact whether a project was successful
 - There are thousands of tribal consultations policies, we aren't developing better recommendations
 - What we're actually trying to get at is what are mechanisms for evaluating and assessing the success of a project that's occurred
- What would a good land transfer look like?
 - There can't really be a specific metric, each piece of land is different, what constitutes as success looks different based on the land and the tribe/s
 - Do the tribes feel the needs they have articulated are being met?
 - Stay away from specificity, rather checking in with the tribe/s, how are they assessing whether it's successful
- Concerns about whether they are contacting the *right* tribes in the *right* area
- Think about what is strategic to include so as to take the rest of the recommendations seriously

Community Guidelines as Performance Measures (EJ Breakout Group)

- Important to have measures/outcomes (e.g., good attendance of community members, measurable increase in survey collection and feedback via sessions)
 - Can follow the guidelines and still not have the desired outcomes

- Format: Guidelines section followed by Measurable Outcomes
- you don't tell the family business; need to have a different meeting for feedback, sharing, healing
 - Duty of care internally and externally; how do they require those, given they are not currently there
- how do we hold regulatory agencies accountable to uphold principles of duty of care?
 - Training? Curriculum? Annually? To demonstrate how these agencies should be operating
 - Guidelines need to go beyond past harm to incorporate how to uphold health
 - How do we shift the way these agencies operate?
- fine line between guideline and recommendation
- agencies often just trying to check a box
 - Co-creating a plan - specific weight that community holds in the evaluation
- Redefining the power structures in co-creation
 - Making sure consistent and regular
- Don't have vague language like "as needed"
 - This will result in Caltrans not doing it or having too much room for interpretation and slippage
 - Adds more about the need for accountability and ensuring there is follow through. Not sure how to get that accountability, but key component
- archives and keeping the history of what has happened and what is continuing to happen. Who has the history? Is it easy to find and publicly accessible.
- Yeah it's kinda hard to see them be able to sell property for "fair market value" when they haven't really done anything to the property and at the same time, look at other orgs struggle to come up with funds to acquire the land.
- plugging the work Reconnect Rondo did with Minnesota DOT to acknowledge their harmful legacy
https://rosap.ntl.bts.gov/view/dot/77778/dot_77778_DS1.pdf

Guide to Navigating Caltrans

- How the agency is structured
- Information about Director's Office of Equity & Tribal Affairs
 - NAAC and Native American liaisons
 - Community engagement
 - Interagency Transportation Equity Advisory Committee
- Who to contact regarding land ownership
- The excess land disposal process

Process Closing

- Next (final) steps:
 - July
 - Incorporate updates into the recommendations
 - Create performance measures
 - August
 - Create guide to navigating Caltrans
 - Final draft of report
 - Optional: We will solicit your feedback via email
 - September
 - Submit report
- Final Reflections
 - I feel like we have so many good pieces and the puzzle is going to come into focus soon!

- I feel inspired by all of the knowledge held within this group
- I feel like we could have used more time but are still walking away with so much learned. I hope Caltrans is open and listening
- I want to see some land transferred back to communities
- I feel a sense of community here with you all and i want to grab the attention of caltrans and land back means health back
- I learned so much about this bureaucratic behemoth in this space. Grateful for the work of this team and all the contributions in this space. I want "Land Back" in grand form. Small wins are great, but I want to see big change and land transfer.
- I feel like I want do more on this, but it's always better to leave wanting more than being glad it's over.
- I think the team at UCLA and SPI have done a great job but still have so much ahead of them to complete the report so...I want to thank you all!

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