

REGIONAL EQUITY

THE BOSTON REGION MPO'S VISION FOR REGIONAL EQUITY

Regional equity and the needs of low-income and minority residents will be assessed through regular activities and technical analyses. Low-income and minority residents will share equitably with others in the access and mobility benefits of the transportation network. Environmental burdens from transportation facilities and services will be identified and minimized.

To implement this vision, the MPO has developed a set of policy statements to guide their decision-making:

- Continue the outreach to communities with a high proportion of low-income and minority residents to identify transportation needs.
- Assess regional equity by analyzing mobility, accessibility, and congestion for communities with a high proportion of low-income and minority residents.
- Fund projects that address identified regional equity issues and needs.

DEFINITION

The MPO's regional equity policy is rooted in its definition of environmental justice, below:

Environmental justice requires the MPO to examine the allocation of benefits and burdens, historically and currently, and planned for the future; to ensure that minority and low-income communities are treated equitably in the provision of transportation services and projects; and to provide full participation for minority and low-income communities to advise the MPO

during its planning and decision-making process.

THE ROLE OF ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE IN THE BOSTON REGION MPO'S PLANNING PROCESS

The MPO's regional equity/environmental justice program builds on the foundation of previous MPO outreach and an analysis of the transportation needs of minority and low-income populations in the Boston region. The MPO has developed a regional equity program that focuses on direct outreach to community organizations that serve environmental justice areas in the region, including conducting and participating in organized forums.

The MPO integrates environmental justice into the planning process by encouraging and sharing input from its outreach efforts, by using environmental justice as a criterion in its planning documents, and by examining environmental justice issues in greater detail. After meeting with community organizations, the MPO staff summarizes the issues discussed and provides the MPO with a summary report. Each issue discussed is categorized and transmitted to other agencies if necessary. Relevant issues also inform the project selection process for the long-range transportation plan (the Plan) and the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). Pertinent issues are also considered for further examination and study.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE AREAS

In 2006, the MPO developed and began using a more detailed transportation model of the Boston region. While the previous version of the model was composed of 986 transportation analysis zones (TAZs), the new version of the model is composed of 2,727 TAZs. A TAZ is an aggregation of census geography based on demographic information and numbers of trips produced, and attracted within, its borders. Each zone contains population, employment, and housing information. The average TAZ has approximately 1,800 people.



The TAZ is the geographic unit for the analysis used to define environmental justice areas. With a larger number of TAZs as part of its model, the MPO was able to identify more groups of low-income and minority people in the region.

In addition to this change, the MPO also developed an expanded definition of environmental justice areas. The original 17 environmental justice areas were selected based on TAZs that either had a median household income of 50 percent of the region's median, or were over 50 percent minority with a median household income of 75 percent of the region's median. When the MPO considered the implications of the finer-grained model, it refined how environmental justice areas are defined. The new definition is:

A TAZ will be considered an Environmental Justice Area if it is over 50 percent minority or has a median household income at or below 60 percent of the region's median. [60 percent of the region's median household income of \$55,800 is \$33,480.]

The MPO adopted this income threshold from a United States Department of Housing and Urban Development definition of low-income households, which is “60 percent of area median income.”¹ TAZs must also have a minimum minority population of 200 people. Coupled with the finer-grained map, this new definition resulted in the addition of 11 environmental justice areas.

The original 17 environmental justice areas, composed of single or localized groups of TAZs, are in the following Boston neighborhoods and municipalities. (The number of environmental justice area TAZs compared to the total number of TAZs in a neighborhood or municipality is indicated in parentheses.)

The Boston neighborhoods of:

- Allston-Brighton (16 of 39 TAZs)
- Chinatown (12 of 19 TAZs)
- Dorchester (23 of 37 TAZs)
- East Boston (14 of 18 TAZs)
- Jamaica Plain (9 of 22 TAZs)
- Mattapan (19 of 20 TAZs)
- Roxbury (26 of 27 TAZs)
- South Boston (4 of 19 TAZs)
- South End (12 of 22 TAZs)

The municipalities of:

- Cambridge (14 of 88 TAZs)
- Chelsea (18 of 19 TAZs)
- Framingham (6 of 32 TAZs)
- Lynn (16 of 39 TAZs)
- Quincy (5 of 50 TAZs)

- Revere (7 of 24 TAZs)
- Salem (1 of 19 TAZs)
- Somerville (7 of 41 TAZs)

The additional 11 environmental justice areas are in:

The Boston neighborhoods of:

- Charlestown (1 of 9 TAZs)
- Fenway (23 of 29 TAZs)
- Hyde Park (9 of 14 TAZs)
- Roslindale (5 of 11 TAZs)

The municipalities of:

- Everett (4 of 18 TAZs)
- Malden (3 of 28 TAZs)
- Medford (2 of 26 TAZs)
- Milford (2 of 18 TAZs)
- Peabody (2 of 23 TAZs)
- Randolph (1 of 15 TAZs)
- Waltham (1 of 32 TAZs)

These 28 environmental justice areas are the focus of the outreach and analysis components of the MPO’s regional equity program. Table 9-1 shows the total population, minority population, and percent of the MPO’s median household income for all of the TAZs within a municipality or neighborhood that meet the low-income or minority threshold. Figures 9-1 and 9-2 show the location of the environmental justice areas in the region and urban core, respectively.

¹ The full definition is: “60 percent of area median income. Used as low income for the low-income housing tax credit and HOME programs.” Office of Policy Development and Research of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, *Rental Housing Assistance – the Worsening Crisis: A Report to Congress on Worst Case Housing Needs*, March 2000.

TABLE 9-1
ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE AREA DEMOGRAPHICS

LOCATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE AREA (EJA)	TOTAL POPULATION OF EJA	MINORITY POPULATION OF EJA	PERCENT OF TOTAL POPULATION THAT IS MINORITY	EJA'S MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME AS A PERCENT OF THE REGION'S MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME
ALLSTON / BRIGHTON	27,932	11,073	40%	47%
CAMBRIDGE	22,921	14,195	62%	60%
CHARLESTOWN	3,627	2,593	71%	27%
CHELSEA	34,535	21,492	62%	54%
CHINATOWN	7,429	4,736	64%	30%
DORCHESTER	53,596	42,157	79%	67%
EAST BOSTON	30,241	17,011	56%	52%
EVERETT	2,956	978	33%	52%
FENWAY	33,565	10,924	33%	43%
FRAMINGHAM	11,247	6,121	54%	50%
HYDE PARK	23,214	17,403	75%	70%
JAMAICA PLAIN	13,547	10,106	75%	47%
LYNN	38,004	23,042	61%	46%
MALDEN	2,387	920	39%	56%
MATTAPAN	50,966	48,779	96%	60%
MEDFORD	6,109	2,247	37%	78%
MILFORD	2,977	516	17%	56%
PEABODY	3,141	682	22%	43%
QUINCY	7,745	2,131	28%	49%
RANDOLPH	1,622	876	54%	88%
REVERE	11,959	4,213	35%	51%
ROSLINDALE	12,344	8,477	69%	62%
ROXBURY	55,747	52,296	94%	50%
SALEM	2,921	2,173	74%	47%
SOMERVILLE	7,224	3,189	44%	52%
SOUTH BOSTON	8,500	3,756	44%	31%
SOUTH END	16,306	12,441	76%	42%
WALTHAM	1,788	919	51%	78%
TOTAL	494,550	325,446	66%	

FIGURE 9-1
BOSTON REGION MPO ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE AREAS

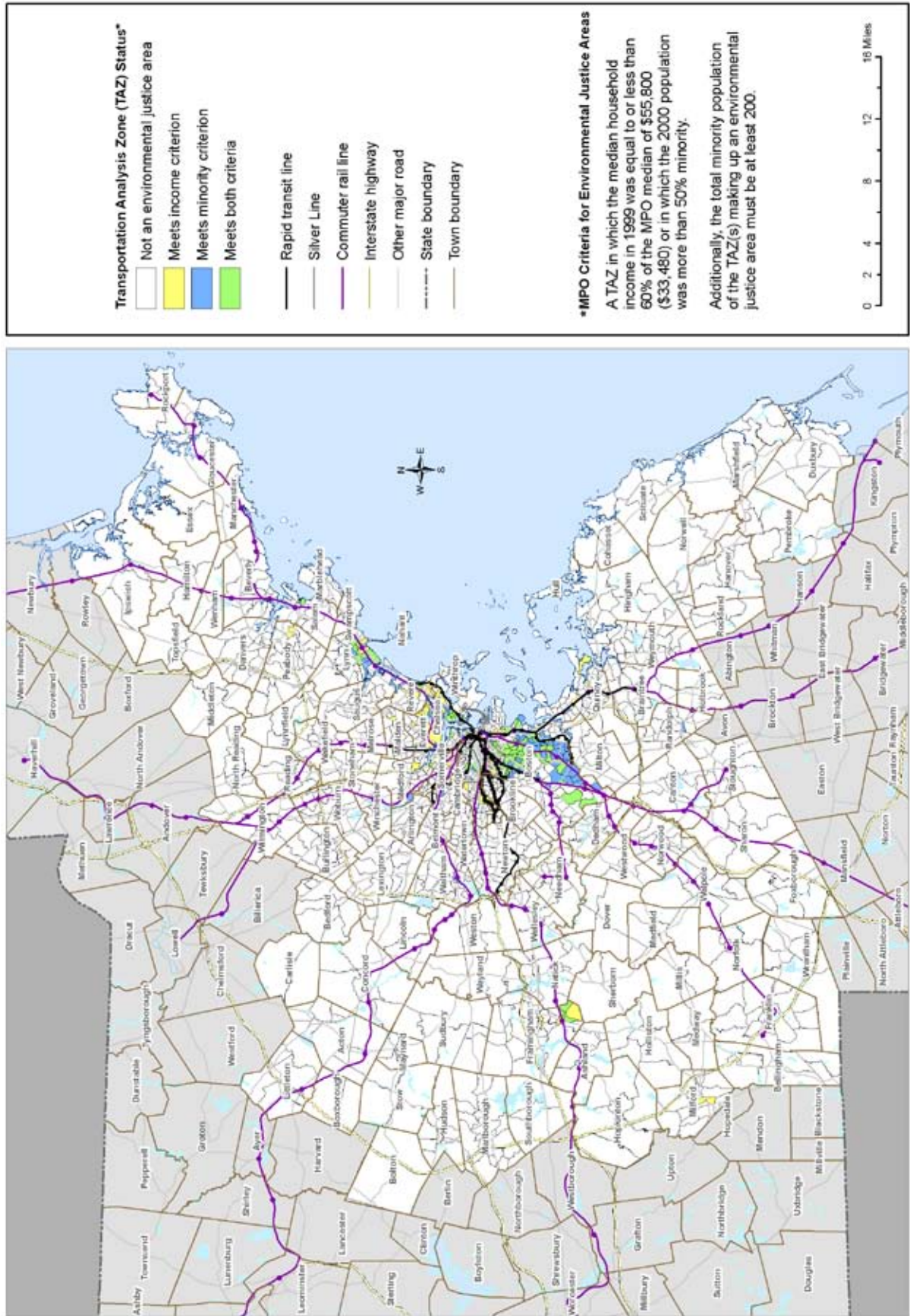
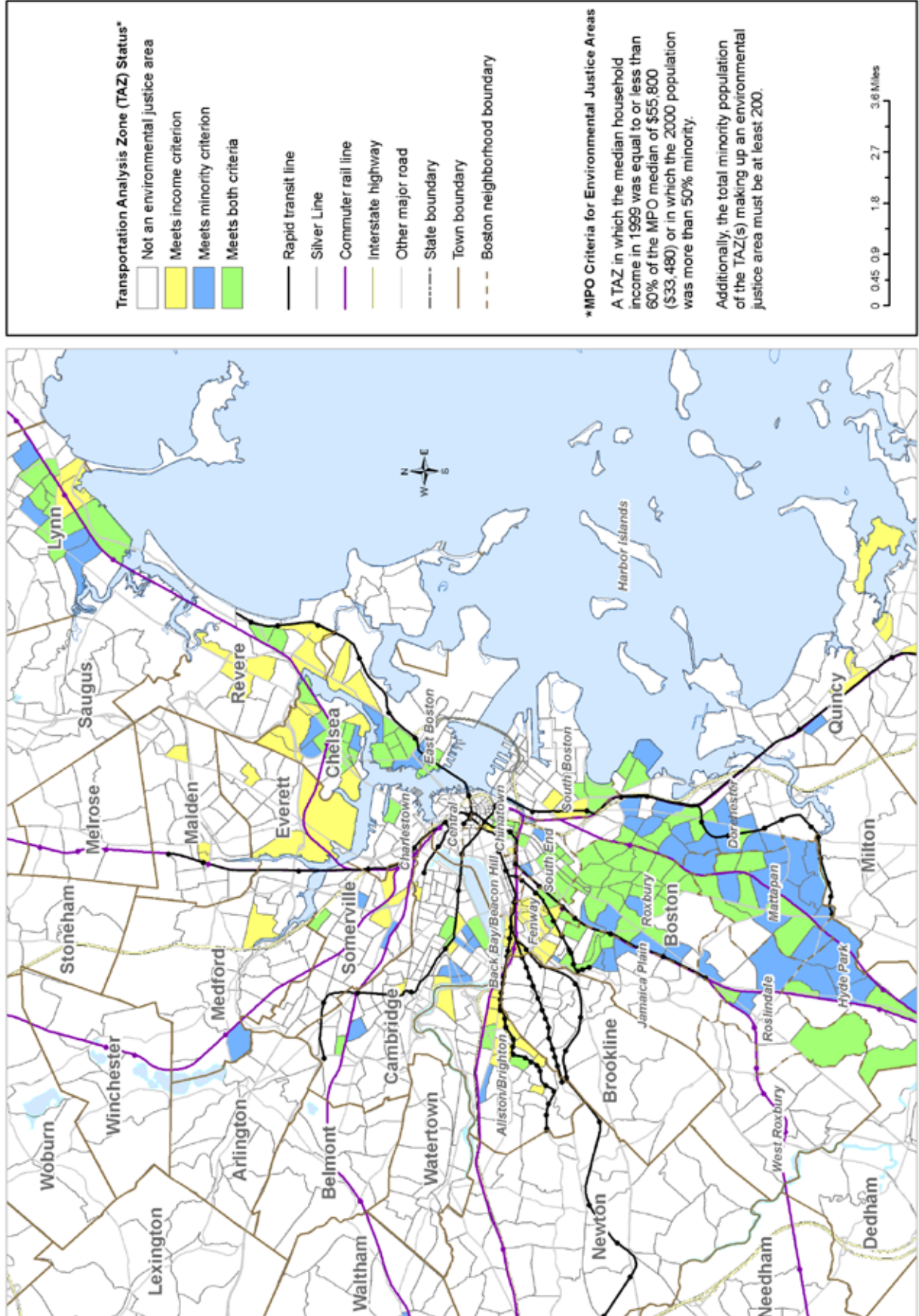


FIGURE 9-2
BOSTON REGION MPO URBAN CORE ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE AREAS



THE BOSTON REGION MPO'S REGIONAL EQUITY PROGRAM

The MPO has developed a regional equity program to identify transportation needs of minority and low-income populations and to provide awareness of opportunities for involvement in the planning process. This program focuses on direct outreach to social service organizations serving environmental justice areas in the region, including conducting and participating in organized forums. The Boston Region MPO's regional equity program is composed of three key elements: outreach, analysis, and integrating environmental justice into the planning process.

Outreach

The MPO takes a proactive, grassroots approach to identifying and articulating environmental justice issues in the region. Methods include gathering information on the transportation needs of minority and low-income populations for consideration in the development of studies and certification documents; identifying, sharing, and connecting new contacts and sources of information for the planning process; meeting new people interested in participating in the planning process; and serving as a conduit for ideas on improving transportation that can be relayed to other agencies.

In carrying out these methods, the MPO identifies social service and community contacts in the environmental justice areas involved in, and knowledgeable about, the transportation issues and needs of their areas. These contacts include social service organizations; community development corporations; regional employment boards; civic groups; business and labor organizations; transportation advocates; environmental groups; and environmental justice and civil rights groups. The MPO's process for working with these community organizations consists of gathering information, summarizing needs, and providing feedback once communication has begun.



Gathering Information

Gathering information about the transportation needs of minority and low-income populations is completed in one of three ways:

1. One-on-one interviews with community organizations are used to discuss transportation needs and burdens and facilitate participation. The MPO has learned that, in some cases, the people best positioned to speak about the transportation needs of environmental justice areas do not have the time and financial resources to travel to meetings in a central location or to participate in public forums. By visiting community representatives at their offices and facilitating one-on-one or small-group interviews, the MPO is able to obtain valuable information about the transportation needs of the area that inform the MPO during its transportation decision-making process. These discussions also provide opportunities to inform participants about the MPO and the metropolitan planning process.

2. Standardized surveys are also used to gather data for analysis and presentation to the MPO. Blank surveys are mailed to community contacts who are unable to schedule time for an interview.
3. The MPO staff also keeps track of forums and meetings planned by community organizations. When relevant, and as time permits, the staff attends these meetings to meet additional contacts, gather information, and provide input on questions specific to the MPO planning process as they arise.

Summarizing Needs

Summaries of the information gathered and copies of the surveys, maps, and any other notes and information are compiled and presented in briefing books for review by the MPO and are made available to contacts and interested parties in environmental justice areas. Prior to its inclusion in the briefing book and reports to the MPO, MPO staff interprets the needs identified by each community and classifies them as related to the Plan, TIP, Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP), service planning, or other planning processes.

Needs identified through the regional equity program include:

- Service improvements to existing transit, including more frequent service (shorter headways), better customer service, longer operating hours, on-time transfers, and an increase in destinations served. These comments were mainly for buses (including the LIFT in the Framingham area) and paratransit, but also for rapid transit (particularly the Green Line) and commuter rail (particularly the Fairmount Line).
- Updated, and more, amenities at transit stations and stops, including route signs, benches, schedules, and shelters.
- A reduction in traffic congestion, including truck volumes, and improvements in traffic flow on major roadways.



- Pedestrian and bicyclist improvements, including more paths, lanes, connections, crossing signs, racks on buses, and signage.
- Roadway and bridge improvements, including cleaning, repairing, and repaving.
- More bilingual information and signage, particularly at transit stops.
- Better parking enforcement.
- Improved accessibility at rapid transit and commuter rail stations.
- Additional commuter rail stations.
- Transportation to decentralized locations, including more reverse-commute options.
- A better balance between transit fares and level of service.

For a more detailed list of needs, with the MPO's follow-up actions, see Appendix E.

Providing Feedback to Community Organizations

The MPO provides feedback to community organizations involved in the MPO regional equity

process by providing a written summary, in draft form, of their discussions with MPO staff for their review, and by classifying the needs as related to the Plan, TIP, UPWP, service planning, or other entity. Communication is ongoing, as the MPO staff keeps community organizations updated with information. Notices of current and planned MPO activities (including MPO-sponsored meetings, open houses, workshops, or meetings sponsored by other agencies, if known) that are related to the community's needs are also sent to the organizations when relevant.

Analysis

The MPO performs a systemwide analysis on current conditions, the set of projects that are currently funded by the MPO, and the set of projects recommended in this Plan. The analysis focuses on mobility, accessibility, and emissions for communities with a high proportion of low-income and minority residents. Chapter 14 details the results of this analysis.

Integration with Planning Process

The MPO integrates environmental justice concerns into the planning process by encouraging and sharing input from its outreach efforts, by using environmental justice as a criterion in its planning documents, and by examining environmental justice issues in greater detail.

The MPO holds several open houses and workshops every year on various topics; these events include forums for discussing certification documents and UPWP studies. Environmental justice contacts are encouraged to attend and to provide input at each of these events. The MPO also holds periodic meetings that focus on environmental justice, and gives presentations on its regional equity program whenever requested by a community organization. Environmental justice contacts are notified of public review periods and are encouraged to provide input. MPO staff summarizes input from these events and distributes it to MPO members.

The potential impact of a proposed project in environmental justice areas is a criterion in the long-range transportation plan and TIP project ranking processes. The MPO staff gives projects that are estimated to benefit environmental justice areas positive ratings and projects that may burden these areas negative ratings. The MPO considers these ratings when deciding what projects should be listed in the Plan or TIP, and which should receive funding.

SUMMARY

The MPO is committed to attaining regional equity and environmental justice and will continue to seek the equitable distribution of benefits and burdens in the transportation system. This commitment will produce results through ongoing compliance with its own policies and consideration of environmental justice issues through its evaluations. The MPO will continue to expand its outreach to environmental justice areas and broaden its direct contacts with minority and low-income residents in these areas in order to maintain the flow of information, and to strengthen communication and its working relationships.

