**A Pilot Project – Special Protections for Transit Corridors:**

**A multi-issue response to today’s gentrification and inequality and unintended consequences of transit improvements in Boston and the region**

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June 11, 2015

Over the past few years, Action for Regional Equity (Action), along with many, many partners, have recognized how communities of color are being left out of the improving greater Boston economy and demanded an increased public focus on the inter-related issues of housing, good jobs, transit, and other issues that underlie equity and stabilize our communities. On the Move (OTM), a transit justice organization, also devoted to equity issues, began to focus on how transit affected other aspects of the community, particularly fueling gentrification. Together these two organizations decided to look at and address how neighborhood improvements were having adverse effects for the current residents, especially displacing people.

Our demand for **Special Protections for Transit Corridors**, especially for those corridors that link our communities of color to downtown, is an urgent response to the displacement in our neighborhoods. Our demand recognizes that improving transit in our neighborhoods has had the unintended consequence of speeding gentrification and exacerbating inequality. New transit stops are attracting new development, higher property values, and higher rents. Although these problems exist in all neighborhoods, transit corridors are experiencing a more rapid rate.

Transit improvements are important to our communities because they provide access and mobility and improve air quality, etc., and that Action and its partners have worked hard to make such projects happen, but that additional protections/steps are needed to ensure that current community members, especially people of color and low-moderate income residents, aren’t displaced and get to benefit from the improvements.

Although the negative consequences were unintended, they were certainly expected; so it is something we have been planning for. One of the ways we feel we can address this issue is to create special protections for residents and businesspeople in Transit Oriented Zones. We decided to choose a few transit corridors which we could use as pilot projects, the hope being, if they were successful, they would provide a template and a precedent for other TOD zone. We wanted areas where our members were already engaged, negative gentrification was already happening or imminent and where we were confident we could get support from local residents and stakeholders. The three pilot projects we chose are the **Green Line Extension, Fairmount Corridor and the proposed MBTA bus route 28X.**

We recognize that we need to put a new frame around everything we do: While the region and city look well off, that image masks deep divisions and lack of equity that are decades and more in the making.

What is our current reality?

* We are the fastest gentrifying city in the country. [[1]](#footnote-1)
* We have the 3rd worst income inequality in the country, and it is getting worse. [[2]](#footnote-2)
* We have massive and worsening wealth inequality, with white households having almost a quarter of a million in mean net worth in greater Boston, while US-born Black households have a median net worth of only $8.[[3]](#footnote-3)
* There are limited and uncertain returns to education in general with only about 40% of people with a college degree finding a living wage job and limited impact on the racial wealth gap.[[4]](#footnote-4)
* We are a highly segregated region, and at the same time, the historic communities of color are being disrupted and people being forced to relocate, weakening key social ties and creating more loss, both here and across the country.
* Our economy is producing huge numbers of bad jobs, with about a third of all jobs below what is needed to support a family and a restructured economy with many layers of contractors and sub-contractors, often controlled by private equity-owned brands with no local accountability.[[5]](#footnote-5)
* Most Black, Latino, Asian, and renting households in Boston cannot afford even what is viewed as “affordable” by many. Median income for Black, Latino, Asian, and renting households in Boston are all below $40,000 a year.[[6]](#footnote-6)

These are big problems created by a narrative that tells us it is our own fault: if you only worked harder, if you only were smarter, that it is up to you as an individual. And it tells us there isn’t enough money for all of us to advance. But neither is true.

We see that the underlying sources of these problems are rooted in the structural racism benefiting the wealthiest 1%. Since the 1930’s, the exclusion of both Black people and immigrants from rights to unionize, coverage by the social safety net such as social security[[7]](#footnote-7), and programs supporting home ownership, have left people of color, today, with little wealth and significantly lower income. This long term racialized history is matched by Boston’s historic disinvestment in the Roxbury-Dorchester-Mattapan corridor—making it even more imperative that we stop the transit-fueled displacement underway.

As we have come together to look for solutions, we have learned some lessons:

* Established tactics for expressing power and gaining equality do not work as well in today’s economy. Just two examples: union membership is at a historic low; HUD tenant organizing is facing massive federal disinvestment.
* Single issue solutions and solutions limited to single neighborhoods are not sufficient. Organizing in just Four Corners will not lead to systemic solutions. Housing demands that do not deal with income and job access leave a key response to displacement unused.

We know we need to:

* Build broad agreement with an equity narrative.
* Develop systemic, rather than single time solutions, including setting standards rather than negotiating over each individual building or development
* Develop multi-issue solutions rather than issue stovepipes that separate housing, good jobs, and transit.
* Develop a new leadership base skilled in both the policy issues and organizing, rather than rely on technical experts and lobbyists alone.

**A coordinated set of campaigns and initiatives**

**Special Transit Corridor Protections** is part of a coordinated set of campaigns and initiatives. The following are all underway led by overlapping sets of community organizations

* **Centering Racial Justice and Equity in Cities and Municipal Government:** Along with the City of Boston’s Office of Fair Housing and Equity, OTM and the Jamaica Plain Racial Justice and Equity Collaborative, Action is helping lead the planning for a **2016** **Regional Convening on Government and Racial Equity.**The conveningwill feature government, community organizations, and leaders from across the region and the country who have strategically adopted cutting edge tools and strategies that leverage the power of government to advance racial equity and increase success for all our communities.  Planning partners and Action hope to learn from cities across the country that have established Offices of Equity in local government which promote and champion policies that address persistent racial disparities in income, wealth, health, learning, and other life impacting conditions.
* **Good Jobs NOT Gentrification:** Action is a leading partner in the Boston Jobs Coalition and Regional Coalition for Good Casino Jobs, demanding that public land, subsidies and procurement result in good jobs and fair access and that no large company expect food stamps and public benefits for their employees to subsidize their bottom line. The Roxbury Strategic Master Plan Oversight Committee’s recent historic commitment to Good Jobs Standards for all future development kicks off our city-wide campaign.
* **Community-based enforcement of labor standards**: While improved job standards have been won here and across the country, it is widely recognized that these standards are not enforced, particularly in Black and immigrant communities. Action has started a new project, partnering with SEIU 32BJ, the union representing janitors, and their employers, together with 6 base-building community organizations in communities of color (La Comunidad, Chelsea Collaborative, Brazilian Immigrant Center, Boston Workers Alliance, Black Workers Economic Justice Institute (BEJI), and Greater Four Corners Action Coalition (GFCAC)) to establish a coordinated approach to understanding the patterns of workplace abuses and failures to enforce labor standards and to test new enforcement models. Innovative new technology is supporting this initiative. All of these community organizations are working together in the Good Jobs campaigns.
* **Housing in a time of income inequality and displacement:** Action members—City Life/Vida Urbana, Boston Tenant Coalition, GFCAC, Fair Housing Center of Greater Boston, and Somerville Community Corporation—are leading players in the current campaigns in Boston and beyond for Just Cause Evictions, increasing inclusionary zoning requirements, protecting truly affordable housing through many means including Land Trusts and purchasing of occupied homes, and saving HUD expiring use housing.
* **Transit justice for communities of color**: On The Move has been leading the fight for just transit in Boston for decades—with a current focus on the U-and Youth-passes, fair fares and the fight for the Fairmount Line along with Greater Four Corners Action Coalition in Dorchester. OTM is developing a 2015-2016 campaign in the City of Boston around transportation zoning reform in Dorchester, Roxbury, and Mattapan, with a focus on parking reform, heath equity and anti-displacement in and around new transit-oriented development (TOD) corridors. Members of OTM include the following organizations: Action for Regional Equity, Alternatives for Community & Environment/T Riders Union, Arborway Committee, Bikes Not Bombs, Greater Four Corners Action Coalition, MASSPIRG Education Fund, Livable Streets Alliance, the Sierra Club and the Washington Street Corridor Coalition.
* **Building a new shared narrative and developing new leaders and a stronger base in communities of color:** Action has developed two leadership development tools that have now been used with over 500 community activists and leaders. The Equity Q & A provides a question-based format for residents to filter information through their own lived experience to make sense of the economy and how it is impacting them, their families, and whole communities. We are now working with City Life, GFCAC, and BEJI to train their leaders to use the tool in their organizations. I-LEAD, created in partnership with the MA Association of Community Development Corporations (MACDC) and Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC), provides economic development training for community residents.

**Special Transit Corridor Protections Now!**

Along with long term corrections to reverse today’s inequality, we need immediate short-term interventions to halt the unintended consequences of improved transit. These higher standards with immediate impact in key Transit Corridors can also kick start other campaigns in other areas where displacement is an issue.

Transit corridors are key. There are five reasons transit plays a central role at this dynamic moment—for greater equity or for increasing inequality.

1. Transit has a functional impact: good transit allows our community residents to stay in the communities they built, supported by the social interactions of their neighborhoods and still reach the jobs clustered downtown and in other key job centers like the medical area. Our communities create a safety net for our residents and maintaining them is necessary public policy. Once displaced, poor people who are generally people of color, are less likely to be able to get to better paying jobs.
2. Greenways and bike paths along transit corridors create access to other neighborhoods and downtown, reducing segregation while allowing residents to maintain their communities.
3. Massive tax-payer subsidies make requiring higher public outcomes for both affordable housing, job access and job quality more reasonable. The profit or benefit from the public investment should not go just to private parties.
4. Our own work and organizing led to the creation of the transit—our sweat equity earned our communities the right to remain in their own neighborhoods.
5. The combination of the geography of racially-based red-lining and land-takings in Boston with vacant land created through disinvestment and the Fairmount Corridor provides a perfect storm for rapid displacement. This racial history is yet another reason why we must resist the displacement already in progress.

**Special Protections for Transit Corridors**

We see standards for housing, employment, transit, health, and potentially business development needed. All new standards and programs are intended to allow those currently living in the transit corridor to remain and to stabilize current communities. This is an urgent intervention, not a complete long-term program.

Housing:

* Special just cause eviction standards limiting speculative profit taking by corporate landlords and requiring mediation.
* Targeting use of additional Inclusionary Development Program (IDP) funds and linkage funding to the corridor.
* A real estate transfer tax in the corridor which will slow predatory sales and flipping.
* Tax breaks and other abatements to property owners who keep their rents affordable.
* Development of a capital pool for both Land Trusts and non-profit organizations purchasing of occupied homes in the corridor.
* Immediate protections of HUD tenants from displacement.

Transit:

* Revise/overhaul city zoning code to prioritize & increase access to biking, walking & transit.
* Develop platform around transit equity policy tied to parking reform for housing development around critical transit corridors in Boston. (i.e. replace parking lots with transit passes as a way to help lower housing costs).
* Work with Community Health Centers on developing Social Determinants of Health and Racial Equity Impact Analysis (REIA) in relationship to Public Transportation.
* Develop Transit Equity Impact Statement for all new development-with a focus on the cost-impact of transportation/transit amenities and their effect on displacement, health impacts, and cultural history of neighborhoods dependent on accessible and affordable transit.
* Synch busses with trains and ensure early morning and late night access to public transit to increase opportunities for work, healthcare and education.

Good jobs:

* Good Jobs Standards already established for the Dudley Sq. Master Plan parcels applied to all new development with city, state, federal or quasi-public land, subsidies, or procurement.
* Access to these jobs—both construction and permanent—are targeted to local residents first, by implementing “first source” hiring programs funded by the city to be run by local community organizations
* Increased access to downtown/medical area jobs is created for Corridor residents through new requirements for sourcing new hiring by publicly subsidized and large employers through city-funded “first source” hiring by the same community organizations working on local hiring.  Station-area or Corridor hiring access to downtown jobs should become a norm for major employers.
* New small business support directed to local residents for local businesses.
* Plan industrial/entrepreneurial zones along the corridor, with “first source” hirings from communities along the corridor.

Stopping the displacement requires many different kinds of intervention that build on the work already underway. Winning **Special Protections for Transit Corridors** requires:

* A large pool of committed local leaders with the time to both build the bridges to work together and work with all the stakeholders, public and private, who are involved
* Residents and experts working together to develop key policies
* Community activists and residents mobilized to join in the fight for equitable, community stabilization.

1. Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland; 2014 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Brookings Institution; “Some cities are still more unequal than others—an update”, Alan Berube, Natalie Holmes, March 17, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. “The Color of Wealth in Boston”, Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. “The Racial Wealth Gap: Why Policy Matters”, Laura Sullivan,Tatjana Meschede, Lars Dietrich, Thomas Shapiro, Amy Traub, Catherine Ruetschlin, Tamara Draut; IASP, Demos; 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The Fissured Workplace, David Weil, 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Michael E. Stone, Boston Tenant Coalition [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. “Echoes of Slavery: Recognizing the Racist Origins of the Agricultural and Domestic Exclusion from the National Labor Relations Act”, Juan F. Perea, Loyola University of Chicago, 2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)