



Source: Youth Action EJ

Democratizing Planning

How Communities Are Raising Their Voices
to Transform the I-710 Corridor Project

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BUILDING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

About This Series

A primary tenet of the **Building Healthy Communities** initiative is that place matters, i.e. where one lives determines how one fares in health, safety and well-being. The 14 communities that are a part of Building Healthy Communities have long histories dealing with policies that have institutionalized class, race and ethnic disparities in education, health and human services, and local government planning decisions. “Health Happens Here” is both a guiding principle and a rallying cry for BHC sites addressing these entrenched disparities.

In this case study series, we explore successes, opportunities, challenges and transitions experienced “in place” as communities endeavor to create and sustain healthy communities for children and families

Acknowledgments

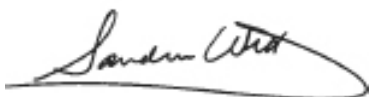
Our gratitude goes to the community leaders and members of the Coalition for Environmental Health and Justice (CEHAJ) for their valuable insights on community organizing, leadership, partnership, and the critical importance of community voice in effective public planning. We wish to thank Martha M. Matsuoka, lead author, of the Urban and Environmental Policy Institute at Occidental College for her work on this case study and TCE Program Manager, Jennifer Chheang, for her strategic support of the effort.



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BUILDING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

Background

Building Healthy Communities (BHC) is a 10-year, \$1 billion program of The California Endowment (TCE). Fourteen communities across the state are working to create places where children are healthy, safe and ready to learn. BHC is focused on prevention and strategies aimed at changing community institutions, policies and systems. In BHC, a focus on systems change requires work across sectors with multiple stakeholders. Through this cross-sector collaboration and with youth and resident leadership, BHC sites seek to improve neighborhood safety, unhealthy environmental conditions, access to healthy foods, education, housing, employment opportunities and more.

All BHC sites began with a planning process. To determine health priorities, each site selected from 10 pre-determined outcomes. From this an implementation plan was created that included targeted strategies to change four systems that impact the wellbeing of children, youth and families: health, human services, education, and community environments. Each site formed a “Hub” to serve as the central table through which implementation efforts would be coordinated. Local leadership worked with TCE Program Managers who were embedded in each site to assist with rolling out the process and enabling the connection with local systems leaders and policy makers. Community campaigns have since been organized under the umbrella of Neighborhoods, Schools and Prevention.

Since 2010, BHC sites have experienced a number of important successes. However, every initiative exists in a dynamic environment and comes with structures and expectations that can be challenging for communities, and BHC is no different. BHC finds its roots in large scale, complex, community change initiatives, so any narrative has to acknowledge that complexity and include the many perspectives that reflect it. The multiple perspectives in these case studies are those of institutional leaders, residents, organizers, facilitators and TCE staff.

Read more about Building Healthy Communities at www.calendow.org.

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INTRODUCTION

On January 30, 2014, more than 120 people crowded into the cramped public hearing room of the Project Committee meeting for the I-170 expansion project. In a meeting venue with capacity for 90 people, community organizations from East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice, Communities for a Better Environment, and other members of the Coalition for Environmental Health and Justice, packed the room with community members to advocate for adoption of a community alternative to the proposed \$6 billion expansion of the I-710 Freeway, which runs from downtown Los Angeles to the Ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles. If constructed, this would be one of the largest public works projects in the U.S.

Speaker after speaker stood before the Project Committee giving testimony about the negative health and community impacts of the project on their families and neighborhoods—asthma, missed days of school, trips to the hospital, families dying of cancer and other illnesses related to air pollution, and the daily noise and disruptions due to trucks in their neighborhoods. But residents were also there to present a solution, a community developed alternative that would ensure that construction of the freeway would protect, not harm, community health and facilitate improvements in neighborhoods that for 30 years have born the burden of the existing freeway, as well as the cumulative impacts of the LA and Long Beach ports, oil refineries, and other polluting industrial uses.

“ It was a major accomplishment to shift the debate and the priorities for the project...Public health and community are now being considered as the project moves forward. But it will take much more organizing to make sure the project delivers real community and health benefits. ”

Angelo Logan, *East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice*

Residents, public health scientists and advocates, environmentalists, and local elected officials stepped to the microphone to encourage the Project Committee to vote to include Community Alternative 7 (CA7) as part of the Draft Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Study (DEIR/EIS) for the project. Community organizers were guardedly optimistic—after all it had taken 10 years of organizing and advocacy to get to this point where health and

community impact were being acknowledged and debated in the decision-making about the I-710 expansion project.

Finally, the majority of the 15-member Project Committee (the advisory board for the I-710 expansion project) voted unanimously to include CA7 in the Draft EIR/EIS review. The vote was a tremendous win for community residents, local community groups, churches, environmental and health advocates, transit riders, and others concerned with how changes in the freeway would impact their homes and communities. For a decade, these residents had raised concerns about losing their homes, emissions, increasing numbers of trucks in neighborhoods, noise, and uncertainty about whether their voices would be taken into consideration in the planning, construction, and operation of the freeway. The vote to consider CA7 in the environmental review process for the I-710 freeway was a hard fought campaign that provides critical lessons on how to ensure that major infrastructure projects consider the health of residents as just as valid as the needs of trucks

INTRODUCTION

and industry. Not only does CA7 reflect a major organizing win, it represents an alternative vision of how goods movement projects, like the I-710 Corridor Project, can protect community health, create jobs, improve quality of life, improve air quality, and effectively and safely plan for the region’s goods movement growth.

Community organizers soon discovered, however, that the agencies were incorporating elements of CA7 into other alternatives rather than evaluating it as a whole. Organizers ramped up their organizing and mobilized to bring CA7 before the Planning Committee again, this time to pressure the Committee vote to adopt CA7 in its entirety as one of the alternatives in the recirculated DEIR/EIS. On July 30, 2014, six months after its initial vote, the Project Committee voted 11-5 sending a clear message to the agencies to treat CA7 as a stand-alone alternative to be considered in the environmental review process. The vote affirmed the community health agenda established by the decade long campaign, reinforced the technical legitimacy of CA7, and most importantly, demonstrated that community voices had the power to push transportation agencies to prioritize community health in transportation planning and decision-making.

“ The July vote was huge for us. We’ve always been pushing to have CA7 in its entirety in the analysis. In the beginning, Caltrans was pushing to move forward with alternatives 5C and 7 which was CA7 but without the community benefits. They were arguing that the community benefits are mitigations—this is backwards. This is a holistic project; we want to prevent problems not create and then address them. Now that CA7 will be considered as an alternative in its entirety, we have the opportunity to ensure that our community agenda can be achieved by the project. ”

Angelo Logan, *East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice*



Members of CEHAJ before the Project Committee. July 2014

Source: Youth Action EJ

The I-710 campaign to ensure health and community benefits in the I-710 freeway corridor project is far from over. Community groups and their allies advocating for health and protections from the project continue to face political, bureaucratic, and technical challenges in tackling a complex infrastructure project like the I-710. Likewise, throughout the country, port cities are looking to expand their infrastructure to accommodate ever larger ships and remain competitive. The experience and lessons to date on the I-710 project provide a series of learnings on how to democratize the planning process and leverage transportation investments for community health.

BACKGROUND

Communities in the Shadow of a Freeway

Originally known as the Los Angeles River Freeway, the Long Beach Freeway or I-710 has become a major freeway artery for Southern California and a major economic artery for the nation.¹ Although significantly smaller when it was first established in the 1950s, the I-710 was constructed to facilitate the flow of goods from Los Angeles' then-burgeoning manufacturing sector to the ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles. Today the freeway is made up of 8 lanes that provide trucks a direct connector from the ports to rail yards in Commerce and Vernon—as well as connecting to the 60 and 10 freeways for access to the San Bernardino and Colton rail yards.

With more than 43% of all U.S. imports coming through the combined ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles, the I-710 represents a key aspect of the global trade system and supply chain.



1953 photo: courtesy of Southern California Auto Club (via KCET website)

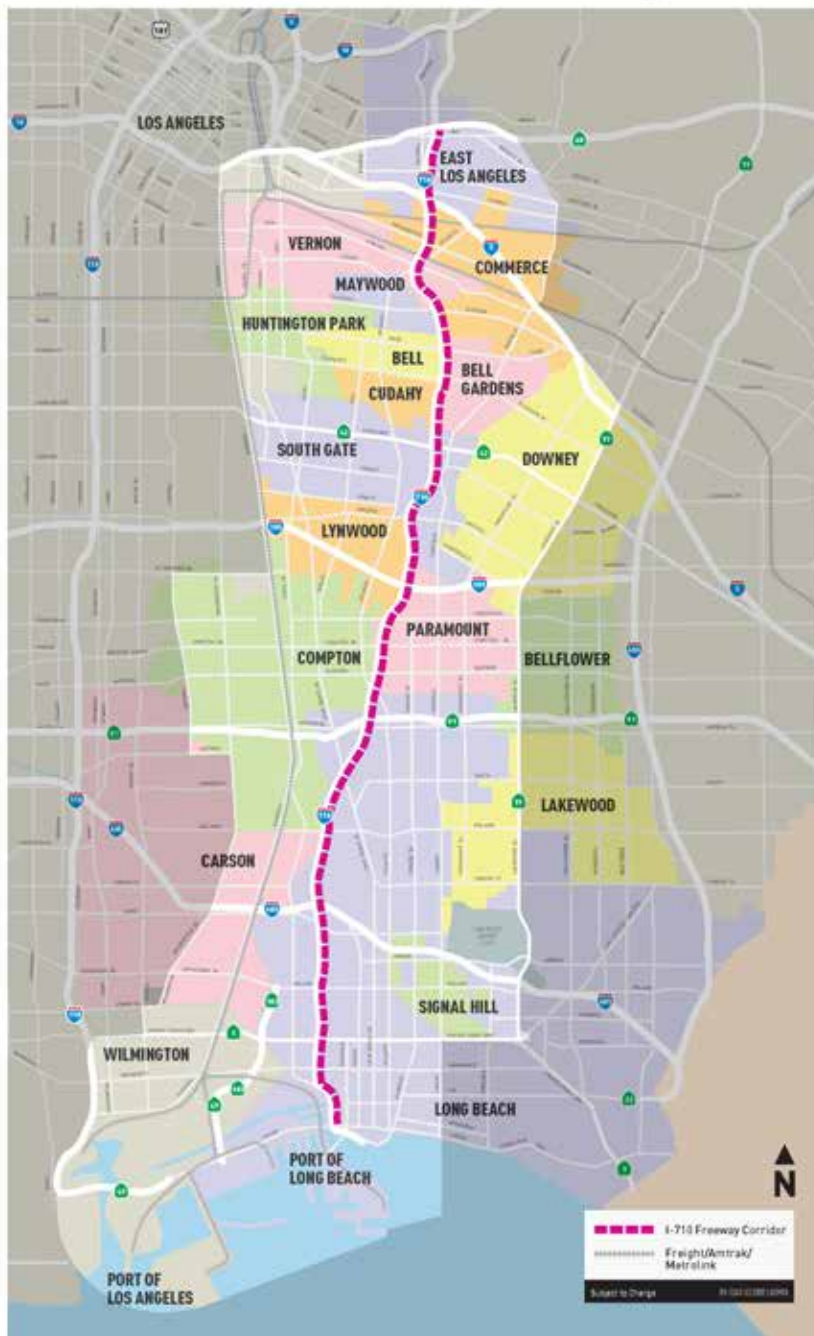


Trucks clog up the 710 at Washington Boulevard
Photo: Gilbert Estrada

Source: <http://www.kcet.org/socal/departures/710-corridor/history-of-the-710-freeway.html>

BACKGROUND

In 2000, the LA County Metropolitan Transportation Agency (Metro), Gateway Cities Council of Governments (GCCOG), the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), and the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) initiated a collaborative effort to study possible improvements to the I-710 Corridor between downtown and the ports of LA and Long Beach. The goal of the Major Corridor Study was to identify a preferred strategy for improvement of the freeway to address the safety, congestion, and environmental problems of its aging infrastructure.² Arguing that growth at the ports of LA and Long Beach would increase truck traffic and congestion, Caltrans proposed alternatives that included a range of possible changes: widening the corridor by 6 additional lanes from 8 lanes to 14 lanes, HOV lanes, dedicated truck lanes, and elevated rail system. Ultimately, Caltrans and Metro proposed a set of alternatives that expanded the freeway and included options for designated truck lanes, a zero emissions truck corridor, and a truck toll road.



Project Map

Source: <http://www.gatewaycog.org/projects/i-710-corridor/>

BACKGROUND

As local residents began to hear about the proposals for possible expansion of the I-710, they were increasingly surprised to learn about proposals to expand the freeway and concerned about the possible demolition of their homes and neighborhoods, pollution from increased numbers of cars and trucks, and additional negative impacts on community quality of life resulting from living in close proximity to the freeway.

The Liberty Hill Foundation in partnership with USC's School of Medicine environmental health outreach program convened an Environmental Justice Institute in 2003 that provided information and training for residents and organizations to learn and strategize about I-710 expansion. As residents became more aware of the expansion proposal, numbers of prominent stories began to appear in the LA Times and Long Beach Press Telegram.



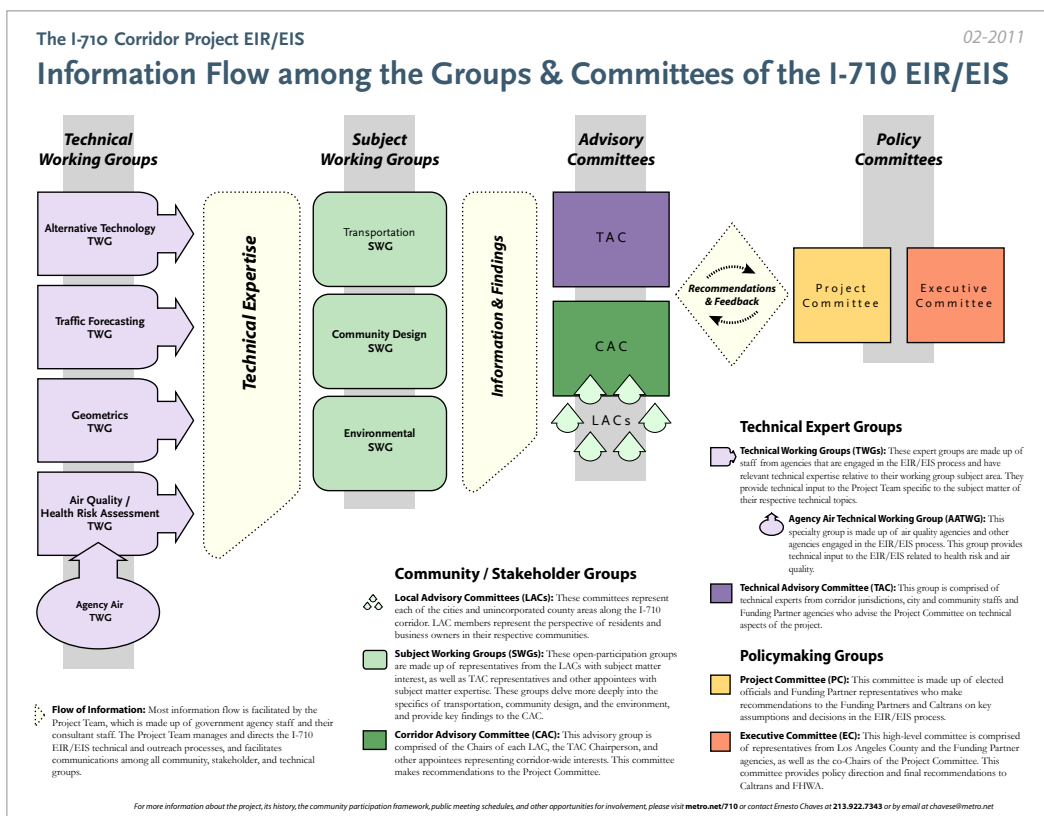
**Environmental Justice
Institute session**
Source: Andrea Hricko

The idea that one could improve the freeway by expanding it with extra lanes (closer to homes and schools) was met with strong concerns by local public health and environmental advocates such as the Long Beach Alliance for Children with Asthma, Coalition for a Safe Environment, and East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice, along with the University of Southern California's School of Medicine's environmental health outreach program, the Coalition for Clean Air, and Natural Resources Defense Council. Some of these groups were already organizing to raise awareness of the negative impact of port growth on the health and environment of low-income communities of color living near the Ports of LA and Long Beach and along the freight transportation corridors, such as the I-710. Key issues included health risks associated with diesel emissions (at the time the two ports generated 25% of all diesel emissions in the region), as well as noise pollution and the impact of trucks and port operations on quality of life in communities living near the ports. For community groups and health and environmental advocates, engaging in the debates over the I-710 were an extension of their organizing related to ports, freight transportation, and the goods movement system in the region.

THE PROJECT AND THE PUBLIC

In response to growing community concerns and pressure by community organizing groups and health advocates about the lack of community participation, Caltrans and Metro expanded their public participation strategy in 2003 and established community advisory committees to give local governments and residents opportunities for greater input into the Major Corridor Study. Yet as they began planning for the environmental review process for the project alternatives, the agencies recognized that a more robust and comprehensive framework was needed to elicit and accommodate public input from the 15 cities and three unincorporated communities located along the I-710 corridor, as well as regional interests (i.e. environmental, health, labor, and transportation advocates).

The anger from residents, community groups and public health advocates caused the process to come to a halt until the two agencies adopted a Public Participation Framework that established Local Advisory Committees in impacted local jurisdictions made up of appointments from city councils/County supervisors; three Subject Working Groups to focus on issues of the environment, transportation, and community design/economics; and a Corridor Advisory Committee (comprised of the Chairs of each Local Advisory Committee, and other appointees representing corridor-wide interests). The Corridor Advisory Committee, in turn, makes recommendations to the Project Committee comprised of elected officials and funding agency representatives. The Project Committee reports to the Executive Committee (made up of agency representatives) who then report to the project lead, Caltrans. The chart below shows the “new” participation framework.



Participation Flow Chart
 SOURCE: http://media.metro.net/projects_studies/I710/images/community_participation_information_flow.pdf

THE PROJECT AND THE PUBLIC

The goal of the structure was to allow for maximum participation by affected communities along the I-710 Corridor. For Caltrans, the participation framework represented an innovative and ambitious effort to engage residents and stakeholders in the 15 cities and three unincorporated communities, some of the most densely populated communities of color in the country including East L.A., Vernon, Maywood, Commerce, Paramount, Huntington Park, Bell Gardens, Lynwood, Compton, Carson, Los Angeles, and Long Beach. Neighborhood demographic analysis by the Program for Environmental and Regional Equity at USC shows that neighborhoods closest to the corridor (2000 feet or closer), are 92% Latino and 21% live in poverty. Further, the corridor communities are also relatively young; 34% were 17 or younger in 2010 compared to 25% for LA County.³



Source: Youth Action EJ

**FORGING AND WINNING A
COMMUNITY-BASED STRATEGY**

For community-based organizations and health and environmental advocates, participation in the formal process required a well-thought out strategy that focused on building an expansive and strong base of residents and workers directly impacted by the freeway project, as well as engaging advocacy and academic partners. Earlier health and community organizing related to the stationary and mobile source pollution from ports, refineries, and other industrial impacts on harbor neighborhoods and along truck routes in the region provided important infrastructure and resources for groups to begin organizing around the I-710 project.

Community-based health, environmental, and environmental justice organizations—Communities for a Better Environment (working in Wilmington and Southeast LA), East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice (working in Commerce and Long Beach), Long Beach Alliance for Children with Asthma (working in Long Beach)—along with allies the Natural Resources Defense Council, Coalition for Clean Air, Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles (Long Beach office), and Physicians for Social Responsibility—LA—established the Coalition for Environmental Health and Justice (CEHAJ), a coalition explicitly focused on advancing demands for health, clean air, and improved quality of life along the I-710 corridor.

Many of these groups had also been working together on health, environmental and economic justice issues related to air quality at the port of Los Angeles and Long Beach through the Port Working Group of the Green LA Coalition, a citywide coalition of environmental and environmental justice groups, the community-academic collaborative called THE Impact Project, and the Coalition for Clean and Safe Ports’ Clean Trucks Campaign, the successful campaign that developed the City’s Clean Trucks Program. As the I-710 campaign continued, groups also drew on resources and institutional capacity provided by the California Endowment’s Building Healthy Communities initiative in Long Beach and, in particular, the constituency built by its Environmental Health Working Group.

Groups within CEHAJ took the leadership to forge and advance the campaign that involved reframing the debate, proposing a community-based alternative, and mobilizing a base of support to push the agencies to make more inclusive decisions based on community perspectives and expertise.

One of their first challenges was reframing the debate.

The Coalition for Environmental Health and Justice (CEHAJ) is comprised of:

- Coalition for Clean Air
- Communities for a Better Environment
- East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice
- Earthjustice
- Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles
- Natural Resources Defense Council
- Long Beach Alliance for Children with Asthma
- Physicians for Social Responsibility—Los Angeles

“ When Caltrans and Metro began the Major Corridor Study, they called it the I-710 Improvement Project. From our perspective it wasn’t improvement, it was making it worse. We had to reframe the debate so that we were not organizing against ‘improvement’ so we identified the areas that we thought needed to be improved. ”

Angelo Logan, *East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice*

FORGING AND WINNING A COMMUNITY-BASED STRATEGY

One of the primary areas for improvement was addressing the negative health impacts on the corridor communities. Therefore, the first order of business became successful advocacy for a health impact assessment (HIA) to be considered as part of the EIR/EIS for the project. As an important public engagement and decision support tool, the HIA comprehensively addressed the potential health impacts of the project and provided recommendations to improve health outcomes associated with the various proposals.

What is an HIA?

Health Impact Assessment (HIA) is formally defined by the National Research Council as, “A combination of procedures, methods, and tools that systematically judges the potential, and sometimes unintended, effects of a policy, plan, or project on the health of a population and the distribution of those effects within the population. HIA identifies appropriate actions to manage those effects.”

Through reports and communications, HIA seeks to:

- Make a judgment about how a proposed project, plan, or policy will affect health
- Highlight disparities (or differences) in health between groups of people
- Provide recommendations to improve decisions
- Raise awareness among decision makers and the public
- Clearly state health effects

Through its process, HIA aims to:

- Promote engaged and empowered communities
- Recognize lived experiences in decision-making
- Build relationships and collaborations
- Improve evidence
- Improve transparency in decision making

*See more at: <http://www.humanimpact.org/new-to-hia/faq/#whatisanhia>

Secondly, through the process of advocating for health to be a consideration in evaluating the EIR/EIS alternatives, CEHAJ and its supporters recognized the need to develop their own community alternative, Community Alternative 7 or CA7.⁴ Instead of widening the freeway to relieve congestion as suggested in the existing alternatives, advocates instead envisioned the development of a public transit system, pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, and improvements to the Los Angeles River.

“When the draft EIR came out, we realized that there wasn’t a real intent to make any improvements and include the community perspective in the long drawn out process so we decided to come up with our own alternative.”

Angelo Logan
East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice

Advocates organized their own communities, as well as others along the corridor to develop a vision representative of communities along the corridor. The framing was key. Instead of engaging in an agency-directed process, groups were organizing across communities and cities to define a broader regional agenda for their neighborhoods and identifying ways that the freeway improvements would address their concerns and also contribute to community development without the negative

impact of the freeway. The process had two goals: 1) protecting community health in an already overburdened part of the Los Angeles metro region; and, 2) proposing an alternative that would perform better environmentally than existing alternatives, while achieving traffic safety, enhancing goods movement, and reducing congestion.

FORGING AND WINNING A COMMUNITY-BASED STRATEGY

It was an important strategy that recognized the need to secure community benefits from the corridor project while building connections and relationships among the residents living in the 15 cities along the Corridor.

“ We came together to envision what is possible, to do community workshops. Our [resident] A-team members were able to see other people from along the corridor who shared the same goals. It made everyone realize we are not the only ones concerned about the freeway and our health. ”

Jessica Tovar, *Long Beach Alliance for Children with Asthma*

The result was CA7, developed by members of CEHAJ and their allies as a holistic I-710 corridor improvement project that meets the needs of residents while accommodating projected truck traffic along the corridor. CA 7 contains seven key elements:

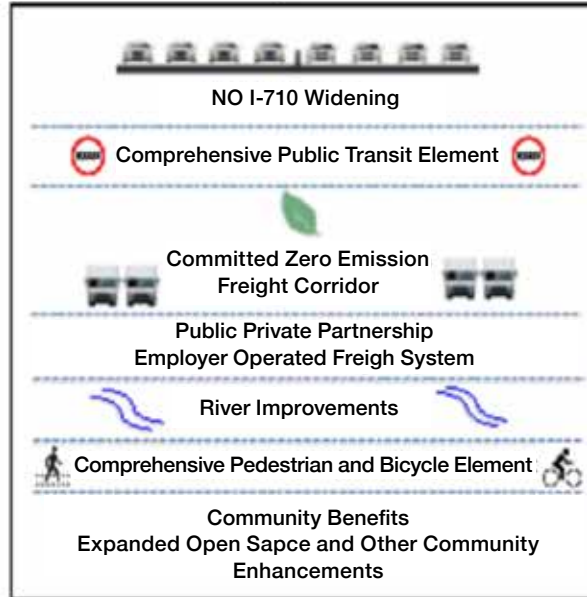
- **No widening of the general-purpose lanes.** More lanes leads to more cars, resulting in more traffic and pollution.
- **A comprehensive public transit element.** The potential to expand public transit would reduce individual car use, reducing congestion and increasing the quality of life for corridor communities.
- **Mandatory Zero-Emission Corridor (ZEC).** The highway expansion project will increase truck travel on the corridor. Zero-emission technology is available and CA7 mandates the use of a zero-emission freight system.
- **Public Private Partnership (PPP) Operator of the ZEC.** In order to create accountability and the assurance that zero-emission means zero-emission, the PPP is designed to ensure this happens.
- **River Improvements.** This I-710 Corridor Project will have significant impacts on the Los Angeles River. CA7 ensures river improvements along a 20-mile stretch, such as green belt, open space and trail developments.
- **Comprehensive Pedestrian and Bicycle Element.** Pedestrian and bicyclist safety needs are prioritized, especially when trucks pass through community streets.
- **Community Benefits.** A project estimated to be over \$6 billion dollars should offer benefits to the local residents. These included targeted hiring measures and training programs to benefit low-income residents of the impacted corridor communities.

FORGING AND WINNING A COMMUNITY-BASED STRATEGY

Construction Community Alternative 7



Community Alternative 7



CA7—Diagram of elements

Source: CEHAJ

Coming up with a community-based alternative for inclusion in the DEIR/EIS process was an important strategy for engaging community in the project. Rather than remain as simply respondents in the I-710 public participation process, CEHAJ groups and their members began discussing the project’s impacts and the future “in our own terms” and developing an alternative that would represent community perspectives, knowledge, and vision for the construction and operation of the freeway. Jennifer Chheang, Program Manager at The California Endowment called the effort, “extremely strategic.” “Pulling together CA7 was huge. It rallied people around a project and pulled people together across issues—health, the LA river, housing, local hiring, and public transit. The alternative articulated our vision for communities in Long Beach and southeast LA. It definitely rallied people because there’s something for everyone in it. “

Developing and proposing the solution was not enough, however. The CEHAJ coalition had to present technical arguments that critiqued the proposed alternatives formulated by Caltrans staff and provide the technical arguments and specifications to support their community alternative. In addition to justifying the technical aspects of their own CA7, CEHAJ also had to provide critiques on the other alternatives to demonstrate how the other proposals ignored neighborhood level conditions and needs.

FORGING AND WINNING A COMMUNITY-BASED STRATEGY

Tackling the 8,000-page DEIR/EIS document in a 90-day timeframe required the groups to divide up the sections and begin the process of careful and technical review. Pooling their limited resources (only two groups of the coalition were funded to work on the I-710) and with additional support from The California Endowment, CEHAJ hired consultants to review and provide technical analysis on the DEIR/EIS seven elements:

1. Transportation and Air Quality
2. Pedestrian and Bicycle element
3. Water Quality and Stormwater Runoff, including recommendations for Construction Site Stormwater Control Measures
4. Noise and Vibration
5. Analysis of Greenhouse Gas Emission Estimates
6. Demographic Analysis of Neighborhoods near the 710 Freeway
7. Analysis of the Selection Process

In addition, CEHAJ members analyzed reports and planning documents necessary to develop and advocate for CA7. These included:

1. California Department of Transportation, “Complete Intersections: A Guide to Reconstructing Intersections and Interchanges for Bicycles and Pedestrians,” 2010
2. Long Beach River Plan, Design Concept
3. Community Livability Plan for the I-710 Corridor Neighborhoods
4. I-710 Corridor Project Draft EIR/EIS, Preliminary Peer Review Findings, City of Commerce (August 21, 2012)
5. Dr. Robert L. Russell, “Performance Evaluation of Air Filtration Devices, Final Report”
6. South Coast Air Quality Management District: “Pilot Study of High Performance Air Filtration for Classrooms Applications, Final Report”
7. Highway Safety Research Center: “How to Develop a Pedestrian Safety Action Plan, “March 2009

In a few short weeks, CEHAJ reviewed the consultant reports and submitted their own 832-page set of comments responding to the arguments and proposals in the DEIR/EIS in late September 2012. Once submitted, CEHAJ and its supporters began its strategy to ensure that their alternative would be considered in the review process. Groups were concerned that project staff would review separate pieces of CA7 without considering the alternative in its entirety and turned to

FORGING AND WINNING A COMMUNITY-BASED STRATEGY

local and state elected officials and commissioners along the corridor to increase transparency and accountability over I-710 decision-making. Building on the work done in the cities where organizers had a strong resident leadership base, e.g. Commerce, Long Beach, and Huntington Park, organizers began reaching out to city officials in other corridor cities such as Bell, Bell Gardens, and South Gate. The strategy recognized the need to educate, organize, and empower elected officials and decision makers from the small cities located along the corridor to become advocates for health and to push Caltrans staff to consider CA7.

Organizers built a relationship with State Senator Ricardo Lara, who represents the corridor cities along the I-710. Through this relationship, Lara authored a bill, SB 811, to require Caltrans to include and analyze CA7 as part of the I-710 Corridor Project. In Senator Lara, CEHAJ found a strong advocate who pushed the bill successfully through the Senate and the Assembly. Lara noted: “[*With CA7*] communities along the I-710 freeway have a meaningful mechanism to provide input about mitigation and local benefits, appropriate freight impacts, advance sustainability and protect public health.”⁵



Source: East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice

**FORGING AND WINNING A
COMMUNITY-BASED STRATEGY**

As the bill made its way to the Governor’s desk, community organizers continued to mobilize residents and expand their coalition around a longer term vision of health and sustainable communities and continued to pressure Caltrans to formally adopt inclusion of CA7 in the recirculated DEIR/EIS. Although the bill passed through the Assembly, the Governor did not sign the bill leaving the decision to Caltrans and the regional process of decision-making staff had designed.

Even without the legislative win, groups embraced the strategy. *“The conversations with elected officials were needed,”* states Angelo Logan. *“They make local electeds more accountable and people we organize recognize that they can influence the way business happens in their neighborhoods and that their voices—and their lives—matter.”*

Also, to keep resident engagement and momentum up, organizers and their supporters organized an event, “On Our Own Terms,” in January 2013 with the goal of giving back power to the people and providing a way for them to hear about the project outside the formal public participation process. The event highlighted the importance of engaging residents even during long periods of time when Caltrans and Metro were focused on internal review of documents. By now, the base of engaged community members and community health advocates included new constituents from a broader set of corridor cities, as well as a more engaged base of environmental health advocates and leaders through the Environmental Working Group of Building Healthy Communities, Long Beach.

ON OUR OWN TERMS!
Community Festival

Date: Saturday, January 26th
Time: 4pm-6pm
Location: The Neighborhood Church
807 Pacific Ave.
Long Beach, CA

HEALTH IS WEALTH

The California Endowment is a private, statewide health foundation with a mission to build a stronger state by expanding access to affordable, quality health care in underserved communities and improving the overall health of all Californians.

health happens here
By Organizing

For More Info: 323.263.2113
eycej.org | facebook.com/eycej

East Yard

Source: East Yard Communities for EJ

TAKING A PULSE OF THE PROCESS

Lessons for transforming transportation projects for healthy communities

As Metro and Caltrans prepare to recirculate the DEIS/DEIR (technically known as the Recirculated DEIR/Supplemental DEIS (RDEIR/SDEIS), community and public health advocates ready themselves for the next phases of the campaign. In August 2014, Metro's timeline indicates that it will be circulating the RDEIR/SDEIS for public review in early 2016 and identify a preferred alternative in early 2017. Incorporation of CA7 as a formal alternative under review gives the Coalition and their supporters additional leverage to ensure health and community benefits from the Corridor project. As the campaign continues, there are several lessons and considerations that are instructive for organizers, as well as policymakers and funders.

MEANINGFUL PUBLIC PARTICIPATION REQUIRES LEVELING THE PLAYING FIELD WITH TECHNICAL RESOURCES

The complexities of planning and construction of a \$6 billion transportation project requires community organizations and other advocates to have the resources to identify and manage high level technical studies and analysis.

While the overall structure allowed for multiple pathways for input into the project, the substantive decisions required the technical capacity to adequately monitor, review, and evaluate project proposals, and prepare written and verbal testimony.

With limited resources, community groups and their allies organized themselves, dividing up the sections and reaching out for support from academic and scientific experts to help review the drafts. However, technical expertise was required to fully engage in the review of the proposed DEIR/EIS so community groups turned to their funders for assistance.

The California Endowment was able to quickly provide a technical assistance grant of \$25,000, which allowed community organizations to hire consultants to review and comment on the highly technical noise and traffic analyses in the DEIR/EIS. Their comments legitimized community perspectives. However, it was a truly a David and Goliath battle. URS Corporation, for example, received the prime contract from Metro to prepare the DEIR/EIS in 2007 for an amount not to exceed \$22.7 million.⁶ By November 2010, the contract was extended 16 months for another \$4.4 million, and in January 2013, an additional 27 months and \$9.2 million was added.⁷ Yet, for community health advocates, having technical expertise, even on a smaller scale, helped organizers make the case to elected officials through educational campaigns to raise awareness of the health consequences of the project, and engage in technical, legal, and policy decision-making in deep and authoritative ways. Further, the right information and technical knowledge provides necessary tools for residents and members to feel empowered to engage with decision makers and advocate for their own solutions.

TAKING A PULSE OF THE PROCESS

NAVIGATING A BUREAUCRATIC PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PROCESS REQUIRES INTERNAL CAPACITY FOR COMMUNITY GROUPS

Because of the scale of the project and early concerns raised by corridor residents and local elected officials along the corridor, Caltrans and Metro set up a comprehensive public participation process. For Caltrans, the process was a necessary one. Ronald Kosinski from Caltrans noted, *“We don’t have a project without these groups. We are doing our part to ensure that this is a community based decision making process... it was better having too much participation than too little. Community organizations bring their passion. Without it we wouldn’t have a project or responsiveness of our engineering staff.”*

In many ways, the extensive public process established by Caltrans and Metro proved to be a challenge. There were hundreds of meetings but it was not feasible for community-based organizations to participate in all of the meetings. Community groups note that the complicated process gave tremendous power to Caltrans staff who made recommendations on many aspects of the project without any input from community members.

“ From a community perspective, it was frustrating to have the Local Advisory Committees in charge of holding meetings to discuss issues but they never meet unless we request meetings. We have to push hard to get our local City Council to hold meetings. Even when we set dates, they cancel at the last minute and then we have to deal with our community members who have to change their schedules. The late meetings are a challenge. Language translation is always challenging—translation equipment doesn’t work; there’s no food even when meetings are during the dinner hours. ”

Jessica Tovar, *Long Beach Alliance for Children with Asthma*

In order to continue to engage residents and health advocates in the process, organizers were faced with the problem of having to keep up with the many committees and mobilizing people to attend meetings to monitor the project and hold decision makers accountable. Organizers found themselves having to monitor project staff reports and publicly raise issues and concerns that were not being articulated to committee decision-makers.

“ Folks needed to be protesting at every meeting because the public servants had a plan that they were pushing. They had the support from industry and had little interest in what the community wanted. They didn’t want to listen. ”

Jonathan Heller, *Human Impact Partners*

TAKING A PULSE OF THE PROCESS

Organizers found that it was necessary to develop an “inside-outside” strategy to navigate the bureaucracy of the participation process. Community organizers and health advocates became representatives on committees and were appointed to the Corridor Advisory Committee where they were able to effectively elevate and advance issues of concern directly to the Project Committee. Through this higher level of Committee representation, advocates could elevate issues of concern for CEHAJ in a more direct and influential way.

ELECTED OFFICIALS MUST BE ORGANIZED TO ACT

While community groups face tremendous challenges in ensuring that there is full and transparent information available to Caltrans decision makers, it is also important for the community to share information with elected officials who are in positions to oversee agency transparency and decision-making. For example Caltrans and Metro agreed to adoption of an HIA as part of the formal EIR/EIS process, but community organizations and advocates had to continually push for integration of the HIA findings in the DEIR/EIS analysis. As one community member noted, “it was as if there was a preset agenda for expanding the freeway without any consideration of community perspective or alternative visions. We needed our elected officials to weigh in.”

Successful efforts to organize elected officials in the corridor cities strengthened relationships between organizers and elected officials, and also began conversations around a shared agenda focused on health and community considerations in the project. These relationships have long-term implications toward successful adoption of other health-promoting policies in the region. By widening the base of support for community and environmental health in the project, organizers and their allies have shifted power from a project dominated by Caltrans staff to a project where residents, their elected officials and health advocates have meaningful input into the project planning and decision-making.

RECOGNIZE THE OPPORTUNITY TO REFRAME THE HIGHWAY PROJECT FOR COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT, NOT JUST TRANSPORTATION

From the beginning, CEHAJ and its supporters framed the I-710 expansion project as a community improvement campaign, and not as simply a transportation project. Angelo Logan from East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice noted, “*The 710 Freeway project should be designed not only to facilitate cargo, but to really meet the needs of the residents of the corridor.*”⁸ The campaign around the I-710 expansion focuses on the planning of a freeway project but in the process, has create awareness and opportunity to re-envision the built environment and health of the many communities in the corridor. The articulation of community vision as part of the CA7 includes, for example, restoration of the LA River that if addressed in the I-710 process, will improve integration of the river with local neighborhoods but also may benefit the broader region. Adrian Martinez from Earthjustice (formerly of the Natural Resources Defense Council) also notes, “*The work has laid the foundation for southeast LA. This may be a galvanizing moment for power building in the southeast.*”

TAKING A PULSE OF THE PROCESS

BUILD ORGANIZING SCALE FROM LOCAL TO REGIONAL

The scale of the project—spanning 15 cities—requires deep and expansive organizing and coalition building strategies that are rooted in neighborhoods but engage groups across multiple cities. An organizer with CEHAJ noted that they received multiple requests from groups throughout the Corridor for help organizing residents, but there was limited capacity to organize since only two groups receive funding to work on the I-710 campaign. This is particularly important given the long periods of time while the agencies are reviewing documents and comments. Jennifer Chheang, Program Manager at the California Endowment notes that community organizing is critical. *“Organizing is what it takes to develop leaders and put a human face on a complex process. Keeping people engaged in the issues and involved in the process over time requires organizing in order to keep up the momentum in down times.”*

COALITIONS AND COMMUNITY-BASED INFRASTRUCTURE ARE CRITICAL

The campaign involved a number of coalition organizations that were necessary to bring together grassroots leaders with advocacy, research, and technical organizations across neighborhoods and cities. Coalitions such as CEHAJ, the Environmental Work Group of Building Healthy Communities Long Beach, as well as earlier environmental and economic justice coalitions such as the Coalition for Clean and Safe Ports and the Port Working Group of the Green LA Coalition, facilitated important relationships and established deep trust and accountability among groups, and helped negotiate competing worldviews and differences in strategy. Trust and accountability were key, particularly when the campaign required groups to be able to react and move nimbly to respond quickly to changes in policy discussions. As Adrian Martinez notes, *“It takes a long time to develop trust. In the campaign to advance CA7, we had developed some base levels of trust in earlier campaigns like the SCIG (Southern California International Gateway rail project) and the Clean Trucks Program. It has taken years but is necessary to allow for openings for real discussions—and disagreements—within a coalition.”*

**BUILDING A COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACH FOR
LARGE SCALE TRANSPORTATION PROJECTS**

Community groups, together with technical experts, local elected officials, outreach professionals from the environmental health division of USC Keck School of Medicine, and environmental and health advocates provided meaningful public input into one of the largest proposed public infrastructure projects in the country. In the face of government and industry pressure to grow the port and the freight transportation system without adequate attention to community health consequences, community-based organizations continue work to change the rules of decision-making for regional transportation policy and projects. Although the decision-making process is still underway, the I-710 campaign represents an alternative community-based approach for large freeway infrastructure projects that incorporate health, environmental, labor, and community considerations. Winning change has not been easy but with smart and relentless advocacy and funding support for leadership development, technical assistance, and community organizing to expand and deepen regional community leadership, the campaign to transform the I-710 corridor is changing the way transportation planning and major infrastructure projects can help not harm communities.

“ The Coalition has shifted the way transportation planning is happening and how transportation is happening in the region... a transformational process is underway. ”

Milton Hernandez Nimatuj, *Communities for a Better Environment*



Source: Martha Matsuoka

INTERVIEWS

California Environmental Health and Justice (CEHAJ) coalition:

- Suzanne Browne, Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles
- Milton Hernandez Nimatuj, Communities for a Better Environment
- Angelo Logan, East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice
- Adrian Martinez, Earthjustice (former staff attorney of the Natural Resources Defense Council)
- Patricia Ochoa, Coalition for Clean Air
- Jessica Tovar, Long Beach Alliance for Children with Asthma

Jennifer Chheang, former Project Manager, The California Endowment

Jonathan Heller, Human Impact Partners

Ronald Kosinski, Caltrans District 7, Division of Environmental Planning

Angelo Logan, East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice

Adrian Martinez, former staff attorney of the Natural Resources Defense Council

Jessica Tovar, Long Beach Alliance for Children with Asthma

Jerry Wood, former Project Director, Gateway Cities Council of Governments

Andrea Hricko, Keck School of Medicine of USC and Community Outreach and Engagement Centers at USC

ENDNOTES

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²*California I-710: Engaged Community Supports Corridor Study Partnership*. 2011. Transportation Research Board, National Academy of Sciences.

³Program for Environmental and Regional Equity (PERE)/USC. "Socioeconomic characteristics of residents near the I-710 Corridor" submitted to the I-710 Project Committee. September 27, 2012,

⁴Groups involved included East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice, Communities for a Better Environment, Natural Resources Defense Council, EndOil/Communities for Clean Ports, Legal Aid Foundation of L.A., Coalition for Clean Air, Greater Long Beach Interfaith Community Organization, Building Healthy Communities Long Beach, Westside Christian Church, Coalition for a Safe Environment, Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles, and Friends of the Los Angeles River.

⁵State Senator Ricardo Lara. "I-710 Corridor Communities Make the Difference in Passage of Environmental Justice Bill". August 12, 2013. <http://sd33.senate.ca.gov/news/2013-08-12-i-71-corridor-communities-make-difference-passage-environmental-justice-bill> (accessed October 6, 2014)

⁶Metro Board Meeting. July 26, 2007. http://media.metro.net/board/Items/2007/07_july/20070726RBMItem45.pdf (accessed August 23, 2014)

⁷Metro Staff Report. January 24, 2013. http://media.metro.net/board/Items/2013/01_january/20130124RBMItem20.pdf (accessed August 23, 2014)

⁸Eastern Group Publications. "East L.A. Sounds Off At 710 Freeway Hearing." [http://egpnews.com/2012/08/east-l-a-sounds-off-at-710-freeway-hearing/...](http://egpnews.com/2012/08/east-l-a-sounds-off-at-710-freeway-hearing/)

CLOSING

The experiences and lessons of case studies illuminate both promising practices and challenges communities experience as they work to create systemic change and sustain healthy communities for children and families. Although each BHC community is unique and the experiences and lessons learned are specific to the Long Beach region, there are themes dealing with leadership, research, collective action, and communication that can be applied to community change initiatives in other places.

Future case studies will continue to chronicle the stories of the 14 BHC communities throughout California as they focus on prevention and changing community norms for better health outcomes.



Source: East Yard Communities for EJ