



Office of the Director

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March 1, 2011

**RE: International Blvd. Transit Oriented Development Plan and Health**

Dear Honorable Council President Larry Reid and City Council Members,

The Alameda County Public Health Department is writing to express our support for the International Blvd. Transit Oriented Development Plan and we urge you to endorse this plan. We also encourage the City Council to direct staff to pursue funding to move this plan to the next phase and would like to extend our support for such endeavors.

We are striving for an Alameda County where all children, no matter the color of their skin, how much money in their parents' bank accounts, or where they live, have the same opportunity for a long and healthy life. Through job creation, affordable housing, mixed retail development, transportation facility improvements, and honoring the corridor's rich cultural history, the International Blvd. Transit Oriented Development Plan represents a step toward achieving this vision of health equity.

The International Blvd was once a thriving corridor, connecting people to jobs, shopping, and entertainment. However, for the last several decades, the corridor has seen declining investment and increasing crime, blight, and hopelessness. The development of the Fruitvale Transit Village demonstrated the efficacy of the transit-oriented development model in not only revitalizing the neighborhood, but also improving resident health through the provision of health-promoting resources such as affordable housing, grocery stores, bike and pedestrian facilities, clinics, new retail, childcare, community meeting space, and so on. Taking this model to scale will extend these opportunities for health to residents all along the International Blvd. corridor. **Appendix A highlights several aspects of the International Blvd. Transit Oriented Development Plan that we believe will contribute to improving resident health and achieving health equity.**

ACPHD would also like to take this opportunity to commend CEDA for supporting a model community engagement process as part of the International Blvd. Transit Oriented Development Plan thus far. ACPHD's emphasis on community participation is rooted in research demonstrating that historical exclusion from decision-making venues has resulted in communities of color and low income communities that are disproportionately burdened by environmental hazards and deprived of social goods. As such, we are dedicated to increasing marginalized communities' meaningful participation in the planning processes that are inextricably linked to their health trajectory. CEDA did an excellent job bringing together a diverse group of stakeholders to create this plan and ensuring that community members were prepared with the information they needed to give critical input. The quality of the public process is reflected in plan's caliber and the near unanimous support it received thus far. **We encourage you to continue using such robust community engagement processes as the International Blvd. Transit Oriented Development Plan moves to the next phase.**

**Again, we support the International Blvd Transit Oriented Development Plan and the opportunities for moving toward health equity that it represents. We encourage you to pursue funding to move the plan to the next phase and we would be happy to assist this effort in whatever way we can.**

Sincerely,

Sandra Witt, MPH, DrPH  
Deputy Director Policy, Planning, and Health Equity  
Alameda County Public Health Department

cc: Alex Briscoe, Director, Alameda County Health Care Services Agency  
Anita Siegel, Director, Alameda County Public Health  
Mayor Jean Quan  
Councilmember Jane Brunner, District 1  
Councilmember Pat Kernighan, District 2  
Councilmember Nancy Nadel, District 3

Councilmember Libby Schaaf, District 4  
Councilmember Ignacio De La Fuente, District 5  
Vice Mayor Desley Brooks, District 6  
Councilmember Rebecca Kaplan, At-Large

## Achieving Health Equity & the International Blvd Transit Oriented Development Plan

- **Promoting walking, biking, and play:** In Alameda County, African Americans and Latinos are over two times more likely to be obese than whites or Asians.<sup>1</sup> Current evidence indicates that the built environment, and the opportunities for healthy living it does or does not create, directly contributes to the obesity and diabetes epidemics and their disproportionate prevalence in low-income communities of color. For decades, the International Blvd corridor has offered few incentives for physical activity. However, mixed retail and high density development, as proposed in the TOD plan, promote physical activity and decrease the risk of disease related to diet and physical inactivity. For instance, one study found that people who live in neighborhoods with a mix of shops and businesses within easy walking distance have a 35% lower risk of obesity.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, the proposed improvements walking and biking infrastructure, as well as the common spaces, encourage residents to exercise. These improvements will help address the fact that over 25% of Alameda County's low income residents report that there is no place near their home to walk or exercise, as compared to less than 10% of our high income residents.<sup>3</sup> Encouraging physical activity by developing places for people to walk to (i.e. retail) and places for people to safely exercise along the International Blvd corridor addresses some of the root causes of the prevalence of obesity, diabetes, and heart disease in low income communities of color, thus promoting health equity.
- **Access to fresh fruits and vegetables:** The proposed development will also attract health food retail. Healthy eating can help reduce the prevalence of obesity and diabetes. However, access to healthy food, and thus consumption of healthy foods, is not equal by income or race/ethnicity in Oakland. Low-income residents of Oakland are half as likely to consume the recommended 5 fruits and vegetables a day than middle-or high-income residents. African Americans are half as likely as Whites to eat the recommended amounts of fruits and vegetables. Low income neighborhoods, where residents are disproportionately people of color, are also 3 times less likely than higher income neighborhoods to have a grocery store within their neighborhood. Studies show that if people have better access to fresh, affordable, healthful food, they will consume more fruits and vegetables. Given the obesity and diabetes epidemics facing low income communities of color, increased access to affordable fresh fruits and vegetables is urgently needed and will promote health equity.
- **Access to employment:** The populations suffering from the worst health outcomes in Alameda County also suffer from the highest un- and under-employment rates. These same populations disproportionately face barriers to employment, such as a lack of a high-school degree. Research clearly indicates that one of the best ways to improve health outcomes is to increase income levels/reduce poverty. However, as industrial and other blue-collar jobs historically available to those with a high-school degree or less leave the area, including along the International Blvd. corridor, the job prospects for those facing multiple barriers to employment are further reduced. The proposed job training center, as well as the new temporary construction and permanent retail jobs, will increase local employment opportunities.
- **Affordable Housing:** The new housing envisioned in the International Blvd. Transit Oriented Development Plan will create housing opportunities that meet the needs of current and future residents,

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<sup>1</sup> *California Health Interview Survey, 2003*

<sup>2</sup> *Driving, Walking and Where You Live: Links to Obesity;*

[http://knowledge.fhwa.dot.gov/cops/italaddsup.nsf/All+Documents/8D26513DD4635FED85256F6A007BF2EB/\\$FILE/J%20of%20Preventive%20Medicine%20re%20link%20between%20driving%20and%20obesity.pdf](http://knowledge.fhwa.dot.gov/cops/italaddsup.nsf/All+Documents/8D26513DD4635FED85256F6A007BF2EB/$FILE/J%20of%20Preventive%20Medicine%20re%20link%20between%20driving%20and%20obesity.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> *Life and Death from Unnatural Causes: Health and Social Inequity in Alameda County;*

[http://www.acphd.org/AXBVCZ/Admin/DataReports/00\\_2008\\_full\\_report.pdf](http://www.acphd.org/AXBVCZ/Admin/DataReports/00_2008_full_report.pdf)

including affordable housing. The City of Oakland lacks sufficient affordable housing to meet the needs of its current residents. A lack of affordable housing is associated with food insecurity and poor nutrition, especially among children, as well as cutting back on childcare, preventative healthcare, and prescription drugs. Furthermore the stress due to a lack of affordable housing is associated with a greater likelihood of developing hypertension and lower levels of psychological well-being. Finally, a lack of safe, affordable housing can lead vulnerable residents to settle for substandard housing situations. Moldy walls, old carpets and pest infestation are all major contributors to the development of serious respiratory and skin infections.

- **Air quality:** The proposed plan increases in density, encourages development at transit hubs, and improves access to active transportation facilities. As a result, this plan both promotes alternative modes of transportation and reduces vehicle miles traveled. Reducing greenhouse gas emission and addressing climate change has profound public health implications. Efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions will benefit everyone, but especially low-income people of color who are the most vulnerable to the risks associated with climate change.<sup>4</sup>
- **Social cohesion and crime:** The International Blvd Transit Oriented Development plan honors the rich cultural history of the corridor and designates spaces for social interaction, entertainment, and community building. Community cohesion and strong social relationships protect health by providing emotional and material support, preventing feelings of isolation and contributing to self esteem and value. On the other hand, a lack of community cohesion and social support is strongly associated with crime and violence.

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<sup>4</sup> As reported in *Life and Death from Unnatural Causes: Health and Social Inequity in Alameda County*, “Climate change may increase rates of health problems affected by extreme weather events and greenhouse gas emissions, as well as facilitate the growth of water-, food-, and vector-borne disease. Generally, everyone is threatened by climate change, but the most seriously affected people will certainly be the poor. In the U.S., low-income people and people of color are at particular risk in part because their health is already disproportionately compromised, they are more likely to be socially isolated, and they command few resources to prepare for and responds to disasters.”