

Meeting Agenda
Equity and Diversity Commission
School Board Conference Room
June 22, 2022
7:00 p.m.

Call to Order

Proposed Agenda:

1. Nominations and Election of Officers

Chair

Vice Chair

Suggested Motions:

I move to nominate _____ as Chair of the Equity and Diversity Commission.

I move to nominate _____ as Vice Chair of the Equity and Diversity Commission.

2. Approval of Minutes: June 4, 2022

Suggested Motion: *I move to approve the minutes of the Equity and Diversity Commission June 4, 2022 orientation meeting as presented.*

3. Discussion and Consideration of Remote Participation Policy for Equity and Diversity Commission Meetings

Suggested Motion: *I move to adopt a remote participation policy for Equity and Diversity Commission meetings.*

4. Discussion and Establishing Dates for Future and Recurring Commission Meetings

5. Other Business:

- Proposal to Rename the Commission
- Other business by Commission members

Adjournment

Other Resources

Blackwell, Angela Glover. "The Curb-Cut Effect." *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Winter 2017, 28-33.

EQUITY AND DIVERSITY COMMISSION

Orientation Meeting
Saturday, June 4, 2022
9:00 a.m.

PRESENT: Lou Boden
Sabrina Burress
Joamarie Garcia
Mark Jeter
Vicki Keyser
Jake Krug
Lindsey Lennon
Beth Nelsen
AnhThu Nguyen
Nathaniel Riddle
Daniel Stuhlsatz
Jennifer Tripppeer
Susan Venable
Zavia Willis

ALSO PRESENT: Dr. Robin Stacia, Sage Consulting Network
Leslie Beauregard, Interim City Manager
Brenda Mead, Council Liaison
Andrea Oakes, Council Liaison
Morgan Smith, Executive Assistant, City Manager's Office

The orientation meeting opened with check-in, breakfast and an ice breaker activity.

Introductions and welcome remarks were given by Leslie Beauregard, Mayor Oakes and Councilmember Mead.

Dr. Robin Stacia was introduced and started the discussion about the goals for the day and the ground rules, which included being person-centered and judgement free, as well as the importance of commissioners listening to one another and the community. She also described the collective, governance and personal commitments being made by Commissioners and stated that diversity, equity and inclusion work is about full engagement, not just checking a box. Celebrating diversity and inclusion in Staunton is complex work that involves understanding what people bring to the community, finding commonalities and connecting on a deeper level.

All commissioners introduced themselves and a video celebrating inclusion was shown. Smaller group discussions about the video occurred and several groups shared their observations.

DEI Definitions and Overview:

Dr. Stacia presented an overview of DEI and definitions. Items discussed were as follows:

- Definitions

- Race - construct; designed and developed as a way to identify people and put us into social classes; a way of thinking; a product of our nationality, culture and ethnicity.
- Gender – not only men and women now, there are many ways folks identify.
- LGBTQ+ and sexual identity
- Religion and generational immigration
- Disability – NOT a handicap
- Demographic – mostly what we think of when we think of diversity
- Cognitive – how we see the world and that we have diverse viewpoints
- Belonging – welcoming and a sense that we feel we can be a part of something; a connection and validation of who we are.
- Black Americans are more likely to have a bad outcome compared to white Americans in several areas.
- Intersectionality – an experience a person has is not just a singular event. Someone will experience many events and have multiple issues in a compounded pattern which creates generational vulnerability.
- Implicit Bias – Unconscious bias
 - Empathy Gap – hardened by the age of 10 due to bias against people of color.
- Social Determinants – what are those things that people need to thrive? Where are there gaps?

A video from Dr. Camara Jones was shown about the “cliff of good health.”

Roles and responsibilities of the commission were outlined by Dr. Stacia and discussed. Items included the structure and operations of the commission as well as the resolution establishing the commission. (ATTACHMENT A.) Breakout groups brainstormed about points 3 and 6 in the resolution and presented their notes (ATTACHMENT B.)

Commission logistics and organization items were presented by Ms. Beauregard and discussed, including: FOIA, open meetings, Virginia regulations, the website, the nominations of chair and vice-chair positions and the responsibilities of those roles.

Final remarks were given by Ms. Beauregard and the meeting was abruptly adjourned by a fire alarm at 1:55 p.m.

Kiley A. Kesecker
Clerk of Council

(ATTACHMENT A)

**RESOLUTION
OF THE
COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF STAUNTON, VIRGINIA,
TO ESTABLISH AN EQUITY AND DIVERSITY COMMISSION**

Recitals

A. The provisions of Virginia Code Section 15.2-1411 and Staunton City Charter, Chapter II, Section 11, Paragraph Twenty-First, authorize the Staunton City Council (“Council”) to establish advisory boards and commissions.

B. The Council received a report from the Staunton Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People at its August 12, 2021 meeting requesting the establishment of an equity and diversity commission.

C. The Council unanimously adopted a motion at its August 12, 2021 meeting to establish the City of Staunton Equity and Diversity Commission (“Commission”).

D. This resolution memorializes the establishment of the Commission, as a public body, and outlines the parameters for its membership, function, and expected work product that will benefit Council and the City of Staunton as the City seeks to understand and implement policies, programs, and procedures to address social and racial equity within the City.

E. These recitals are an integral part of this Resolution.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Council of the City of Staunton, Virginia, as follows:

1. The Commission is established and will be composed of 11–15 members, one of whom will be named by the constituent members as the Chair and another of whom as the Vice Chair to help lead the Commission. The Commission will be a public body subject to the applicable requirements of the Virginia Freedom of Information Act and members of the Commission should be aware of those requirements.

2. The Acting/Interim City Manager, in consultation with Dr. Robin Stacia will develop an application for individuals interested in serving on the Commission. The entire Council will convene as the Nominations Committee as a “Committee of the Whole” and recommend candidates to Council to serve on the Commission. Council, upon recommendation of its Nominations Committee of the Whole and in consultation with the Interim City Manager, Assistant City Manager, or designee, will appoint the initial members of the Commission by not later than May 26, 2022. Members of the Commission will be selected such that the members will bring a diversity of backgrounds and perspectives to the Commission. Members of the Commission shall serve terms of two years commencing upon the date of their appointment by Council. Council Member Mead shall serve initially as the Council’s Liaison to the Commission.

3. The Commission is initially charged with objectively evaluating existing data, studies, and reports from available sources concerning social and racial equity in the City of Staunton that evaluate social determinants and inequitable outcomes within the City of Staunton.

The Commission's initial charge shall also include data collection and research that evaluate the same outcomes. The Council will appropriate funds to establish a budget for the Commission to conduct its data collection and research.

4. The Commission will be supported by the City Manager, Assistant City Manager, or designee, as well as other City staff to the extent that information is needed, with access to City financial and other records and reports.

5. The Commission shall conduct at least one public hearing and other community conversations to receive input from City residents concerning racial and social equity.

6. The Commission shall compile a report for the Council consisting of its analysis of existing data, studies, and reports concerning racial and social equity as well as its own research and data collection efforts on the topic. The report shall also contain a summary of all public comments received by the Commission at its public hearing(s) as well as any other communications it receives from Staunton residents concerning racial and social equity. The report shall include recommendations to the Council (a) about specific inequitable social and racial outcomes within the City of Staunton, and (b) for a proposed framework (Strategic Plan) for the Commission to pursue in the next 12 to 18 months to address specific factors that may contribute to inequitable racial and social outcomes.

7. The Commission will be expected to provide an update on their work to City Council not later than December 2022 and complete its initial work and submit its report to Council not later than December 2023. Council then will schedule and hold a public hearing on the report.

8. Subsequent to receiving the Commission's report and its public hearing on the report, the Council will assign further duties to the Commission.

Andrea W. Oakes, Mayor

Attest: _____
Morgan C. Smith, Interim Clerk of Council

(ATTACHMENT B)

Notes from Final Group Exercise

- Intercultural Development Continuum – this is a journey; mindset is a way we frame our understanding of situations;
- Conversational Third Rail – we have made all the *isms* a tense topic; will have conversations that will go bad and be hurt sometimes; have to be able to affirm all of what we want to talk about and may need to feel uncomfortable
- Been through some really hard times in 2020 in particular; feeling some despair about where our country is going;
- Polarized divisions – these are the types of things that will be thrown at this group
- What if we don't change at all... "and something magical just happens?"
 - Diversity is a lot – we have to develop deeper relationships with people
- Surface culture v. deep culture of how communities deal with diversity
- Does Staunton have a large immigration community?
- Celebrating diversity and inclusion in Staunton – this is complex work understanding what people bring to the community, we need to find those commonalities; we need to connect on a deeper level; the group is going to go deeper
- Inclusion is more than diversity and more than inviting folks to sit at the table – to be intentional about who needs to be at the table; and make sure those who are not given voice are invited to the table; and brings them into decision making and policy outcomes
- We need to ask ourselves - What's pushing people to a cliff?

What data resources do we have?

- Library
- Schools
- Hospital
- Blue Ridge Area Food Bank
- Faith Communities
- Community Foundation
- City?
- Census
- Housing Authority
- Building Bridges
- Valley Program for Aging Services
- Non-profits
- Boys & Girls Club
- Sin Barreras
- Habitat for Humanity
- VA School for the Deaf & Blind
- Workforce
- Valley Mission
- Mary Baldwin University
- ALICE report
- MIT report
- Augusta Health

- Planning Commission
- Economic Development data
- Social Services
- United Way
- Historical Societies
- Leaders of special communities/populations

What do we need to consider?

- Languages
- ASL
- Accessibility
- Childcare
- “irregular” work hours
- Transportation
- Size
- Location/neighborhood
- Committee liaisons
- Distribution of info- use community partners

Data/Research

- What?
 - Housing demographics – housed & unhoused data
 - Health- access/participation
 - Physical- dental/vision/hearing
 - Mental
 - Actual demographic info
 - Ethnicity
 - Gender identity
 - Business ownership/entrepreneurship
 - Education
 - Resources
 - Assistance services
 - Teacher support/training/retention
 - Lived experiences across demographics
 - Judicial
 - Criminal justice
 - Police engagement
 - Incarceration
 - City employment
 - Who
 - Environment
 - Access/participation in benefits
 - Food equity
 - Contractual agreements w/ non-profit organizations
 - Digital equity

- Who?
 - Agencies who are/have resources
 - Citizens – marginalized population
 - City staff
 - Leaders of special communities/populations

- Where?
 - Working with city staff/community leaders to identify best locations
 - Accessibility consideration

Member Remote Participation for Staunton Equity and Diversity Commission Meetings:

1. **Purpose and Applicability.** It is the policy of the Staunton Equity and Diversity Commission (Commission) that individual Commissioners of the Commission may participate remotely in Commission meetings by electronic means as permitted by Virginia Code Section 2.2-3708.2, even in the absence of the Governor having declared a state of emergency, when there is a quorum physically assembled at one primary or central meeting location. For circumstances when the Governor has declared a state of emergency, such as has existed with COVID-19, the requirements of Virginia Code Section 2.2-3708.2(A)(3) must be satisfied. The purpose of this policy is to comply with the requirements of Section 2.2-3708.2 of the Code of Virginia to allow for and govern remote participation by one or more Commissioners in Commission meetings by electronic communication means in general, outside of an extraordinary situation involving a Governor- declared state of emergency. All Commission proceedings pursuant to this policy shall be conducted in accordance with Virginia Code Section 2.2-3708.2 as that statute, a part of the Virginia Freedom of Information Act, may hereafter be amended. This policy shall apply to the entire Commission membership without regard to the identity of the member requesting remote participation or the matters that will be considered or voted on at the meeting.
2. **Quorum and Setting Required.** The Commission may consider a member's individual request for remote participation by electronic communication means only if a quorum of the Commission is physically assembled at one primary or central meeting location, and there is an arrangement for the voice of the remotely participating Commissioner to be heard by all persons at such primary or central meeting location.
3. **Notice and Permissible Reasons for Electronic Participation.** Commissioner participation remotely under this policy shall only be allowed if: on or before the day of the meeting, the Commissioner notifies the Commission Chair or other presiding officer that the member's inability to attend is due to a temporary or permanent disability or other medical condition that prevents the member's physical attendance or due to a family member's medical condition that requires the Commissioner to provide care for the family member which prevents the Commissioner's physical attendance at the meeting, or due to a personal matter and the Commissioner identifies with specificity the nature of the personal matter. A Commissioner may remotely participate in up to two meetings or twenty-five percent of the Commission's total meetings (whichever number is higher) each calendar year due to personal matters. A Commissioner's remote participation due to a temporary or permanent disability or other medical condition shall not be subject to a meeting limitation per calendar year. A Commissioner's remote participation due to a family member's medical condition that requires the Commissioner to provide care for the family member thereby preventing the Commissioner's physical attendance shall not be subject to a meeting limitation per calendar year. The Commissioner requesting to remotely participate in the meeting must state the remote location from which they will participate.
4. **Approval.** Individual participation from a remote location shall be approved unless such participation would violate this policy or applicable law. The Commission shall vote whether to allow such participation and, if approved, the Commission's meeting minutes

shall reflect the following: the remote location from which the member participated, even though the remote location need not be open to the public; if the basis for the remote participation is disability or a Commissioner's or a family member's medical condition, the fact of such; and, if the basis for the remote participation is a personal matter, the specific nature of the personal matter. Upon adoption of a motion to approve the Commissioner's participation by electronic communication means, the Commissioner shall be allowed to fully participate in the meeting by electronic communication means. Before proceeding with the remainder of the Commission meeting, the Commission Chair shall ask the Commissioner to state their name. The Commission Chair shall then ask the other Commissioners and members of the public in attendance if they can hear the remotely participating Commissioner. The meeting shall not proceed until the remotely participating Commissioner's voice can be heard by all Commissioners and members of the public physically assembled at the meeting location.

5. **Disapproval.** If the Commission votes to disapprove the Commissioner's remote participation because such participation would violate this policy or applicable law, such disapproval shall be recorded in the Commission's minutes with specific reasons cited under this policy and/or under applicable law for the disapproval.

Stanford SOCIAL INNOVATION^{Review}

Features

The Curb-Cut Effect

By Angela Glover Blackwell

Stanford Social Innovation Review
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Laws and programs designed to benefit vulnerable groups, such as the disabled or people of color, often end up benefiting all of society.

THE Curb-Cut EFFECT

BY ANGELA GLOVER BLACKWELL

Illustration by ALEX EBEN MEYER

One evening in the early 1970s, Michael Pachovas and a few friends wheeled themselves to a curb in Berkeley, Calif., poured cement into the form of a crude ramp, and rolled off into the night.¹ For Pachovas and his fellow disability advocates, it was a political act, a gesture of defiance. “The police threatened to arrest us,” Pachovas recalls. “But they didn’t.”² It was also pragmatic. Despite their unevenness, the makeshift sloping curbs provided the disabled community with something invaluable: mobility.

At the time, getting around Berkeley—or any American city—in a wheelchair was not easy. The Architectural Barriers Act of 1968 required government buildings to make themselves universally accessible, but traversing the streets in a wheelchair resembled the running of an obstacle course: Wheel to the driveway in an alley or at a loading dock; roll into the street until you reached another driveway; hope all the while that a truck didn’t pull out. Students with disabilities at the University of California, Berkeley, housed in Cowell Hospital—the only space that could accommodate them³—planned their class schedule according to which class was downhill from the previous one.

Yet this was Berkeley in the era of political activism. There was a Free Speech Movement, an antiwar movement, a civil rights movement. Why not a movement for movement? Pressed by disabled activists, in 1972 the city installed its first official “curb cut” at an intersection on Telegraph Avenue.⁴ It would become, in the words of a Berkeley advocate, “the slab of concrete heard ’round the world.”⁵

Curb cuts were not an entirely new invention—the first appeared in 1945, in Kalamazoo, Mich.⁶ But the one on Telegraph changed the way the country thinks about access and opportunity for a population that has faced barriers at every turn. This turnabout and the remarkable ripple effects are salient today, as the nation confronts the anguish of rising inequality and the mounting barriers to economic mobility.

Hundreds more curb cuts followed Berkeley’s. Then hundreds of thousands, all

across the country. Disabled advocates continued to push for access to the basics that many Americans take for granted—sidewalks, classrooms, dorm rooms, restrooms, buses. At last, on July 26, 1990, President George H.W. Bush signed the landmark Americans with Disabilities Act, which prohibits disability-based discrimination and mandated changes to the built environment, including curb cuts. “Let the shameful wall of exclusion finally come tumbling down,” he proclaimed.⁷

Then a magnificent and unexpected thing happened. When the wall of exclusion came down, everybody benefited—not only people in wheelchairs. Parents pushing strollers headed straight for curb cuts. So did workers pushing heavy carts, business travelers wheeling luggage, even runners and skateboarders. A study of pedestrian behavior at a Sarasota, Fla., shopping mall revealed that nine out of 10 “unencumbered pedestrians” go out of their way to use a curb cut.⁸ As journalist Frank Greve has noted, the barricades stormed by disabled advocates in Berkeley 40 years ago were a few inches high, “yet today millions of Americans pass daily through the breaches.”⁹

An economist might call it a “positive externality.” A military officer might call it a “force multiplier.” I like to think of it as the “curb-cut effect”—and it’s changing the way the country thinks about the struggles of the most vulnerable communities.



ACCESS, OPPORTUNITY, AND THE NEW DEMOGRAPHICS

There's an ingrained societal suspicion that intentionally supporting one group hurts another. That equity is a zero sum game. In fact, when the nation targets support where it is needed most—when we create the circumstances that allow those who have been left behind to participate and contribute fully—everyone wins. The corollary is also true: When we ignore the challenges faced by the most vulnerable among us, those challenges, magnified many times over, become a drag on economic growth, prosperity, and national well-being.

This has become painfully evident as inequality has reached toxic levels in the United States. Since 1979, the income of workers in the top 10 percent has grown nearly 15 percent.¹⁰ For workers in the bottom 10 percent, incomes have fallen more than 11 percent.¹¹ The top 25 hedge fund managers earn more than all kindergarten teachers in America put together.¹² Only 9 out of 100 children born to parents in the bottom fifth of the income distribution can expect to rise above their circumstances, the cornerstone of the American Dream.¹³

A wave of recent publicity has focused attention on the toll that these trends are taking on white America. In a paper published in November 2015 in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, Princeton University economists Anne Case and Angus Deaton revealed that the death rate for middle-aged whites without a college education jumped more than 20 percent from 1999 to 2013,¹⁴ a staggering increase attributable largely to drug- and alcohol-related deaths and suicides. Case and Deaton see the spikes in addiction and suicide as a response to financial insecurity and economic despair. They write: “After the productivity slowdown in the early 1970s, and with widening income inequality, many in the baby boom generation are the first to find, in midlife, that they will not be better off than were their parents.”

While commentators debate the extent to which economic shock is driving white mortality, one thing is indisputable: Economic distress is deepest and the inequities are widest in communities of color. In 149 of the country's 150 largest metro areas, the percentage of college-educated whites exceeds the percentage of African-Americans and Latinos with college degrees.¹⁵ The national unemployment rates for blacks and Latinos are 9.5 percent and 6.5 percent, respectively, compared with 4.5 percent for whites.¹⁶ One in four black and Latino Americans live in poverty, more than twice the rate for whites.¹⁷ People of color lag well behind whites on just about every measure of well-being, including health, homeownership, wealth, and (Case and Deaton notwithstanding) longevity.

The point is not to argue about who is suffering more, but to identify the best solutions to remedy these inequities. And here, another number should command attention: 2044. That is the year in which people of color are expected to become a majority of the US population.¹⁸ The nation—80 percent white in 1980, 63 percent white today¹⁹—is already well on its way. Since 2012, the majority of babies born in the United States have been children of color.²⁰ By the end of the decade, the majority of Americans under age 18 will be people of color.²¹

These demographic shifts matter to every American. Not because there is something frightening about a nation where whites are no longer the majority. Rather, it is because the costs of society failing people of color are climbing as the population grows—and because the benefits of strategies that expand opportunity for people of

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color would extend to all. Knock down walls of exclusion and build accessible pathways to success, and everyone gains.

The curb-cut effect applies to America's new demographic profile in two important ways. First, curb-cut thinking is animated by the idea of equity. This should not be confused with the formal legal equality conferred by landmark laws such as the Civil Rights Act. Equality gives everyone the right to ride on the bus. Equity ensures that there are curb cuts so people in wheelchairs can get to the bus stop and lifts so they can get on the bus, and ensures that there are bus lines where people need them so they can get to wherever they need to go. Equity means promoting just and fair inclusion throughout society and creating the conditions in which everyone can participate, prosper, and reach his or her full potential.

Second, the curb-cut effect illustrates the outsize benefits that accrue to everyone from policies and investments designed to achieve equity. The country must choose: Will we make these investments? Will we make sure that everyone has access to the essentials for living productive lives—things like jobs and reliable transportation? Or will we neglect entire communities and waste the talents and potential of tens of millions of people?

There's really no choice. Continuing to write off poor people and people of color is not an option. Not when the American Dream is nearly unattainable for all low-income people, regardless of their ethnicity. Not when age-old health disparities between whites and people of color are narrowing because whites are sicker than they used to be and more are dying younger. Not when popular fury is growing over an economic system in which a single American family (the Waltons) has more wealth than 41 percent of Americans combined.²²

Policymakers tend to overlook the ways in which focusing on one group might help all groups and strengthen the whole nation. Cut into the curb, and we create a path forward for everyone.

CURB-CUT EFFECTS, FROM STREETS TO SCHOOLS TO THE SKY

Once you know what you're looking for, the curb-cut effect is on display all around. It happened when seat belt legislation, adopted initially to protect young children, led 49 states to adopt seat belt laws that have saved an estimated 317,000 lives—children and adults—since 1975.²³ It happened when affirmative action was created to open the doors of higher education to black people—and ended up emboldening vast numbers of white women, and other racial and ethnic groups, to push for greater access as well. It happened when fed-up flight attendants spearheaded a national fight to end smoking on planes, setting in motion a decades-long public-health campaign that has largely banished smoking from public spaces and cut tobacco consumption in half since the 1960s.²⁴

And it happened, spectacularly, with another improvement to America's streets: bike lanes. After years of enduring injuries and fatalities, beleaguered bicyclists—backed by environmental advocates—have pressured a number of cities to install protected bike

lanes. As of 2014, New York City had added roughly 30 miles of these lanes.²⁵ My hometown of Oakland is installing a similar amount.²⁶

The verdict? In city after city, despite a “bike-lash” of critics who warn of more congestion and less parking, we’ve seen that—like a bicycle wheel—what goes around comes around. From 2000 to 2013, the risk of serious injury dropped 75 percent for New York City cyclists²⁷—and pedestrians, a much larger group and not the intended target of the bike lanes, are 40 percent less likely to be injured.²⁸ In a 2011 survey of Chicago drivers, half believed that they noticed improved driving behavior on a street with bike lanes.²⁹

In addition to creating safer and saner streets, bike lanes add tremendous economic value to a neighborhood. One stretch of Ninth Avenue in Manhattan saw retail sales rise nearly 50 percent after bike paths were installed, compared with a 3 percent rise borough-wide.³⁰ Rents along the Times Square bike paths grew 71 percent in 2010, the largest increase in the city, as people flocked to pedestrian- and bike-friendly neighborhoods.³¹ A single block in Indianapolis saw the value of its property jump nearly 150 percent after adding bike lanes.³²

Then there are the benefits to public health and the environment. A study of the San Francisco Bay Area found that a slight increase in walking and biking each day can reduce the prevalence of diabetes and cardiovascular disease by 14 percent,³³ while decreasing greenhouse gas emissions by 14 percent as well.³⁴ If just 5 percent of New York City commuters began biking to work, the CO₂ emissions saved would be equal to planting a forest 1.3 times the size of Manhattan.³⁵

THE MAKING OF A MIDDLE CLASS

The most illuminating example of the curb-cut effect is the Serviceman’s Readjustment Act of 1944, more commonly known as the GI Bill. It’s no overstatement to say that the legislation created the white

THE MOST ILLUMINATING EXAMPLE OF THE CURB-CUT EFFECT IS ... THE GI BILL. IT'S NO OVERSTATEMENT TO SAY THAT THE LEGISLATION CREATED THE WHITE AMERICAN MIDDLE CLASS.

American middle class. The sponsors of the bill, initially scrawled by an American Legion lobbyist on a piece of hotel stationery, didn’t expect to do more than provide job training to some World War II veterans looking to reintegrate into society.³⁶ Supporters of the legislation predicted that just a few hundred thousand of the 16 million returning veterans would use it to go to college. Even that was too much for educators like Robert Hutchins, the president of the University of Chicago, who direfully predicted that campuses would be turned into “hobo jungles.”³⁷

To the surprise of nearly everyone, nearly eight million veterans went to college on the GI bill,³⁸ and contrary to Hutchins’ warning, they earned better grades, on average, than their civilian classmates. Journalist Edward Humes has catalogued their ranks to include 14 future Nobel Prize winners, three Supreme Court justices, three presidents, a dozen senators, 22,000 dentists, 67,000 doctors, 91,000 scientists, 238,000 teachers, and 450,000 engineers, along with numerous lawyers, nurses, businessmen, artists, actors, writers, and pilots.³⁹ New campuses sprang up to handle the influx, including

Claremont McKenna College, Marlboro College, and the State University of New York at Binghamton. In 1944, the United States was home to 58 two-year community colleges. By 1947, there were 358.⁴⁰

The results of the bill, however, could have been even better. The GI Bill included black veterans in the deal but let local governments decide how to allocate the money. All too predictably, black GIs received much, much less generous subsidies.⁴¹ The bill that opened doors of opportunity to so many people who had previously been left out effectively barred entry for too many others.

Despite its shortcomings, the GI Bill demonstrates the transformative effects of smart, targeted investments. The beneficiaries did not just rejoin society; they remade it. The second pillar of the GI Bill, low-interest home loans, boosted homeownership from 44 percent before the war to 60 percent by the mid-1950s.⁴² (Here, again, black GIs were largely excluded.) This, in turn, spurred the tremendous growth of the suburbs and buoyed an already-booming economy. All told, historians estimate that for every \$1 invested in returning World War II veterans, the country recouped \$8.⁴³ But the true benefits are incalculable.

CREATING A PROSPEROUS FUTURE

Many years ago, trying to get across Los Angeles to a job interview in Watts, I budgeted an hour and a half to take the five buses from my house to my destination. Two and a half hours later—well after my interview would have ended—I got off bus number four and turned around, defeated.

Frustration like this—to say nothing of lost opportunity—reflects a reality still common to people of color living in low-income neighborhoods. Connections to jobs, schools, hospitals, and grocery stores, and often to each other, are few and far between. One in five African-Americans—and 12 percent of Latinos—live in households without access to a car.⁴⁴ Two-thirds of the roads on Native American reservations are unpaved.⁴⁵ Half of the people who use public transit are people of color, yet far too many cannot get where they need to go.⁴⁶

In Chicago, four out of five residents cannot reach their jobs in 90 minutes or less using public transit.⁴⁷

“Transportation touches every aspect of where we live, work, play, and go to school, as well as the physical and natural world,” writes author and scholar Robert Bullard, often described as the father of the environmental justice movement.⁴⁸ “Transportation also plays a pivotal role in shaping human interaction, economic mobility, and sustainability.”

If the United States can get equitable infrastructure right, the benefits will ripple far and wide. Transportation investments, particularly public transit projects, create many jobs and contracting opportunities building and maintaining infrastructure. With the right policies in place, those investments can do the double work of building the physical infrastructure that connects residents of underserved neighborhoods to economic opportunities while also delivering jobs and business opportunities to those residents.

Over the next five years, the country could generate more than one million transit-related jobs if the 20 largest cities in America merely

shifted half of their transportation budget from funding highways to funding transit.⁴⁹ No new spending, just shifting our priorities.

Businesses would benefit, too. A Harvard Business School survey of business leaders' priorities found that more and better public transportation was at the top of their wish list,⁵⁰ and it's easy to see why. Better transportation leads to less absenteeism, and it gives businesses a larger pool of candidates to choose from to fill the available jobs.⁵¹ In a 2013 study, urban planning scholar Daniel Chatman of the University of California, Berkeley, and Robert Noland of Rutgers University calculated that when metro areas added even just a few bus or rail seats—four for every 1,000 residents—this increased the number of employees working in the central city by 320 per square mile, nearly a 20 percent increase on average.⁵² Similarly, the researchers found that expanding public transit 10 percent boosted the city's total economic output between 1 and 2 percent. Chatman and Noland estimate that the “hidden economic value” of public transit was \$45 million in the average metro area, with a range between \$1.5 million and nearly \$2 billion depending on the size of the region.

The ripples don't end there. When people have access to public transit, they can more easily attend good schools and take advantage of higher education, which creates a more prepared workforce for the region. They can more readily get to health clinics and hospitals, allowing for greater preventive care and lower health care costs. Evidence also suggests that public transit leads to a decrease in crime. Simply put, better transit means better access to opportunity. Indeed, the pioneering Stanford University economist Raj Chetty has identified the top 10 cities for upward economic mobility. Five of them—New York, San Francisco, Boston, Washington, D.C., and Seattle—are also in the top 10 for physical mobility.⁵³

To maximize benefits like these, metropolitan regions around the country are rethinking their transportation strategies and investments. The neighboring cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul offer a glimpse of how this is playing out. People of color—more than a quarter of whom are poor—have long been concentrated in disinvested neighborhoods and cut off from opportunity.⁵⁴ Initial plans for a new Green Line light-rail corridor overlooked these neighborhoods—reminding me of Bullard's observation, “Follow the transportation dollars and one can tell who is important and who is not.”⁵⁵ But local activists worked with the federal government, city government, and others to rewrite the old rules.⁵⁶ Now, when the city evaluates the viability of a transportation project, planners assign points based on whether the proposed road or rail will enhance racial equity.⁵⁷ In other words, equity—not just safety or usage statistics, the traditional metrics for transportation considerations—has become central to transportation decisions.

The Green Line is a model of inclusive growth. People of color have made up nearly a fifth of the work hours on the project.⁵⁸ Women- and minority-owned small businesses have earned nearly 20 percent of construction contracts, worth \$115 million.⁵⁹ The light rail now stops in previously neglected neighborhoods, connecting those residents to the more robust job markets in downtown Minneapolis and St. Paul.

The nation can apply curb-cut thinking far beyond transportation infrastructure, to strengthen the entire economy. The misshapen way in which the economy has grown is a problem not only for those at the bottom. As everyone from the OECD⁶⁰ to the International

Monetary Fund⁶¹ has concluded, widening inequality leads to declining economic growth. When a country fails to include a large number of people in its economy—when it restricts the circle of opportunity—the economy is weakened and the whole nation suffers.

There's no mystery about how to decrease inequality and increase economic growth. The answer is not easy credit or subprime mortgages or the privatization and parceling off of the social safety net. The antidote to inequality is equity. That means growing good jobs and improving the pay and quality of low-wage jobs. It means building human capabilities by upgrading the education and skills of today's workforce, and tomorrow's. It means eliminating barriers to economic inclusion and civic participation—for example, by revamping a criminal justice system that has trapped seven million people, the vast majority of them black and brown.⁶² And it means expanding opportunity by investing in the most distressed places in America, and in the people who live there.

If the chasm between the gleaming skyscrapers of Manhattan and the barrios of East Los Angeles is holding the entire country back and limiting American economic potential, just think what closing that chasm with well-chosen policies would do. In 2012, blacks, Latinos, and Asian businesses grew more than three times faster than white-owned businesses⁶³—so imagine the entrepreneurial energy waiting to be unleashed if the country strengthens programs to boost business owners of color. Imagine the impact of connecting poor people and young people of color to high-growth industries like technology. The term “equity” in a corporate context is currently defined as a mere tally of assets and liabilities. But with racially diverse companies 35 percent more likely to outperform their peers,⁶⁴ imagine the rewards to be reaped if equity came to mean so much more.

Shrinking the racial gap in the US economy—simply employing and paying workers of color at the same rates as white workers—would boost the total GDP of America's 150 largest metro areas by nearly a quarter.⁶⁵ New York City metro would add 31 percent—\$409 billion—to its GDP. Miami's GDP would grow 41 percent, adding nearly \$113 billion. In Brownsville, Texas, GDP stands to grow 131 percent. In total, building a racially equitable economy would add \$2.1 trillion to America's annual GDP.

The curb-cut effect underscores the foundational belief that we are one nation, that we rise or fall together. Without equity, there can be neither progress nor prosperity. Despite years of politicians insisting otherwise, the laws of economic gravity have always run in reverse. Opportunity doesn't trickle down; it cascades out and up.

The initiatives described here are not handouts or giveaways; they are investments in the broader well-being of society. They are highly efficient. They are not a sweeping takeover by the federal government. In fact, many—if not most—rely on policies implemented at the state and local levels.

This is not a liberal or a conservative issue. It is not strictly a question of morality or efficiency. All of us—Democrats and Republicans, businesses and nonprofit organizations, city dwellers and suburbanites alike—have an interest in developing targeted, achievable reforms that yield real results and make noticeable differences in the lives of our most vulnerable. The inescapable conclusion is that it is right and smart to let hard-working Americans see more of the benefits of their hard work. It is right and smart to give more Americans, indeed all Americans, the chance to contribute to this country. It is right and

smart to build a future in which every American, regardless of skin color or economic quintile, can participate and prosper. What is called for is nothing less than a return to the notion of a common good.

Half a century ago, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. prophetically wrote from a Birmingham, Ala., jail cell, “We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.”⁶⁶ Outside that building today, a plaque commemorates its most famous inmate. Along the sidewalk, at regular intervals, are curb cuts. ■

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