

# *Evaluation of Whiteman Airport's Operational Future and Exploration of Equitable Transit- Oriented Development as an Alternative Use*

A Master's Applied Research Paper submitted to the faculty of Georgia Institute of Technology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of City and Regional Planning in the College of Design.

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# Executive Summary

Community members in Pacoima, California have been urging for the closure of Whiteman Airport (WHP) due to various concerns, including air and noise pollution, inadequate communication from the airport after accidents, public safety risks, and limited community benefits. Groups opposed to a WHP closure believe the municipal airport provides many benefits to the Los Angeles (LA) region such as opportunities for aviation education, jobs, emergency services, and critical air traffic relief for nearby airports. As the owners of WHP, Los Angeles County has made incremental progress towards rectifying community harms. After an extensive community engagement process, called *Re-envisioning Whiteman Airport*<sup>1</sup>, Los Angeles County Department of Public Works determined that some recommended improvements are dependent on the long-term future of the airport. If the LA County Board of Supervisors decides to pursue an airport closure as a long-term solution, the Department of Public Works estimates that a full redevelopment study for the airport land would take five to ten years. This study seeks to serve as preliminary research for that redevelopment study and explore an alternative use of the land that may better serve the community: equitable transit-oriented development (ETOD). Before any redevelopment is explored, this study summarizes and evaluates the main arguments for and against a Whiteman Airport closure. Topics related to Whiteman Airport's existence and future, such as environmental justice, gentrification, and transit-oriented development are also explored. To fully explore ETOD as a viable scenario for redevelopment of the site, this study includes a case study analysis of similar projects or efforts, such as the Stapleton Redevelopment project, Mueller Austin redevelopment project, ETOD in Denver, and ETOD in Twin Cities. To inform the subsequent exploration of ETOD, strategies and best practices are pulled from the cases, such as: creation of a TOD fund, involvement of community land trusts, comprehensive housing affordability policies, developer incentives, and collaborative public and private partnerships. The exploration for ETOD as an alternative use describes local and regional context, applicable funding mechanisms in Los Angeles and California, and how ETOD may enhance community benefit and economic development opportunities. Finally, the results of the argument evaluation,

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<sup>1</sup> [Home | Whiteman Airport \(reenvisionwhitemanairport.com\)](https://www.reenvisionwhitemanairport.com)

case study analysis, and ETOD exploration are used to create foundational elements to be included in future redevelopment plans.

# Section 1. Introduction

The Los Angeles County Department of Public Works, through its Aviation Division, oversees the development, operation, and maintenance of their five general aviation airports, one of which is Whiteman Airport. Whiteman Airport is in Pacoima, a San Fernando Valley suburb, within the City of Los Angeles. There has been an onslaught of calls from the surrounding community to shut this airport down due to a multitude of concerns evaluated in this study. Simultaneously, the aviation community, among other groups, have expressed their concern about negative implications from a potential airport closure. Local elected officials have also joined the call to express their concern or support regarding an airport closure, making this a highly politicized issue. Given the nuance and complexities of Whiteman Airport's operational future, Los Angeles (LA) County Public Works underwent a strategic planning effort, named *Re-envisioning Whiteman Airport: A Community-driven Process*. This extensive process primarily focused on re-envisioning the airport and improving its relationship and benefit to the community. However, at the conclusion of this process, the Community Advisory Committee (CAC), made up of local stakeholders and experts, voted in favor of recommending an airport closure. The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors has taken steps to improve airport and community compatibility in the short-term, but an airport closure and a long-term redevelopment plan are years away from commencement. This study aims to draw recommendations and conclusions from the ongoing arguments on Airport's operational future as well as other redevelopment projects relevant to this context and serve as a preliminary exploration of equitable transit-oriented development (ETOD) as an alternative use at Whiteman Airport.

## Background and Context

Whiteman Airport (WHP) was originally established in 1946 by Marvin E. Whiteman Sr. as a private general aviation airport. Now LA County owned, the airport facilitates roughly 82,000 takeoffs and landings of aviation aircrafts each year. The facility is publicly available to general aviation aircraft all days of the week and hours of the day. The 184-acre site is home to 600 stored aircrafts and an Air Traffic Control Tower, which operates daily using navigational aids and an advanced weather reporting Automated Weather Observing System (AWOS).

The presence of this airport in the community of Pacoima has been a controversial topic since its inception, and Los Angeles County Public Works recently underwent a strategic planning process to brainstorm solutions to this nuanced topic. The *Re-envisioning Whiteman Airport: A Community-driven Process*, led by Los Angeles County Public Works, was separate and distinct from the required airport master planning process. Between June 2021 and February 2023, the County facilitated a community engagement process. The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors recognized that Whiteman Airport was such a complex problem to solve that a Community Advisory Committee (CAC) was needed to brainstorm solutions. The CAC, made up of stakeholders, community members, and aviation experts, met roughly once a month in person to discuss a re-envisioning of the airport. This diverse group allowed for the broadest range of knowledge to be present at a single table and formulate conceivable solutions. The County anticipates investing roughly \$3 million into the airport within the next five years in response to community members' feedback and their desire to improve the facility, operations, services, and explore a full closure of the airport. Since the CAC voted in favor of "Scenario 1," or the recommendation of an airport closure, the County has instituted a voluntary aircraft curfew and begun the process of phasing out leaded fuel. The County has also recently introduced a motion to research the economic impact of a Whiteman Airport closure. However, a full redevelopment study has not begun and will likely take 3 to 10 years.

This study hopes to serve as a jumping off point for any redevelopment efforts in the future. The research included, perspectives and case studies analyzed, subject matter expert narratives, and ETOD alternative use explored will contribute to the larger dialogue regarding Whiteman Airport's operational future and identify key elements to be considered in any redevelopment. This research aims to answer the questions of: (1) What are the merits behind the varied arguments on Whiteman Airport's existence and operational future (2) What strategies and lessons can be applied to Whiteman Airport redevelopment using similar case studies (3) What are relevant programs and funding mechanisms that be employed for redevelopment at Whiteman Airport and (4) What is the potential for ETOD as an alternative use of the Whiteman Airport land?

## Objectives

My core study objectives are as follows:

1. Effectively engage with arguments on Whiteman Airport's existence and future.
2. Demonstrate a thorough case study analysis on airport redevelopment projects and ETOD efforts.
3. Explore the potential for ETOD as an alternative plan for Whiteman Airport land using local and regional context and opportunities.
4. Create foundational elements that must be included in the alternative use plan using the Evaluation of Arguments, Case Study Analysis findings, and ETOD exploration.
5. Illustrate the alternative use plan with implementable steps.

## Structure of Paper

**Section 2** of this study includes the research methods used to achieve the core research objectives. This section provides an overview of the qualitative research methods used, including: a summary and evaluation of arguments featuring background interviews, a literature review, and a case study analysis. **Section 3** summarizes and evaluates the contradicting arguments regarding improvements or closure to Whiteman Airport and the argument analysis key findings. **Section 4** includes a theoretical literature review on core research topic and introduces transit-oriented development. **Section 5** includes findings from the case study analysis using airport redevelopment projects and ETOD efforts. **Section 6** includes the full exploration of ETOD as an alternative use using relevant context and programs. **Section 7** includes the resulting foundational elements recommended for redevelopment, implementation steps, and a SWOT analysis on the ETOD exploration. Lastly, **Section 8** includes a summary of final conclusions for the implementation of ETOD as an alternative use and next steps for research.

## Section 2. Research Methods

In this section, I delineate the methodological framework and process employed to investigate the alternative use of Whiteman Airport land. I start by listing the research steps followed, then sources, and finally, explaining the research approach used. Subsequently, I expand on each strategy employed.

### Research Process

1. Background Research for Problem Statement
2. Theoretical Literature Review of Core Concepts
  - a. The criteria used for identifying sources was to first identify leading scholars for each concept and ensure there were at least two credible sources included for each subsection. Broad perspectives were included to ensure this foundational research offered a comprehensive foundation for my research question and objectives. For example, contradicting arguments are included on whether or not gentrification or environmental injustices are simply market dynamics at play or an intentional and preventable harm done to those in marginalized communities. In identifying sources, there was also a preference toward research that features California or Los Angeles regional perspectives.
3. Qualitative Approach
  - a. Perspective Analysis
    - i. Creation of standards to include in the alternative use
  - b. Case Study Analyses
    - i. Strategies, best practices, and lessons learned to inform alternative use
  - c. Subject Matter Expert Interviews
    - i. Narrative analysis to underpin research needs and direction for alternative use.

## Data

The following secondary source was used in the creation of my problem statement. The core framing of Whiteman Airport's existence in Pacoima as an "environmental justice issue" was the impetus for exploring alternative uses at the site.

## Environmental Justice

For this research, the CalEnviroScreen (CES) tool serves as a pivotal instrument in assessing the environmental justice implications surrounding the Whiteman Airport land. CES, updated to version 4.0 as of October 2021 by the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment under the California Environmental Protection Agency, is designed to identify communities disproportionately affected by various sources of pollution. By integrating pollution burden data and demographic data, CES offers a comprehensive understanding of environmental health disparities. Utilizing CES enables a structured approach to assess the current environmental state of Pacoima and other environmental factors to consider in the exploration of an alternative use at the Whiteman Airport site, guiding policymakers and stakeholders towards more equitable and sustainable decision-making processes.

## Qualitative Approach

For this study, a qualitative research approach is employed to delve deeply into the multifaceted dimensions of the Whiteman Airport discussion. This qualitative approach includes the following strategies for analysis: Summary and Evaluation of Arguments, Case Study Analyses, and two background interviews.

## Summary and Evaluation of Arguments

After a content analysis of all materials and reports relating to Whiteman Airport were initially reviewed, main categories of perspectives and narratives regarding Whiteman Airport's operational future were identified. Primary data was drawn from LA County's report, *Re-Envisioning Whiteman Airport: A Community Driven Process*, and secondary data was captured through media outlets (Facebook, Nextdoor, blog posts, etc.) referencing Whiteman Airport. Specifically, the *Re-Envisioning* Final Report's community engagement section and public comment summaries were used. This section includes their outreach strategy, an overview of

meeting format, meeting dates, materials presented and distributed at all meetings, accommodations made at meetings, points of engagement (website, social media), number of attendees at meetings, and number of comments received at each meeting. Over 2,000 total comments were received and organized into fourteen main categories of “Issues and Needs” (Figure 4.1, p. 17). The Community Advisory Committee (CAC) then created a list of recommendations based on those “Issues and Needs” and divided them into 6 main topic areas (*shown to the left*). Each topic area included a list of goals and objectives for the re-envisioning process. These topic areas informed the groupings of major perspectives. **The resulting argument topic areas being analyzed are:** Environmental Justice (Air Pollution and Noise Pollution), Community Benefit (Public Safety, Education and Programming, and Economic

Impact), Regional Air Capacity, and Displacement.

Figure 6. 2 - Topic Areas from CAC Workshop



The evaluation is divided by the core topic areas, and explores the different argument held for each topic. The three main groups with arguments are as follows:

**community members in support of an airport closure (Community Support), community members opposed to an airport closure (Community Opposed), and external parties or individuals who oppose an airport closure (External Opposed).** The evaluation will use ‘Community Support’, ‘Community Opposed’, and ‘External Opposed’ to classify each group.

I found it imperative to dive deeply into each topic area given that this is a complex issue affecting real people. Therefore, background interviews were conducted with two local practitioners and experts. Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) were interviewed to gain further understanding of all the complexities related to environmental justice and economic development. Each interview was conducted on the phone and lasted ten to thirty minutes. Between two to five questions were provided ahead of time. The SMEs include local

professionals with urban planning background who specialize in environmental environmental policy and economic development. SMEs are as follows:

- **Economic Development** - Humberto Quintana, Adjunct Professor at California State University, Northridge: Seminar in Planning for Communities and Local Economic Development
- **Environmental Justice** - Miguel Miguel, Pacoima Beautiful Policy Director

The Summary and Evaluation of Arguments is nuanced and evidence-based, anchoring the findings and conclusions on verifiable data and credible sources. Evidence used includes peer-reviewed research articles, governmental reports/studies, and documented empirical evidence from those who interact with the airport (nearby residents and/or those who use it).

## Case Study Analysis

Four case studies were included in this analysis in order to pull from a wide sample of real life applications of relevant redevelopment projects and efforts. The goal of this analysis is to gather real strategies employed for redevelopment (how to do it), successful or positive outcomes (what worked), unsuccessful outcomes (what did not work), and establish key takeaways for future practice (lessons learned).

The first two case studies are of airport redevelopment projects. While researching for airport redevelopment projects, the following criteria was employed:

- Project is in progress or completed (i.e. not only “proposed”)
- Project took place within the last three decades.
- Site of project is located at a former airport (i.e. not an airport expansion or a new airport on land that previously was not an airport)

Out of eight airport redevelopment projects found that fit all three criteria, two were chosen for the analysis due to their parallels with Whiteman Airport such as: both sites were publicly owned, there was a community push for redevelopment, an extensive community engagement

process for redevelopment was followed, and the end result features a mixed-use development. The redevelopment cases studies include:

- 1. Stapleton Redevelopment Project (Denver, Colorado)**
- 2. Mueller Austin (Austin, Texas)**

The next two case studies are of equitable transit-oriented development (ETOD) efforts. Given the recent emergence of this concept, there were far fewer examples to pull from. However, the first two criteria used in the previous case study analysis were duplicated. The following ETOD locations were chosen for the analysis:

- 3. Denver, TOD Fund**
- 4. Twin Cities, Central Corridor Funders Collaborative**

## Section 3. Summary and Evaluation of Arguments

This Summary and Evaluation of Arguments for and against a Whiteman Airport closure provides an overview of perspectives held by those impacted or interested in Whiteman Airport's (WHP) operational future and presents the potential merits of each perspective. Although Los Angeles County presented statements from participants with support or opposition to a WHP closure, no further analysis or research was done to verify or explore these claims. The idea behind providing an evidence-based evaluation of these distinct arguments is to explore the validity of all statements, but not to assign different weights to the various arguments (i.e. one argument is more important than another). The goal of this section is to gain a deeper understanding of viewpoints and experiences surrounding Whiteman Airport in order to ground the subsequent exploration of an alternative use at the site.

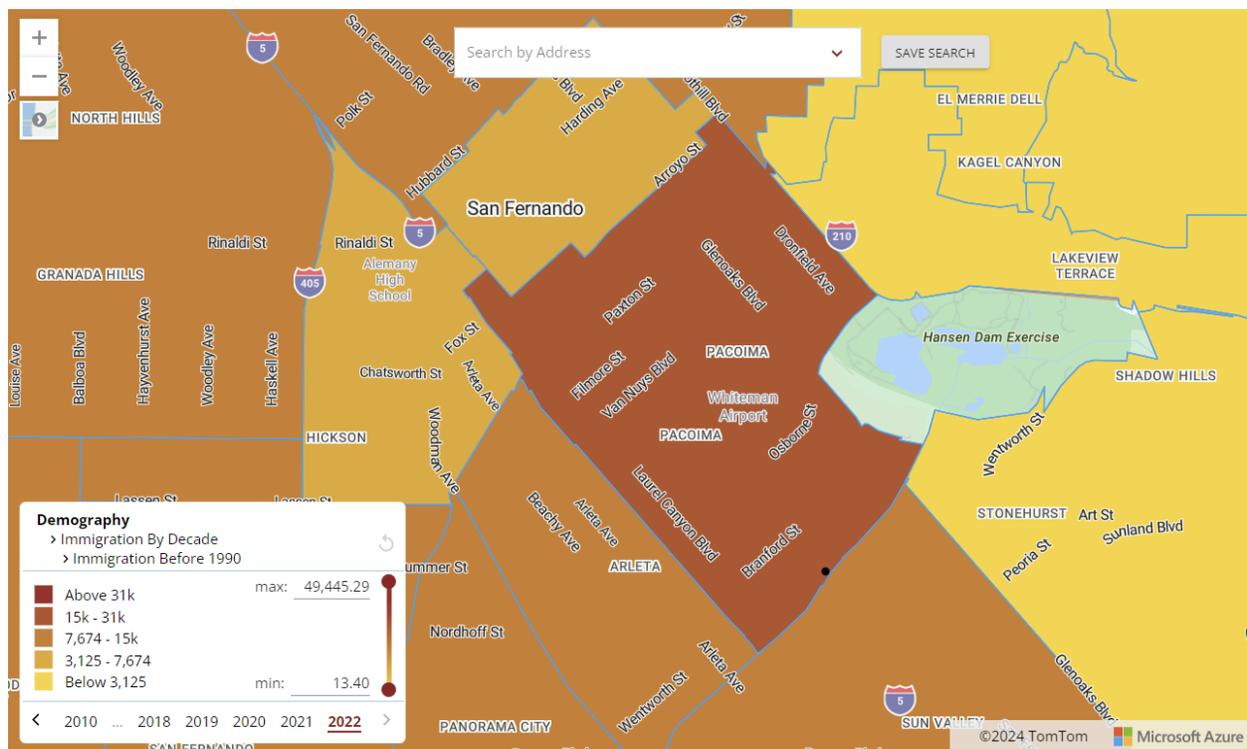
Some topic areas include contradictory perspectives regarding Whiteman Airport's operational future. The topic areas of pollution and economic impact require additional nuance. Therefore, this evaluation also includes two background interviews with local subjective matter experts (SMEs) to increase contextual awareness. These interviews aim to enhance the existing analyses in this study by incorporating real-world considerations on two important subjects,

“*Community*” within this evaluation is defined as individuals who live within Pacoima. It should be noted that external parties or individuals who support an airport closure do exist, but their perspectives are either the same or similar to those community members in support of an airport closure. External perspectives and evidence may drive greater involvement in discussions and planning for a potential airport closure due to concerns or curiosity about its impact on them.

### Environmental Justice

Environmental injustice is a foundational argument for the Community Support group in terms of why Whiteman should close. As discussed in the Literature Review, environmental justice refers to the fair distribution of environmental benefits and burdens, where all individuals, regardless of their race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status, have equal access to a clean and

healthy environment (Agyeman et al., 2016).<sup>2</sup> Environmental injustices are classified when there is a “disproportionate siting” of an environmental risk in a marginalized community. Pacoima was home to Native Americans and working-class Mexican farmers and laborers as early as the 1930s. The area was redlined in 1939 by the Federal Housing Administration, which left it susceptible to locally undesirable land uses (LULUs). These LULUs in communities of color are typically an indication of disproportionate sitings. In the 1920s and 1930s, Pacoima was widely known as the only place in the San Fernando Valley where people of color could purchase land.<sup>3</sup> Whiteman Airport was founded on former farmland in 1946 when there were already marginalized immigrants living in the community. This sequence of events is important to detail because the External Opposition group argues that “the airport was there first.” As shown in USC’s Neighborhood Data for Social Change, Pacoima had the highest concentration of immigration before the 1990s compared to all neighboring communities.



<sup>2</sup> Agyeman, J., Schlosberg, D., Craven, L., & Matthews, C. (2016, November 1). Trends and Directions in Environmental Justice: From Inequity to Everyday Life, Community, and Just Sustainability.

<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-environ-110615-090052>

<sup>3</sup> Accessed via: [History of Pacoima \(pacoimahistoricalsociety.org\)](http://pacoimahistoricalsociety.org) and [Pacoima historian tells the tale of America through the lens of her hometown – Daily News](#)

Less than 15 years after its founding, Pacoima community members called for a Whiteman Airport closure.<sup>4</sup> This historical documentation negates the arguments that calls to shut down Whiteman Airport have only been made recently.

## Air Pollution

The other leading factor in determining whether or not an environmental justice issue is present is the emission of pollutants from the LULUs. In this case, the air pollutant with the most varied perspectives is lead. Community Support group feels the lead air pollution risk from Whiteman is grounds for its closure. The External Opposition group feels there isn't enough evidence to suggest lead is a substantial threat to the community. Lead is a heavy metal found in the natural environment and in manufactured products, such as aviation fuel. When this fuel is burned, it is released directly into the air as suspended particles.<sup>5</sup> The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) conducted a study in October of 2023 that found "lead air pollution may reasonably be anticipated to endanger" public health and welfare under the Clean Air Act (EPA, Federal Register).<sup>6</sup> Although lead-based fuel was banned from being used by vehicles, it is still used for small aircrafts. Due to increased community concerns, the South Coast Air Quality Management District (SCAQMD) conducted a lead (Pb) monitoring study at Whiteman Airport between July 10 and September 2, 2022.<sup>7</sup> This study featured ten 24-hour samples that were measured at various stationary locations around Whiteman. Results from these measurements found an average Pb level concentration of 12.1 ng/m<sup>3</sup>, which is substantially lower than U.S. EPA's national standard of 150 ng/m<sup>3</sup>. In addition to the stationary measurements, South Coast AQMD used their new mobile monitoring system that swiftly detects various air toxic metals, including lead, providing real-time data and identifying metal hotspots in the community. Results from the September 27, 2022, mobile survey showed Pb levels generally below 15 ng/m<sup>3</sup>, with the highest reading near the 5 highway. These results were consistent with the stationary measurements taken at Whiteman and well below the U.S. EPA's standard of 150 ng/m<sup>3</sup>. These

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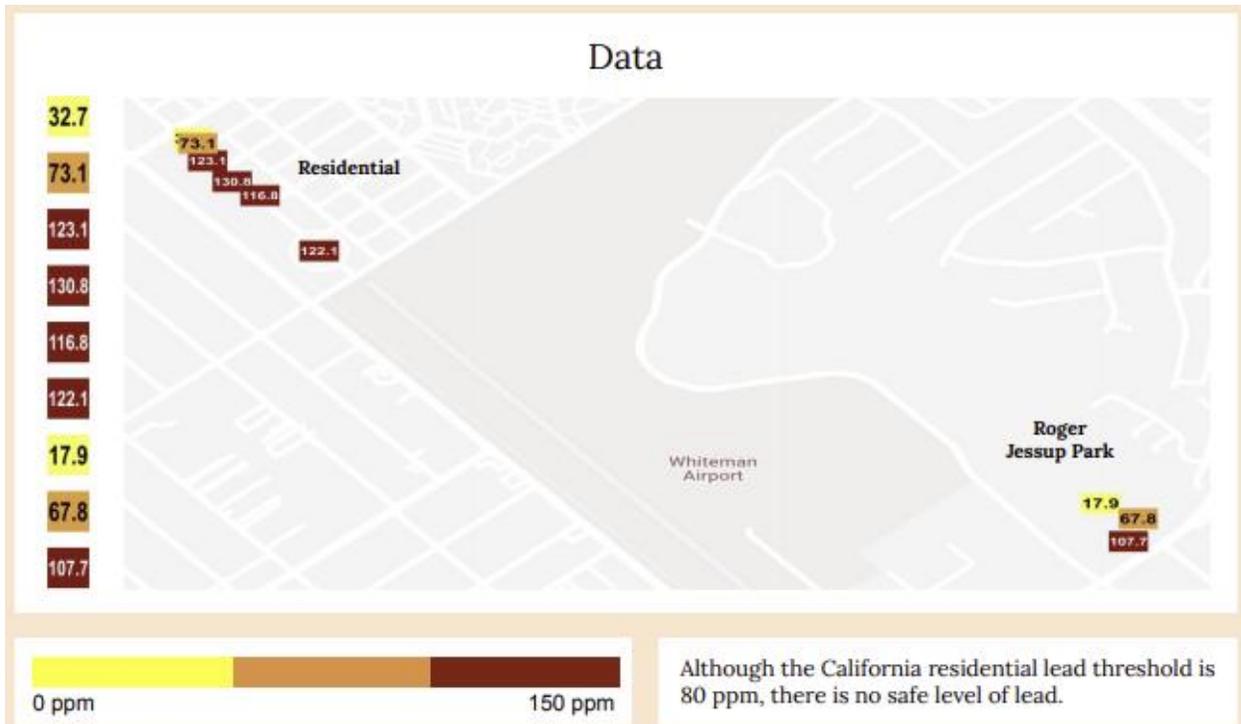
<sup>4</sup> Newspaper clipping taken from Pacoima & Whiteman Airport: A History of Harm, ArcGIS StoryMap, Accessed here: [Pacoima & Whiteman Airport: A History of Harm \(arcgis.com\)](https://arcgis.com/storymaps/view/1234567890)

<sup>5</sup> [Air Pollution from Lead - Texas Commission on Environmental Quality - www.tceq.texas.gov](https://www.tceq.texas.gov/air-quality/lead-pollution)

<sup>6</sup> [Federal Register :: Finding That Lead Emissions From Aircraft Engines That Operate on Leaded Fuel Cause or Contribute to Air Pollution That May Reasonably Be Anticipated To Endanger Public Health and Welfare](https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2023/10/23/2023-20343/finding-that-lead-emissions-from-aircraft-engines-that-operate-on-leaded-fuel-cause-or-contribute-to-air-pollution-that-may-reasonably-be-anticipated-to-endanger-public-health-and-welfare)

<sup>7</sup> [Whiteman Airport Lead Monitoring \(aqmd.gov\)](https://www.aqmd.gov/air-quality/lead-pollution)

results have been used by those opposed to WHP closure to state there is no air pollution risk to the surrounding community. However, even in low levels deemed acceptable by the EPA, lead still accumulates in the soil over time. Researchers at the USC Center for Children’s Environmental Health conducted a study on lead concentration in soil surrounding Whiteman Airport. The locations for sampling were chosen “based on their proximity to plane landing and takeoff paths.”<sup>8</sup> Each soil sample was tested three times and the average parts per million (ppm) was assigned to each sample. The results are shown below. EPA recently changed their lead screening level from 400 ppm to 200 ppm and will use the 100 ppm screening level if there are multiple sources of Pb exposure. Many of the residential soil samples around Whiteman were well above the 100 ppm screening level, which may indicate a need for further testing.



As demonstrated, varied perspectives regarding pollution from Whiteman Airport are complex and both arguments have precedent. It is important to note that Whiteman Airport is not the sole pollution contributor in Pacoima and therefore nearby residents are impacted by multiple pollution sources at once. Focusing solely on lead air pollution from Whiteman neglects the broader environmental justice discourse, which encompasses a wider array of issues.

<sup>8</sup> [USC Project](#), Center for Children’s Environmental Health

### *Background Interview Regarding Air Pollution*

Community members have expressed their concern regarding environmental health risks from pollution. To better understand these risks, recent progress, and next steps, I spoke with Miguel Miguel, the Policy Director for Pacoima Beautiful. Pacoima Beautiful is Pacoima's oldest and most involved environmental justice nonprofit. Miguel explains that dismissive perspectives regarding the pollution risk of Whiteman partially stems from pollutant standards being set at the "macro-scale."<sup>9</sup> The SCAQMD's report on lead output from Whiteman Airport found lead levels far below the EPA's standard of what constitutes as a "risk." However, Miguel argues that the use of these standards by the California Air Resource Board (CARB) and SCAQMD reinforces equal air protection standards rather than equitable air protection standards. He advocates for "hyper-local" thresholds to be set to give an accurate indication of pollution risk from Whiteman in Pacoima. I asked him if TOD may be a solution for the environmental risks posed by Whiteman Airport. In regard to the environmental benefits from TOD, he stressed the importance of being clear on what the purpose of TOD is. He asks, "if the purpose of TOD is to incentivize community members to utilize transit" instead of driving "to reduce emissions, how are we tracking that?" Essentially, if emissions and pollutants are being tracked at the macro-scale, it will be hard to determine if micro-developments, such as a TOD at the Whiteman Airport site, would actually lead to cleaner air. He stresses the need for appropriate metrics and tools to be included in CARB and SCAQMD air quality analyses in order to accurately measure existing risk of pollutants and future benefits from interventions.

### Noise Pollution

Noise is a well-known contributing factor to pollution around airports. According to the U.S. EPA, noise becomes pollution when it either diminishes one's quality of life, or it interferes with daily activities such as: sleeping or conversing. This happens when persistent or escalating noise becomes an annoyance, which can adversely affect one's health.<sup>10</sup> Noise-induced health problems include stress related illnesses, high blood pressure, speech interference, hearing loss, sleep disruption, and loss of productivity. In addition to noise pollution impacting health, it's been shown to impact home values. A study conducted by Friedt and Cohen on airport-related

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<sup>9</sup> Phone interview with Miguel Miguel on April 10, 2024

<sup>10</sup> [Clean Air Act Title IV - Noise Pollution | US EPA](#)

noise impact on home values found a “noise discount of around \$25,000 per sale of noise-affected” homes (2021).<sup>11</sup> In response to the adverse effects of noise pollution around airports, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) authorized the Federal Regulations Part 150 Noise Compatibility Study. This process would establish guidelines to measure current and future aircraft noise levels, outline actions to reduce aircraft noise, establish land use guidelines to foster community compatibility with an airport, and designate federal funding towards sound insulation for affected properties.

The Community Support group has used the noise pollution issue from Whiteman Airport as justification for its closure. An initial study administered by LA County and the CAC found that 335 residential units were potentially impacted land uses.<sup>12</sup> External Oppositions groups such as the Southern California Airspace Users Working Group (SCAUWG) have used the results of this study as evidence that noise pollution from Whiteman is not a problem. In SCAUWG’s open letter to Los Angeles Councilmembers and the local Congressman, they state that 335 residential units (less than 2% of the total units in Pacoima) “are qualified for noise relief services under the part 150 process.”<sup>13</sup> Although 2% seems like an insignificant percentage, this initial noise pollution study was separate from the Part 150 Study process. This “preliminary noise screening study” was an informal process to get a baseline understanding of noise pollution, whereas the Part 150 Study is a formal process that takes roughly three years. This formal process includes extensive data collection and a community engagement process. It is therefore premature to claim that no noise pollution issue is present at Whiteman Airport since the formal Part 150 Study has not yet been funded or started. In the meantime, Los Angeles County has implemented a voluntary aircraft curfew from 10 p.m. and 6 a.m. daily to mitigate noise pollution concerns.

## Community Benefit

The community benefit perspectives are the widest range and play a key role in determining necessary elements for any alternative use of the site. The Community Support group general

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<sup>11</sup> [Valuation of Noise Pollution and Abatement Policy: Evidence from the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport \(jhu.edu\)](#)

<sup>12</sup> [Microsoft Word - Document1 \(aopa.org\)](#)

<sup>13</sup> [New Data, A New Time – Whiteman Airport Shouldn’t be Under Siege! - Southern California Airspace Users Working Group \(scauwg.org\)](#)

feels like they do not receive enough of a benefit from the airport to justify its continued operation. The Community Opposed group has argued on this front mainly in regard to public safety benefits. The External Opposed group has argued that existing educational opportunities, programming, and the airport's economic impact provides a benefit outside of the immediate area, which is still regionally significant. This topic area therefore includes the main perspectives and evidence for public safety, education and programming, and economic impact.

## Public Safety - Emergency Services

Public safety and emergency preparedness was the most common argument used in the Community Opposed perspectives. Safety is an important asset for any community and especially a community like Pacoima that is vulnerable to multiple risk factors. One of the greatest threats to the community are climate-related hazards. Pacoima is susceptible to heat waves, drought, and wildfires. Los Angeles County conducted a Climate Vulnerability study that found extreme heat is projected to increase in severity, frequency, and duration with one of the largest increases happening in the San Fernando Valley.<sup>14</sup> With an increase in extreme heat tied with drought-related conditions, comes an increased risk of wildfires. These factors make the community acutely aware and sensitive to fire department capacity and location. There is a Los Angeles County Fire Department Station at 12605 Osborne St, Pacoima, CA 91331, directly adjacent to Whiteman Airport. Los Angeles County also has a Fire Air Operations Unit out of the Barton Heliport, also adjacent to Whiteman. These two facilities are critically important to the resiliency of the area and even Community Support group perspectives show a common interest in preserving these facilities. It is important not to conflate that County fire operations are “adjacent to and separate from Whiteman Airport” (p. 28). Therefore, the operational future of Whiteman Airport is not directly tied to the operational future of these facilities. However, Fire Department officials did express their support of the continued operation of Whiteman Airport. Although these Los Angeles County facilities are the main topic area for preserving public safety for the community, other emergency public services “utilize the Airport on a regular or occasional basis” (p. 23). These other emergency public services include: Los Angeles City Fire Department, Cal Fire, U.S. Forest Service, Civil Air Patrol, Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, Los Angeles Police Department, Federal Emergency Management

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<sup>14</sup> [LA-County-Climate-Vulnerability-Assessment-1.pdf \(lacounty.gov\)](#)

Agency, etc. In the event of a disaster, the Los Angeles County Office of Emergency Management (OEM) stated that airports serve as critical infrastructure to support emergency response, recovery missions, storage areas for critical resources, mass care, and shelter operations.

## Public Safety - Threat of Crashes

The threat and fear of crashes at or around Whiteman Airport is another main argument for an airport closure. Over the past decade, there have been 13 accidents in or around the Airport, as investigated by the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), the authority on aviation accident causes. Investigations by the NTSB typically span 18-24 months. There have been no reported injuries to the public from accidents since 1983, which has been used a core argument for External Opposition group. The NTSB released the results of its investigation into a November 2020 accident in January 2023. They determined the probable accident cause to be the failure of maintenance personnel to properly secure throttle control hardware during recent maintenance, leading to its disconnection and loss of engine power. The pilot attempted to reach the runway but collided with power lines short of the runway. Although no physical injury to the public was sustained, the crash happened outside a residential home on Sutter Avenue in Pacoima. A resident and her grandson saw the pilot die in front of them, which was reported to be mentally and emotionally traumatic. An LA Times article reports that safety concerns at Whiteman date back decades.<sup>15</sup> A 1990 LA County-sponsored study on Whiteman found “a relatively high number of incidents” and cited more than one accident each year from 1979-1990. Despite the historic and recent crash statistics, External Opposed parties have noted that small aircrafts flying to and from Whiteman (Cessnas and Pipers) are extremely light and those injured or killed are usually in the aircraft. Additionally, in-air crashes are being proactively prevented with flight path restrictions as to not conflict with Hollywood Burbank Airport flights. In comparison to other neighboring airports, Whiteman Airport’s accident rate is slightly higher. Los Angeles County's other airports generally experienced fewer incidents: El Monte had eight, La Verne had ten, Compton had six, and Lancaster had seven accidents during the same period.

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<sup>15</sup> [Crashes and pollution prompt calls to close L.A. airport - Los Angeles Times \(latimes.com\)](https://www.latimes.com/2023/01/03/crashes-and-pollution-prompt-calls-to-close-l-a-airport/)

## Education and Programming

In Los Angeles County's summary of public comments from the *Re-envisioning* process, a common theme identified was requesting Whiteman (or any new development) to address the community's greatest needs such as: education, job opportunities, and other public services. Disadvantaged communities in California, such as Pacoima, are characterized as communities which suffer most from a combination of economic, educational and environmental burdens. For this reason, the educational and programmatic benefits provided by Whiteman Airport are a hot topic for both all groups involved. The Community Opposed and External Opposed groups argue that Whiteman Airport provides a wide array of opportunities for the local youth. Several ongoing programs include:

- Air Explorer Program - offers affordable flight training for youth aged 14 to 21, with free instruction from volunteer Certified Flight Instructors.
- San Fernando Valley 99s Aviation Explorers 747 program - provides flight skills training for ages 14 to 20, preparing participants for aviation careers.
- Civil Air Patrol Squadron 35 (Group 1) - educates and trains interested civilians, serving as the nation's Air Force auxiliary, and fostering citizen volunteers.
- The Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA) Young Eagles program - provides free flights and awareness programs for community youth aged 8 to 17, with flights offered by EAA volunteers on the fourth Saturday of each month.

Additionally, Glendale Community College has a partnership with Whiteman Airport for a pilot training program using “college-owned aircraft.”<sup>16</sup> The presence of these programs is important, but the Community Support group would argue that it does not indicate a community benefit for those who live directly around the airport. Without an inventory of who is participating in these programs and where they live, it is hard to know that these are local community benefits. The knowledge on how to participate in these programs is not common knowledge and many public comments indicated that “established relationships, regular outreach, and connection points”

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<sup>16</sup> [Pilot Training | Glendale Community College](#)

between the airport and the community are missing.<sup>17</sup> Aside from the lack of community from the airport, costs to enroll in these programs was not disclosed in the final report. Given the socioeconomic status of many of the surrounding households, some of the opportunities may be cost-prohibitive.

## Negative Externalities of Closure

### Economic Development

Job creation is the most important economic impact of concern to all groups involved. This is both because Whiteman Airport houses multiple businesses and Pacoima has a lack of high-paying job opportunities. In 2020, Los Angeles County Public Works Department conducted an Economic Impact Analysis of their five regional airports.<sup>18</sup> There are a total of twenty-five businesses operating out of Whiteman as of 2020. These business types include helicopter operations, aircraft maintenance, hangar leasing, flight training, not-for-profit aviation organizations, and more. Whiteman Airport is reported to create 246 direct jobs and an additional 166 job opportunities through economic multipliers. The direct effect is characterized by economic activity occurring on site or linked to the airport. Indirect effect is characterized by the increased economic activity among connected industries, typically located off airport in surrounding communities. Between these two effects, the economic output of Whiteman is nearly \$90 million. Although the County's final report includes these statistics, there is no breakdown of the percentage of local hires included or if there was priority or outreach for job opportunities given to those who live in the local community. If this process and prioritization did take place, there would be a stronger argument made for those in the External Opposed groups in their claim around economic benefit to the community. However, it should be noted that those who work and fly out of Whiteman Airport may be frequenting local businesses for services, contributing to a net-positive induced economic effect. The value reported by the County for induced effect is \$22.7 million. An example of this effect is mortgage, auto payments, and healthcare spending. Once again, these benefits more clearly translate to a direct community benefit if those who work at the Airport also live in the community. In the local

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<sup>17</sup> Overview of Public Comments document, [Overview of public comments to date June2022 \(reenvisionwhitemanairport.com\)](https://reenvisionwhitemanairport.com)

<sup>18</sup> [LA County Airports Economic Impact Analysis 2020 .pdf](#)

regional scale, Whiteman Airport has the largest economic output compared to the other four Los Angeles County owned airports, indicating there would be an economic loss for the County if this land was sold or transitioned to a less productive use. The Community Opposed group is not in support of any alternative use that would lessen high-paying jobs for the community.

### *Background Interview Regarding Economic Impact*

Given that the economic impact of the closure of Whiteman Airport is a recurring argument and that economic development opportunities are pivotal, I thought it was important to speak with a local economic development expert. I wanted to better understand the results from the Los Angeles County Airports economic analysis and if Whiteman's economic output directly indicates a community benefit. Humberto Quintana, an adjunct professor in economic development at California State University Northridge (CSUN), stresses the importance of the "multiplier effect" for the secondary and tertiary industries that support the airport and are found in the community. The existing industry and related industries contain highly skilled jobs so any alternative used should provide the same level of salaries. In terms of economic opportunities, Humberto believes "Whiteman Airport can be seen as an asset to the community and there may be an opportunity for residents, such as workforce development, that is currently not being tapped into."<sup>19</sup> He advises that an asset assessment should be conducted to connect nearby existing opportunities such as the North Valley Occupational Center who offers an aircraft technician program located at Van Nuys Airport. Having a satellite campus could be beneficial for the community. The two airports are within close proximity to one another, less than ten miles apart. The Center could partner with EWDD to inject funds for tuition. If redevelopment were to take place, I asked Humberto how it would be financed. He explained the importance of benchmarking the redevelopment analysis, creating a strategic plan for the redevelopment site, and performing an economic analysis to understand redevelopment resources. Humberto hints at the difficulties that lie ahead for redevelopment of the site given that many of the tools previously available for "promoting development are no longer here." He references Governor Brown's decision to dissolve redevelopment agencies (RDAs) in 2012. Within project areas designated by the RDAs, jurisdictions could utilize tax increment financing (TIF) to incentive developers by limiting capital costs and offsetting financial risk in blighted communities. RDAs

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<sup>19</sup> Phone interview with Humberto Quintana on April 9, 2024

would consolidate the sites, purchase the land, and advise a developer to come in. This process was used to redevelop nearby land from the Price Pfister industrial site into retail including Costco, Lowes, and Best Buy. He also warns that Whiteman Airport will more than likely need remediation that could be costly. He believes no developer would be interested in the project until the owner remediates the land.

## Regional Air Capacity

Regional air capacity is a topic area of large concern for the External Opposed group. This topic does not fall under “Community Benefit” because those in the surrounding community of Pacoima are unlikely to own a plane at the airport given the cost. Regional air capacity is a concern for Los Angeles County, pilots, aircraft personnel and enthusiasts. As mentioned, Whiteman Airport is one of five airports owned by Los Angeles County. It is also one of nine public airports operating in Los Angeles County. The Airport is contained in the National Plan of Integrated Airport Systems (NPIAS) and is classified as a “Reliever Airport.” Reliever airports are defined as “general aviation airports that provide general aviation access to the surrounding areas and have 100 or more based aircraft.”<sup>20</sup> Their function is to reduce the aircraft mix at a commercial service primary airport and provide a less congested airport for smaller jet and general aviation operations. An active voice in the External Opposed group is the SCAUWG. In their open letter to the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, they also state the importance of reliever airports in “promoting efficient airspace management.”<sup>21</sup> In 2014, the National Business Aviation Association reported that the Los Angeles basin has “congested airspace that rivals the traffic on the freeways.”<sup>22</sup> However, they also reported that between Hollywood Burbank Airport and Van Nuys Airport, there is “a lot of airspace capacity.” The Airports Council International (ACI) advances the collective interests of the world’s airports and promotes efficient airport management and operations. ACI reported global airport traffic forecasts from 2023-2052 and found that “global passenger traffic in 2024 is predicted to surpass

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<sup>20</sup> [WHP\\_Chapter3Draft.pdf \(ladpw.org\)](#)

<sup>21</sup> [Open Letter to Supervisor Horvath - Preserving Whiteman Airport: A Vital Hub for Emergency Response, Public Safety, Community Prosperity & Aviation Education - Southern California Airspace Users Working Group \(scauwg.org\)](#)

<sup>22</sup> [Business Aviation Capacity Looks Good at Los Angeles-Area Airports | NBAA - National Business Aviation Association](#)

the 2019 level for the first time since COVID-19, reaching 9.7 billion passengers.”<sup>23</sup> Between 2023 and 2052, the United States remains in the top 2 ranked markets by total passenger traffic forecast. These global predictions indicate that the need for air capacity will continue to increase, which may suggest the growing importance for reliever airports.

NASA recently released a study exploring Regional Air Mobility (RAM). RAM is the transportation of passengers and goods by air, primarily using smaller regional airports. Their study explores how RAM technology investments may benefit the convenience, speed, and safety of air travel for “all Americans.”<sup>24</sup> NASA reports that nine major U.S. airports are considered capacity-constrained, meaning too many people and planes are trying to use the same resources simultaneously. Two to six additional airports are predicted to become capacity-constrained by 2030. Their report claims that with the growing trend of investing in and expanding RAM, small regional airports can bring sizeable economic development, employment opportunities, and a better quality of life for residents. This is an important consideration to understand the perspectives of those who are opposed to a Whiteman Airport closure.

## Community Displacement

One of the leading causes of community opposition to a Whiteman Airport closure is the potential for displacement from an alternative use. Public comments have presented suggestions for improvements and changes to the land including a mix of new uses, community amenities, open spaces, and small local businesses. Local elected officials have also implied their desire to see a more productive use at the site. These hypothetical improvements would then increase the property value of the land and the property values of the land around the new development. Property taxes and rents would then likely increase leading to the unaffordability of housing in the area and subsequent displacement of community members. This is the process that gentrification and resulting displacement typically follows. Gentrification is a process related to changes in land use, housing, community demographics, and socioeconomics. These separate but related factors make tracking and studying displacement challenging. However, the prevalence of displacement throughout large cities has led to innovative ways to track and visualize ongoing

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<sup>23</sup> [WATF \(aci.aero\)](#)

<sup>24</sup> [2021-04-20-RAM.pdf \(nasa.gov\)](#)

displacement or the risk of displacement. The Urban Displacement Project (UDP), a research and action initiative of the University of California Berkeley and the University of Toronto, stands at the forefront of this effort. UDP conducts community-centered, data-driven research aimed at fostering more equitable and inclusive urban futures. By comprehensively understanding and describing the dynamics of gentrification, displacement, and exclusion, UDP endeavors to provide insights into how policy interventions and investments can support more equitable development, aligning directly with the goals of this research. The UDP interactive map was used to confirm Pacoima's vulnerability to displacement.

Unless measures are taken to preserve housing affordability, offset gentrification and displacement, and incorporate equity measures into development, the fear of potential displacement is warranted. On top of the market demand pressures surrounding Whiteman's hypothetical alternative use, the incoming nearby East San Fernando Valley Light Rail Transit Project may result in transit-induced displacement.<sup>25</sup> There is a high demand for living in close proximity to transit and lack of supply, which leads to an increase in price for any housing surrounding transit. Transit-oriented development (TOD) may help offset this pressure on local housing by increasing the housing stock near transit. However, TOD also has the capacity to displace existing riders in the community. With these considerations in mind, only *equitable* transit-oriented development is explored for the site. The following section will draw best practices, lessons learned, and implementation strategies from redevelopment projects, including ETOD projects.

## Key Findings

This analysis includes varied perspectives relating to Whiteman Airport's operational future, which inform some key considerations for any redevelopment of the site. Given the original framework of Whiteman Airport as an environmental justice problem, and the environmental impacts sustained by the community, any alternative use should prioritize limiting future environmental harms. Prior to redevelopment, further studies on lead and noise pollution are

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<sup>25</sup> Delmelle, Elizabeth. Transit-induced gentrification and displacement: The state of the debate. Accessed via: [Transit-induced gentrification and displacement: The state of the debate - ScienceDirect](#)

needed to understand the extent of environmental harm. The perspectives on community benefit highlight the desires to preserve public safety and emergency services. In addition to maintaining the function of Los Angeles County's fire station, additional public services on the site could also benefit community members. Although it has been established that Whiteman Airport creates and sustains jobs for the broader Los Angeles County region, it is unclear what the direct economic return is for nearby community members. To ensure the preservation of these jobs and maintain similar regional air capacity, an airport relocation or offsite facility within the region away from residential neighborhoods could be explored. Even if redevelopment is not pursued, the current Whiteman Airport programs will have to be improved and expanded. If redevelopment is pursued, job and workforce development, educational opportunities, and affordability must be a top priority to limit harm to the community.

## Section 4. Literature Review

This theoretical literature review will include an overview and analysis of leading scholarship and research in **environmental justice, gentrification, and transit-oriented development (TOD)**. These core concepts were chosen due to their intrinsic relationship to the Whiteman Airport discussion and the various arguments regarding its operational future. Whiteman Airport debates are largely framed around environmental justice because of the pollution emitted from airport operations, its close proximity to residential neighborhoods, and the fact that Pacoima is known as an “EJ” community. The structure of this literature review presents the core concepts of the natural order that they occur in the research: existing environmental justice problem, potential impact if redevelopment was to occur (gentrification), and the specific development being explored (TOD). Each concept includes subsections such as: background and *context*, related *theories*, and *connections* to the following core concept or broader research. This review features applications to my research incorporated throughout and seeks to establish my understanding of existing research and underscore the importance of further exploring the concepts as they relate to Whiteman Airport and a potential alternative use on the site.

### Environmental Justice

Environmental justice is a term coined by Robert Bullard, Paul Mohai, Robin Saha, and Beverly Wright in the 1980s. Because of his contribution to *Bean v. Southern Waste Management*, the United States’ “first ethnographic study” that made the connection between polluting industries and their close proximity to communities of color<sup>26</sup>, as well as subsequent publications on the issue of environmental justice, Dr. Robert Bullard is now known as the father of environmental justice. His book, *Dumping in Dixie*, is one of eighteen award winning books published on environmental justice. In this book he explains that in order to understand environmental justice as it stands today, we must first explore the historical conditions in the South that birthed this concept and movement. In the 1940s through the 1960s there was a massive out-migration of

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<sup>26</sup> Dr. Robert Bullard, Father of Environmental Justice, Blog Post, Clear Air Council, Accessed from: <https://cleanair.org/dr-robert-bullard-father-of-environmental-justice/#:~:text=Robert%20Bullard%2C%20the%20father%20of%20the%20environmental%20justice%20movement>.

Black people from Southern states, known as the Great Migration. This was due to jim crow laws, lynchings, and lack of economic opportunities and housing.<sup>27</sup> This changed in the 1970s when the South became known as having a “good business climate,” which included relaxed environmental regulations, low business taxes, an eager yet non-unionized workforce, and vigorous law enforcement (Bullard, 1990)<sup>28</sup>. Between 1975 and 1985, there was a net in-migration of Black and African Americans (AA) of 282 thousand. The “Rise of the South ” was characterized by the increase of industries locating here and rapid growth. The Rise of the South in the 1970s and 1980s led to an increase in land-use conflicts around “use value” (neighborhood interests) and “exchange value” (business interests) (Bullard, 1990). Typically, those in favor of business interests were able to go forward with their land development plans in exchange for the promise of “new jobs.” There is historical precedent in the South of economic boosters getting support from the working class majority through “the claim that growth makes jobs” (Molotch 1976)<sup>29</sup>. A similar scenario is playing out in the San Fernando Valley at Whiteman Airport. Whiteman Airport supporters use the fear of job loss opportunities as an argument for keeping the airport operational. This argument is explored further in the next section.

Although the South experienced significant growth in the 1970s and 1980s, black people, women, and those in rural areas “benefitted very little or not at all” (Falk, Lyson, 1988)<sup>30</sup> from this economic growth. This was due to a range of issues such as industries intentionally favoring white male workers and avoiding locating in inner cities, which were predominantly Black and African American. Black people in the inner cities could not easily access economic opportunities in the suburbs due to housing discrimination, residential discrimination, and poor public transportation (Bullard, 1990). Therefore, they had to settle for the nearby pollution-ridden manufacturing jobs and risk their own health. This set of circumstances where people of color live or work in close proximity to polluting industries is the quintessential early example of an environmental justice issue. Similarly, in the neighborhood of Pacoima, where Whiteman is located, nearby work opportunities and transportation options are lacking. Supporters of the

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<sup>27</sup> The Great Migration, National Archives, 2021, Accessed from: [The Great Migration \(1910-1970\) | National Archives](#)

<sup>28</sup> Dr. Robert Bullard, *Dumping in Dixie*, Chapter 2, 1990

<sup>29</sup> Harvey Molotch, *The City as a Growth Machine: Toward a Political Economy of Place*, American Journal of Sociology 82, September 1976

<sup>30</sup> William Falk, Thomas Lyson, *High Tech, Low Tech, No Tech*, 1988

Airport argue that it is a hub for jobs and economic growth. The issues of affordable housing, job opportunities, and lack of transportation options are all interrelated historically and contribute to the complexities of Whiteman Airport as an environmental justice issue today.

In 1987, *Toxic Wastes and Race*, “documented disproportionate environmental burdens facing people of color” and poor communities across the country (Bullard et al, 2007).<sup>31</sup> The impetus for the creation of this report was one of the first cases of environmental justice in Warren County, North Carolina, where a PCB (polychlorinated biphenyl) landfill ignited major protests and demonstrations. This report was the first time a credible correlation had been made between waste facility sites and community demographics. Race was found to be the most significant variable “in predicting where these facilities were located” (Bullard et al, 2007). The findings were historic and sparked a national environmental justice movement that encompasses many theories, trends, and interdisciplinary connections.

## Theories

This subsection seeks to create a conceptual framework of environmental justice based on the theories of distributive justice, procedural justice, and the relationship to ecological factors. Environmental justice has many definitions as a concept and movement, but this subsection will use David Schlosberg’s foundational argument in, *Defining Environmental Justice: Theories, Movements, and Nature*, to conceptualize it. Scholsberg’s foundational argument is that although distributive theories can be applied to environmental justice, they must be paired with concepts of procedural and participatory justice.

The theory of distributive justice focuses on the distribution of goods in a society, and “the best principles by which to distribute those goods” (p. 3). In the context of environmental justice, the goods being distributed equally or unfairly would refer to ecological factors, such as: clean air, clean water, clean soil, etc. However, Scholosberg argues that we must also discuss “the processes that *construct* maldistribution” (p. 4). This aspect is an important consideration because one of the main concerns of Pacoima residents is the exclusive nature in which

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<sup>31</sup> Robert D. Bullard, Paul Mohal, Robin Saha, and Beverly Wright, *Toxic Wastes and Race at Twenty: Why Race Still Matters After All of These Years*, 2007

Whiteman Airport operates and makes decisions that affect the surrounding community. Procedural justice emphasizes the critical analysis of fair processes and highlights how people's perception of fairness is heavily influenced by their experiences rather than just the outcome.<sup>32</sup> According to Yale School of Law's Justice Collaboratory, people's perception on whether or not they were treated fairly is dependent on several factors, including whether or not they were given voice and whether or not the decision-maker conveyed trustworthy motives. The decision-makers in this case would be the Los Angeles County Public Works Department, Board of Commissioners, and Whiteman Airport as an entity. Although these parties didn't establish Whiteman Airport in this area to begin with, the private parties who did, may have used the justification of "economic rationality" for why this location was chosen. Economic rationality is a "thesis advanced by researchers to counter claims of discrimination in siting patterns" of hazardous or pollution emitting facilities (Dorceta, 2014).<sup>33</sup> A private businesses main motivator is to control costs and therefore they are driven to buy land where it is the cheapest. This process is done without input from the surrounding community because that is how land market dynamics typically work. However, it is fair to expect that as soon as this private entity (Whiteman Airport) was purchased by a public entity (Los Angeles County), that public participation would have or should have been part of the process. Procedural participation is integral to environmental justice, as defined by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in 1998, encompassing "fair treatment and meaningful involvement" of all individuals in decisions or developments with potential environmental risks. Early circumstances and decisions made around Whiteman Airport have likely influenced the surrounding communities' perception of procedural justice. There was no early participatory process or consensus to build the airport or for the County to buy it in 1973. In fact, Pacoima residents had been calling for a Whiteman Airport closure as early as the 1960s.<sup>34</sup> It wasn't until surmounting political pressure and a slew of bad press that the County initiated an in depth participatory framework for community members and stakeholders to vote on a future vision for the Airport. The negative impacts on ecological factors caused by the Airport's operations in conjunction with the lack of procedural

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<sup>32</sup> Justice Collaboratory, "Procedural Justice," Yale School of Law. Access via [Procedural Justice | Yale Law School](#)

<sup>33</sup> Taylor, Dorcetta. Toxic Communities: Environmental Racism, Industrial Pollution, and Residential Mobility, New York University Press, 2014

<sup>34</sup> Pacoima & Whiteman Airport: A History of Harm, Pacoima Beautiful (2021). Accessed via [Pacoima & Whiteman Airport: A History of Harm \(arcgis.com\)](#)

justice for the community in regards to Whiteman's existence and previous operations, have created a textbook environmental justice issue.

## Connections

During the past few years, there has been a significant increase in literature addressing the intersections of environmental justice and gentrification. This subsection aims to provide an overview of connections and themes in this area of research. As we have established, environmental justice refers to the fair distribution of environmental benefits and burdens, where all individuals, regardless of their race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status, have equal access to a clean and healthy environment (Agyeman et al., 2016).<sup>35</sup> Environmental injustices are classified when there is a "disproportionate siting" of an environmental risk in a marginalized community. These "EJ" communities are sustained through a lack of investment, concentration of locally undesirable land uses (LULUs), and limited access to resources and amenities such as parks, green spaces, and transportation options. To rectify this set of circumstances, decision makers may explore increasing economic investment to the area like transforming LULUs to higher performing or productive land uses. After this increase in economic investments and change of the urban landscape or land use, the area may become desirable for those who live outside the community. This general trend of "neighborhood upscaling and the in-migration of relatively privileged individuals," whether in social status or wealth, is described as gentrification (Golio, 2023)<sup>36</sup>. Pacoima residents have expressed their concerns for an alternative use to Whiteman Airport due to the threat of gentrification, and potential displacement from the community (Re-envisioning Whiteman Airport Report, Los Angeles County). One trend to note from the literature includes the role of green spaces in the gentrification processes (Rigolon and Németh, 2019). Due to Pacoima's classification as an "EJ" community, and the health impacts caused by pollution from the Airport, one of the most common ideas for what should replace Whiteman is a huge park. Many are in agreement that an increase in park space is critical for the well-being of the community, however, some residents fear this new park could be a catalyst for gentrification.

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<sup>35</sup> Agyeman, J., Schlosberg, D., Craven, L., & Matthews, C. (2016, November 1). Trends and Directions in Environmental Justice: From Inequity to Everyday Life, Community, and Just Sustainabilities. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-environ-110615-090052>

<sup>36</sup> AJ Golio (2023) What makes gentrification 'white'? Theorizing the mutual construction of whiteness and gentrification in the urban U.S., *Journal of Race, Ethnicity and the City*, DOI: 10.1080/26884674.2023.2234275

Although there is a plausible link shown between an increase in active green space particularly (bike lanes, etc.) and gentrification, there are multiple things to consider to avoid displacement from occurring, as well as benefits to the community as a whole. These links emphasize that a solution to the issue of environmental injustices beared by Pacoima residents from Whiteman Airport must include a participatory process and strategies to offset gentrification and displacement.

## Gentrification

Gentrification was a term first established by sociologist, Ruth Glass, in 1964. Her research identified a pattern of upper middle class buyers, or ‘gentry’, taking over working class neighborhoods in London. She defined gentrification as the “upward” transformation of urban space” caused by hierarchies of class or other intersectional axes of power or identity that intensifies and normalizes displacement (Glass, 1964)<sup>37</sup>. The phenomenon of working class residents in cities being displaced by upper middle class residents was seen in Paris in the 1800s and Washington D.C. in the 1930s. In their historical overview of gentrification, Tim Verlaan and Cody Hochstenbach, claim that “displacement is and always has been”<sup>38</sup> a key element of the gentrification process. However, displacement has been hard to measure (Padiero et al., 2019), which has led many scholars to conclude that gentrification doesn’t automatically lead to or increase the likelihood of displacement. Other scholars (Slater, 2006, 2008) have found “these studies to rely on a problematically narrow” definition of displacement (Verlaan and Hochstenbach, 2022). Recent scholarship views displacement as a slow, dynamic, and violent experience that can involve not only physical relocation, but a change in lived experience. These changing norms or behaviors can make existing residents feel out of place causing them to move (Howell 2015)<sup>39</sup>. The most violent form of displacement, according to Verlaan and Hochstenach, is eviction, which can be traumatic and life altering, especially for those who are economically marginalized. According to research done by UCLA graduate students, in Pacoima, like

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<sup>37</sup> London: Aspects of Change, published by the Centre for Urban Studies at UCL in 1964

<sup>38</sup> Tim Verlaan and Cody Hochstenbach (2022), Gentrification through the ages: A long-term perspective on urban displacement, social transformation and resistance

<sup>39</sup> Howell, Kathryn. 2015. “It’s Complicated . . .’: Long-Term Residents and their Relationships to Gentrification in Washington DC.” In *Capital Dilemma: Growth and Inequality in Washington, D.C.*, 255–78. New York: Routledge.

numerous other locations in Southern California, lower-income residents cope with a housing affordability crisis by residing in converted garages, outbuildings, or rented portions of homes.<sup>40</sup> There is clearly a portion of the population in Pacoima that would benefit from anti-displacement measures if any new development were to occur. Sadly, the research on displacement is limited and although anti-displacement strategies exist, there is limited research on their efficacy or proven best practices.

## Theories

Early research on gentrification suggested two competing theories to explain its leading cause. Neil Smith coined the production or supply-side theory of gentrification, which describes existing disinvestment and later reinvestment by developers exploiting the rent-gap as the main catalyst for gentrification. The Marxist derived rent-gap theory describes the growing difference between present land use rents and potential profits from redevelopment. As the rent-gap expands, “real estate investments increase as they become more profitable,” which leads to declining affordability for residents (Padeiro et al., 2019). This leads to a phenomenon where higher-income households move into properties that were previously occupied by lower-income households, a trend known as up-filtering. This up-filtering could be driven by the housing supply shortage in Los Angeles. The prevention of rent-gap exploitation will be a key aspect of efforts to limit any displacement for Pacoima residents. On the other hand, the demand-side theory (Ley 1996; Hamett 2000) defines a cultural shift of a new ‘creative class’ having an increased desire for urban living. This theory was used as a simplistic interpretation of the “Back to the City” movement. This demand-based theory has led gentrification to be described as “competition for urbanity in every sense” (Gray and Wyly, 2020).<sup>41</sup> Results from a survey conducted by the National Association of Realtors confirmed that over 75% of respondents found living in a walkable area, a key attribute of urbanity, to be ‘somewhat’ to ‘very important’.<sup>42</sup> Recent scholarship now acknowledges that the process of gentrification is caused

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<sup>40</sup> Aspiring urban planners seek to mitigate gentrification in Pacoima, Les Dunseith, UCLA Newsroom, 2019. Accessed via [Aspiring urban planners seek to mitigate gentrification in Pacoima | UCLA](#)

<sup>41</sup> Gentrification, Dustin W Gray and Elvin K Wyly, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, International Encyclopedia of Human Geography, 2nd Edition, Volume 5, 2020

<sup>42</sup> New NAR Survey Finds Americans Prefer Walkable Communities, June 2023, Accessed via: [New NAR Survey Finds Americans Prefer Walkable Communities](#)

by the “shifting socio-cultural nature of urban life” in addition to “neoliberal land-market dynamics at play,” or a combination of both theories (Gray and Wyly, 2020). When exploring the creation of jobs through mixed use development, this research will encourage a range of uses outside the needs of a creative class.

## Connections

A key component of gentrification is the rent-gap theory, which is impacted by speculation in the real estate market. Researchers have long established that transit accessibility gets capitalized into real estate prices due to the increase in demand for urban living. Due to this process, analysts and community activists have grown increasingly concerned that increased investments in transit routes or transit-oriented development may be leading to gentrification and displacement, also known as transit-induced gentrification (TIG). A case study analysis was performed on 35 quantitative research-based studies focused on the potential link between transit-oriented development and gentrification (Padiero, et al., 2019). Studies on this link were extremely limited before 2014, showcasing that this may be a newly established trend that necessitates more exploration. Los Angeles was the most frequently analyzed city. Of the eight studies that focused on Los Angeles, four studies detected patterns of TIG: a loss of affordable housing and greater occurrence in areas with higher proportions of renter-occupied housing (Chapple et al., 2017; Brown, 2016). However, one of the studies reported counter-gentrification. Although the results varied, the overall finding was that “proximity to transit may indeed contribute to gentrification” (Padiero, et al., 2019). It should be noted that this research is still limited on establishing a concrete link between transit and gentrification, especially for renters, given that ‘rental price’ was a rarely explored measure of gentrification in all the studies. These findings still indicate the extreme caution needed as we explore transit-oriented development and careful consideration to ensure everyone is benefitting from increased transit access equally. In addition to the link between gentrification and transit improvements, studies have also found a link between gentrification and sustainability initiatives, known as green gentrification. Sustainability-focused public realm improvements such as an increase in street trees, bike lanes, or park space increase local desirability, which increases property values and rents and forces

local residents to be displaced.<sup>43</sup> This is especially troubling since many of the policy tools to counteract environmental injustices includes greening efforts.

## Transit-Oriented Development (TOD)

Peter Calthorpe first coined the term “Transit-Oriented Development” or TOD in his book “The New American Metropolis.” He defined TOD as an urban planning approach for sustainable community design with the intent to reduce sprawl, traffic congestion, and air pollution (Calthorpe, 1993).<sup>44</sup> Key metrics of the development would include being less than half-a-mile from transit (station or stop), compact, mixed use, and walkable. This mixed-use development may include a combination of land uses such as: residential, retail, open-space, and others. The TOD concept was born partially through the growing awareness of the “major environmental externalities” of auto-dependency (Padiero et al. 2019).<sup>45</sup> TOD intends to curb this auto-dependency through encouraging modal shifts from residents’ proximity and ease of access to transit. Low-income groups are the largest demographic within transit users, which in theory, makes a community like Pacoima a reasonable candidate for development that prioritizes increased transit accessibility. The emphasis on environmental benefits from TOD is also relevant for Pacoima due to the presence of nearby environmental injustices and pollution sources.

## Theories

The planning and development approach of TOD is inspired by the New Urbanism theory. At its core, New Urbanism believes in the ability of the built environment to create a ‘sense of community’ (Talen, 1997)<sup>46</sup>. This suggests that TOD initiatives aim to promote social cohesion and connectivity within communities in addition to environmental issues. New Urbanism was catalyzed from the growing set of challenges cities experienced in the twentieth century, such as

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<sup>43</sup> [Green Gentrification in Austin: A Case Study of the Mueller Development - Public Citizen](#)

<sup>44</sup> Calthorpe, P. (1993) *The Next American Metropolis Ecology, Community, and the American Dream*. Princeton Architectural Press, New York.

<sup>45</sup> Miguel Padeiro, Ana Louro & Nuno Marques da Costa (2019) Transit-oriented development and gentrification: a systematic review, *Transport Reviews*, 39:6, 733-754, DOI: 10.1080/01441647.2019.1649316

<sup>46</sup> Talen, E. (1999). Sense of Community and Neighbourhood Form: An Assessment of the Social Doctrine of New Urbanism. *Urban Studies*, 36(8), 1361–1379. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43084387>

spaceless sprawl, social segregation, and environmental degradation. In 1961, Jane Jacobs famously critiqued “the failures of modernist planning ideas,”<sup>47</sup> which led planners to welcome a new set of principles and strategies that offered simple and tangible solutions to complex city problems (Ghorbi and Mohammadi, 2017)<sup>48</sup>. This shift towards more community-oriented design principles laid the foundation for both New Urbanism and TOD, highlighting their shared emphasis on creating livable and sustainable urban environments. New Urbanism and TOD rely on common strategies like: mixed-use, mixed housing types, dense urban form, an attractive public realm, human-scale streetscapes, and increased transportation options (Ghorbi and Mohammadi, 2017). Given that TOD has roots in New Urbanism and both share approaches to design, connections between New Urbanism projects and gentrification are also relevant to understanding TOD impacts. Multiple studies established a link between New Urbanism projects and the failure to incorporate adequate affordable housing, which is a potential precursor to displacement (Grant, 2006; Talen, 2008). This trend further emphasizes the need for equity considerations within any exploration of TOD in Pacoima.

## TOD and Equity

Ensuring equity is crucial for all future developments within marginalized communities such as Pacoima and becomes particularly imperative when research indicates a potential link between Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) and displacement. The following studies present strategies and considerations for implementing equity into transit-oriented development. *Mi Casa es Su Casa* analyzes the fight for equitable transit-oriented development in the predominantly Latinx immigrant suburb of Langley Park in Maryland (Lung-Amam, 2019)<sup>49</sup>. To achieve greater equitable and inclusive outcomes in the TOD process, community organizations and neighborhood-based advocacy groups organized to form coalitions and achieve their desired outcomes through several means. They pushed the local transit agency to create an “Economic Empowerment Program” to provide information and assistance to local businesses that would be impacted during construction, formed partnerships with nonprofit developers, established a

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<sup>47</sup> Jacobs, J. (1993). The death and life of great American cities.

<sup>48</sup> Mitra Ghorbi and Hamid Mohammadi (2017), A Critical View on Urbanism Theory in Urban Planning: from Theory to Practice, University of Yazd

<sup>49</sup> Mi Casa no es Su Casa: The Fight for Equitable Transit-Oriented Development in an Inner-Ring Suburb, Willow Lung-Amam, Rolf Pendall, and Elijah Knaap, Journal of Planning Education and Research 2019 39:4, 442-455

housing trust fund, and expanded capacity to serve more residents in various areas of need. The parallels between Langley Park and Pacoima are quite substantial, such as the prevalence of strip malls, which serve as “affordable spaces for immigrant-owned enterprises.” However, these commercial strip malls face challenges like potential rent hikes due to lacking safeguards such as rent stabilization ordinances or attentive, local landlords. The issues highlighted in respect to strip malls reinforces our desire to ensure anti commercial displacement strategies are included in TOD plans or policies. Overall, this case study showed that TOD investments create opportunities to build cross-sector coalitions who can help lead equitable development agendas and increase procedural justice. Similarly, findings from a comparative case study between MacArthur Park (Los Angeles) and Fruitvale (Oakland) by Sandoval and Herrera<sup>50</sup> highlight the potential of TOD projects to foster equity in Latino neighborhoods. These projects depend on transportation planners leveraging political, financial, and cultural capital within the community, with community-based organizations and local politicians playing crucial roles. Just like the Langley Park case study, prioritizing bottom-up public participation and supporting local resources showcased how TODs can catalyze revitalization while addressing the unique needs of marginalized communities. Future research should continue exploring the benefits and challenges of TODs in Latino neighborhoods to inform equitable development practices.

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<sup>50</sup> Gerardo Francisco Sandoval & Herrera, R. Transit-Oriented Development and Equity in Latino Neighborhoods: A Comparative Case Study of MacArthur Park (Los Angeles) and Fruitvale (Oakland). NITC-RR-544. Portland, OR: Transportation Research and Education Center (TREC), 2015. <http://dx.doi.org/10.15760/trec.58>

## Section 5. Case Study Analysis

The following case studies were analyzed for strategies employed, successful and unsuccessful outcomes, and key lessons for future practice. The **table below** includes the four cases being analyzed.

Topic	Cases	Overview
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Airport Redevelopment</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Stapleton Redevelopment Project</p>	<p>Denver Municipal Airport in Denver, Colorado ceased operations and was redeveloped into a sustainable urban infill and mixed-use project using New Urbanism and TOD principles.</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;">Mueller Austin</p>	<p>Robert Mueller Municipal Airport in Austin, Texas ceased operations and was redeveloped in a mixed-use TOD featuring extensive affordable housing strategies.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>ETOD Efforts</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">ETOD in Denver, Colorado</p>	<p>Denver began the first official equitable transit-oriented development (ETOD) effort through the creation of the Denver Regional TOD Fund and other strategies that prioritized affordability.</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;">ETOD in Twin Cities, Minnesota</p>	<p>As the Twin Cities expanded their light rail transit (LRT) system into disadvantaged communities, private and public partnerships were formed to support local land trusts and land banks that preserved and developed affordable housing.</p>

The first two case studies are airport redevelopment projects, and the last two are equitable transit-oriented development (ETOD) efforts. Findings from this case study analysis will be used for the exploration of ETOD at Whiteman Airport in the following section.

# Airport Redevelopment Projects

## Stapleton Redevelopment Project

### **Background:**

Previously known as the Denver Municipal Airport, Stapleton International Airport, was located outside of Denver in the Rocky Mountain West. This 4,700-acre development is the largest example of a sustainable urban infill project in the nation. The City and County decided to discontinue airport operations in 1989 after plans to expand the airport failed due to nearby residential pushback and lawsuits. Instead of expanding Stapleton International Airport, the current Denver International Airport was built. Much like Whiteman Airport, the surrounding community dealt with noise pollution from Stapleton's operations. The community goals for Stapleton were similar to that of Whiteman including preservation of open space, creation of employment opportunities, and provision of cultural and recreational facilities. Before the airport was closed, a community planning initiative was started, which resulted in the *Stapleton Tomorrow* plan in 1991. Two years later, The Denver Mayor, Wellington E. Webb, created the Stapleton Citizens Advisory Board, which still exists today.

### **Strategies Employed:**

- *Cooperative public and private partnerships*
  - Plan for redevelopment was backed by the Stapleton Redevelopment Foundation, a nonprofit group of influential civic and business leaders who leveraged private philanthropy.
  - Mayor Webb entered into a partnership with the Stapleton Redevelopment Foundation to create a solar policy foundation for the redevelopment of the site.
- *Timely transitions*
  - Stapleton Development Plan was submitted before airport ceased operations so process could start as soon as it closed.
  - Similarly, the City took less than a year to complete or start their obligations as outlined in the purchase agreement, which kept momentum going.
- *City inclusion of community plans*

- The Stapleton Development Plan was adopted by the City Council in June of 1995 as part of its comprehensive plan.
- *Innovative partners and programs*
  - After the planning process concluded, the City and County officially created the Stapleton Development Corporation (SDC) composed of a Board of Directors appointed by the Denver Urban Renewal Corporation (DURA) and the Mayor.
  - DURA “was the only public agency empowered by the State of Colorado to fund redevelopment projects through utilization of Tax Increment Financing (TIF),”<sup>51</sup> which was used an innovative way to attract progressive developers.
- *Single developer for site*
  - SDC decided to go with one single developer instead of subdividing site and chose Cleveland-based Forest City Enterprises Inc., who had a proven track record of successful urban infill projects and a strong commitment to affordable housing.
- *Clear vision around sustainability*
  - a. From its inception, community members expressed the desire for a sustainable redevelopment project. Project brought forth job and workforce development opportunities in animal husbandry, gardening, conservation, and land cultivation.
  - b. Buildings were developed using green building standards.
- *Planning expertise with public oversight*
  - The Stapleton Redevelopment Foundation had the power to hire an accomplished team of architects, urban designers, land use and transportation planners, and market analysts to create the *Stapleton Development Plan*, but had oversight by the Mayor-appointed Stapleton Citizen Advisory Board.
  - Staffers from relevant public agencies worked collaboratively with consultants in the planning process.
- *Robust community engagement process*
  - Planning process included over 100 public meetings and events from September 1993 to February 1995.

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<sup>51</sup> Yates, Christopher, Principles, Partners, and Process: The Redevelopment of Stapleton International Airport (2003)

- *Plan pulled from established New Urbanism and TOD principles*
  - Given the focus on sustainability, New Urbanism principles included standards for walkability and TOD principles ensured connectivity to the regional transportation rail and bus network.

### **Successful Outcomes:**

- Mayor Webb's partnership with the Stapleton Redevelopment Foundation to externally lead the project allowed him to contract out planning services at little cost to the City.
- The entire planning and development process moved swiftly.
- The Stapleton Redevelopment Foundation, a nonprofit, was able to leverage significant private funding, and raised over \$4 million for the planning effort.

### **Unsuccessful Outcomes:**

- Negotiations on the purchase agreement between the City of Denver and Forest City stalled for two years.
- Most sustainable development goals were upheld, except in terms of the Regional Retail Center included in the site. Big box retailers, like Walmart, were not in line with the community's wishes for small businesses.
- A major hurdle was obtaining the permits, plat approvals, and zoning changes for such a large property.<sup>52</sup>
- The inclusion of New Urbanism and TOD principles aimed to reduce auto-dependency and decrease carbon emissions from new development, but inclusion of big-box retailers hindered this goal, and no performance metrics were included to measure reductions in vehicle miles traveled (VMT).

### **Key Takeaways:**

- Instead of making the redevelopment an internal process, partnerships with private entities or nonprofits should be established early in the process.

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<sup>52</sup> [Stapleton Denver, Colorado \(uli.org\)](http://uli.org)

- The incorporation of a third-party negotiator may have been able to speed up the purchase agreement process.
- The City could implement by-right permit approvals and start zoning changes before sale of property.
- The implementation of the redevelopment plan into the City's broader goals incentivized public-sector commitment to the community's vision.
- To avoid the permanent development of big-box retailers, sites can utilize a modular design to potentially fit smaller businesses in the future.
- The plan's early commitment to sustainability encouraged those with the same values to support and fund the planning effort.

## **Mueller Austin**

### **Background:**

Robert Mueller Municipal Airport in the City of Austin, Texas, was operational between 1936 and 1999. As Austin's population grew, the City considered expanding the airport and was quickly met with pushback from the surrounding residential neighborhoods. The surrounding community members created the Citizens for Airport Relocation (CARE) group which organized for an airport relocation and redevelopment of the site. In 1993, a new airport site was acquired and the City launched a public planning process to expand outreach and engage citizens. The City hired a project manager and contracted the ROMA Design Group to complete the master plan. The Robert Mueller Municipal Airport (RMMA) Master Plan was adopted in 2000. The City then created the Implementation Advisory Committee to ensure the development was created in line with the Master Plan. The RMMA Master Plan had a vision for an affordable and diverse mixed use, walkable, and interactive development. Traditional neighborhood district and New Urbanism principles were used in the design process. The Mueller Development purchase agreement between the City and Catellus Development Corporation was completed in 2004 and the first homes were available on the site in 2007.<sup>53</sup>

### **Strategies Employed:**

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<sup>53</sup> [Podbielski, Todd\\_Final \(txst.edu\)](#)

- *Affordable housing program, partnerships, and policies.*
  - Catellus Development and City of Austin created the Mueller Affordable Homes Program to conduct affordability requirements and vision. Program included:
    - i. Tax Credits for Single- or Multi- Family development
    - ii. Special Needs Housing Grants
    - iii. Cooperative Housing Models for homeownership that serve families between 50-65% median family income and rental housing that serves families at or below 50% median family income
    - iv. Down Payment assistance
    - v. Mortgage Credit Certificates
    - vi. Rental Housing Development Assistance
    - vii. Bond Financing
    - viii. Housing Trust Fund, S.M.A.R.T. Housing Capital Improvement funds or other federal resources
  - City of Austin created the S.M.A.R.T. (Safe, Mixed-Income, Accessible, Reasonably Priced, and Transit-Oriented) Housing Program, which provides waivers of development fees and an expedited review process to stimulate the production of low- and moderate-income housing that is also in accordance with the City's Green Building standard.
  - City of Austin passed Resolution NO. 041202-59, which outlined the requirements for Catellus to create the affordable housing program and work with Austin Housing Finance Corporation (AHFC) to achieve greater affordability.
- *Early and robust community participation*
  - Robert Mueller redevelopment originated as a community desire and the public was thoroughly engaged throughout the planning process with over 200 outreach meetings and events.
- *Strong public-sector leadership*
  - The City of Austin created the conditions for the affordable homes program to exist and made the affordability component a top responsibility in the RFP.
  - They committed roughly \$265 million in infrastructure costs and remain an active partner in development.

- *Oversight built into agreement*
  - As outlined in the Master Development Agreement, Catellus is required to provide semi-annual reports and annual development audits that outline status and progress on all affordability requirements.<sup>54</sup> This ensures continued compliance and accountability by the private developer.
- *Creation of Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone (TIRZ)*
  - Austin City Council made the Mueller development a TIRZ which is a special tax use zone to attract new investment to the area by helping finance the costs of redevelopment by leveraging tax increments for covering capital costs and securing bond debt.<sup>55</sup>
- *Planned Unit Development (PUD)*
  - The City made the Mueller development a PUD, which is a floating overlay district or type of development that permits a developer to meet community density and land use goals without being restricted by existing zoning requirements.<sup>56</sup>
- *Low-Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC)*
  - LIHTC was the most common tool used to support affordable housing at Mueller. This program was created in 1986 under the Tax Reform Act and creates a partnership between the city and developer of affordable units.
- *Community Land Trusts (CLTs)*
  - CLTs provide permanent affordable housing and are governed by residents, community members, and public representatives. They co-own properties on long-term leases, which preserves affordable housing stock and accommodates various needs like homeownership, rentals, and commercial opportunities. Low-income families in CLT homes are exempt from escalating property taxes.

## **Successful Outcomes:**

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<sup>54</sup> [Microsoft Word - AH Semi-Annual Report DEC 2023 FINAL \(austintexas.gov\)](#)

<sup>55</sup> [Podbielski, Todd\\_Final \(txst.edu\)](#)

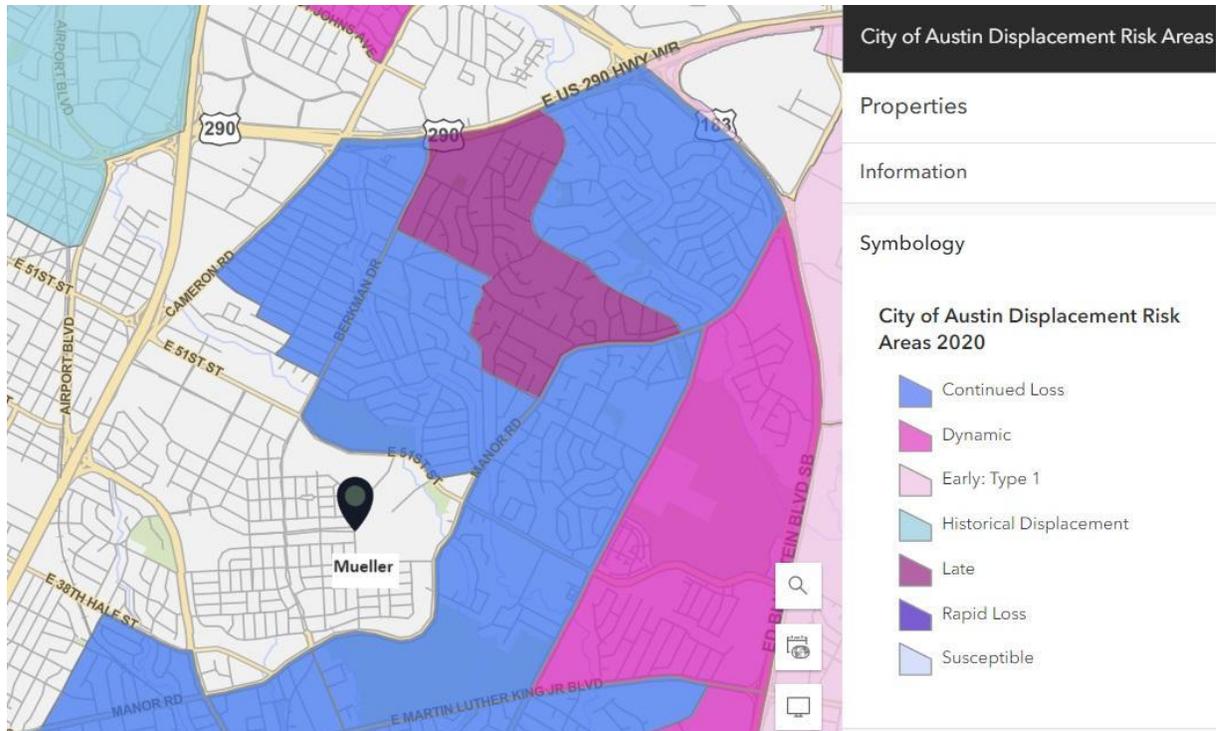
<sup>56</sup> [PUD.indd \(uwsp.edu\)](#)

- Before redevelopment took place, City ensured there was early buy-in from the community, which made it easier to obtain a developer for the site.
- The program's success is attributed to public and private partnerships between City of Austin, Catellus, Mueller home builders, multifamily developers, and nonprofit organizations. Partners collaborated to ensure there was a broad range of funding mechanisms for affordable housing.
- All partners were in agreement on providing 25% affordability for all for-sale and for-rent homes at 60% and 80% median family income (MFI). Some units are also available below 60% MFI.
- SMART Program was also equipped with staff who review all builder applications and potential residents to ensure compliance with the program's goals.
- Community Wheelhouse, a nonprofit organization, was chosen to manage the affordable homes program and work with the community.
- The City secured a developer for the Dell Children's Medical Center of Central Texas early on which increased economic support and resources for the site.
- The designation of a PUD provided flexibility and relief to over 100 City codes and policies, which would have significantly hindered community's vision and slowed down development process.
- The inclusion of a local nonprofit with housing experts and advocates made the complex and competitive LIHTC process obtainable.
- CLTS were pivotal in the Mueller affordable homes program's success. While this reduces tax revenue for Austin, the Mueller Foundation, established as a non-profit, offsets these costs, ensuring sustainable affordability for generations.

#### **Unsuccessful Outcomes:**

- Although affordability was a focus within this development, the City of Austin may not have done enough to offset gentrification and displacement. University of Texas researchers studied Austin gentrification in their report Uprooted and identified all neighborhoods surrounding Mueller as "vulnerable to displacement" through accelerating

housing prices.<sup>57</sup> The **map below** shows the defines the ‘Continued Loss’ as areas where vulnerable populations have already been displaced, demographic change has occurred, and housing value has appreciated or is appreciating.



In their research titled *Those Who Stayed*, Eric Tang and Bisola Falola from the Institute for Urban Policy Research and Analysis at the University of Texas examine the impact of gentrification on long-term residents of East Austin.<sup>58</sup> They find that despite the expectation of benefiting from new nearby developments, these residents experience little improvement in their quality of life, facing instead higher property taxes and a loss of community cohesion due to the indifference of newcomers.

### Key Takeaways:

- Early community buy-in is possible through a robust engagement process and even serves as a developer incentive.

<sup>57</sup> [AustinUprooted.pdf \(utexas.edu\)](#)

<sup>58</sup> [THOSE-WHO-STAYED-The-Impact-of-Gentrification-on-Longstanding-Residents-of-East-Austin.pdf \(communitynotcommodity.com\)](#)

- Early agreements on the specifics of affordable housing measures are the most effective in achieving goals.
- If an affordable homes program is initiated for the development, it must include ongoing evaluation, staff to implement the program, and an experienced entity or nonprofit to run the program.
- Affordability programs must be extensive and may include community land trusts and LIHTC.
- The inclusion of a landmark institution may offset costs while providing a benefit to the community.
- As noted by University of Texas researchers, sustainable development initiatives should prioritize equity alongside environmental concerns to prevent the displacement of established communities like those near the Mueller Development.<sup>59</sup>

## ETOD Efforts

### ETOD in Denver, Colorado

#### **Background:**

In 2004, the Denver region created an ambition plan, known as FasTracks, to expand its regional transit system. The plan implemented a half-cent sales tax estimating to contribute \$4.7 billion over fifteen years to transit development. Goals of the plan included relieving congestion, making communities more livable, and keeping up with projected population growth. Between the 1990s and early 2000s, Denver experience a boom in job growth that did not keep pace with housing availability. This led home and rental prices to increase significantly. The Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) projected there would be a surge in demand of housing near existing and new FasTrack stations. They also estimated that roughly 40% of this demand would come from lower-income households. In 2010, the Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG) reported that only 5% of new TOD housing included ongoing affordability restrictions. To address the growing housing affordability crisis, residents, community groups, and Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) came together to brainstorm solutions that ensured investments in transit would benefit low- and moderate-

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<sup>59</sup> [Green Gentrification in Austin: A Case Study of the Mueller Development - Public Citizen](#)

income households and not lead to displacement. This strategy became known as “equitable TOD (ETOD).”<sup>60</sup> To carry out equitable TOD, the Denver Regional TOD Fund was created and operational by 2010. This was the nation’s first land acquisition fund dedicated to equitable transit-oriented development. The Fund’s purpose was to support the creation and preservation of 2000 affordable units in current or future transit corridors.<sup>61</sup> The Fund provided fixed-interest below-market rate loans of up to \$5 million for 5 years (as of 2018).<sup>62</sup>

### **Strategies Employed:**

- *Public and private partnerships*
  - Urban Land Conservancy (ULC), Enterprise Community Partners, the city and county of Denver, Colorado Division of Housing, and the Colorado Housing and Finance Authority partnered with the Gates Family Foundation, the Denver Foundation, and other private investors partnered for ETOD effort.
- *TOD Fund creation*
  - The public and private partners leveraged their resources to create a monetary fund specifically for ETOD efforts.
- *Strategic borrowers and managers of fund*
  - When TOD Fund was first established, the ULC was the sole intended borrower. ULC was established in 2003 and combined the functions of a traditional community land trust (CLT) with those of a private land bank to preserve real estate assets in urban areas while ensuring their community benefit. They had a proven track record of preserving affordable rental homes and serving very low-income households.
  - A Denver CDFI, Enterprise Community Partners, was chosen to manage the fund. As an active partner with community groups, Enterprise was well equipped to understand the risk of local displacement, inform equitable development policies, and negotiate community benefit agreements.
- *Borrower incentives*

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<sup>60</sup> [Financing the Development in Transit-Oriented Development \(urban.org\)](http://urban.org)

<sup>61</sup> [The Role of Community Land Trusts in Fostering Equitable, Transit-Oriented Development: Case Studies from Atlanta, Denver, and the Twin Cities \(niu.org\)](http://niu.org)

<sup>62</sup> [PDF \(enterprisecommunity.org\)](http://enterprisecommunity.org)

- Fund allows developers to access local and state affordable housing credits, such as LIHTC, but doesn't punish them if they don't include affordable units.
- Fund allows for an expedited process not bound by the traditional loan approval process, which allows nonprofits to access funding quicker.

**Successful Outcomes:**

- In partnership with ULC, the TOD Fund deployed over \$15 million and created 570 affordable homes, a new public library, and over 700 jobs.
- Nonprofits were able to access the TOD funds more rapidly due to provisions in the Fund that allowed for an expedited process not stalled by the traditional loan approval process.

**Unsuccessful Outcomes:**

- Denver was supportive of the TOD Fund financially, but its policies hindered progress. The City's inclusionary housing policy only applied to homes and not rental units, which were the most common type of housing being developed. This policy also allowed developers to opt out of building affordable housing units by paying a fee that was insufficient to building affordable housing elsewhere.<sup>63</sup>

**Key Lessons:**

- TOD Funds may be successful for the inclusion of equity standards in TOD, but the local jurisdiction's policies and zoning standards must also be supportive of affordable housing development.
- Although allowing developers the flexibility to opt out of constructing affordable housing and served as an incentive, it ultimately hindered the Fund's ability to achieve equity.
- If jurisdictions are committed to affordable housing development and equity standards, affordability standards should not be left to the discretion of developers.
  - If developers can opt out, the fee should be substantial and allow for nearby affordable housing construction elsewhere.

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<sup>63</sup> [The Role of Community Land Trusts in Fostering Equitable, Transit-Oriented Development: Case Studies from Atlanta, Denver, and the Twin Cities \(niu.org\)](#), Interview with Enterprise Community Partners.

- The City’s high parking ratios and requirements for environmental remediation often made it difficult for nonprofit borrowers to recoup their equity invested into TOD.

## **ETOD in Twin Cities, Minnesota**

### **Background:**

In 2004, the Metropolitan Council, the metropolitan planning organization (MPO) for the Minneapolis-Saint Paul (Twin Cities) region, completed their first light rail project, known as the Hiawatha line. Over the years the Metropolitan Council has added to this light rail network. The Central Corridor and Bottineau Corridor expansions were of particular concern for leading to displacement because they pass through lower-income communities. The Central Corridor, or METRO Green Line, was an 11-mile LRT system connecting the downtowns of Saint Paul and Minneapolis.<sup>64</sup> In 2012, the Housing Preservation Project authorized a survey of landlords along the Central Corridor and “found that 40 percent of landlords within a quarter-mile of the Green Line intended to raise rents” once transit service began in 2014.<sup>65</sup> This growing affordability crisis led to the launch of the Central Corridor Funders Collaborative, a partnership between local and national funders aiming to promote equitable TOD through funding of affordable housing, local economic development, and place-making efforts along the new line. The Funders Collaborative invested in community-led solutions through program related investments (PRIs) and grants. PRIs led to 366 new jobs, 320 affordable units preserved, 36 homeownership opportunities, and 113 jobs protected (as of 2018). One example of ETOD is the Western U Plaza, located at the Green Line’s Western Avenue station in one of Saint Paul’s most diverse and lowest-income neighborhoods. This development preserved a historic building, featured 60 units of affordable housing below 60% AMI, a dynamic community space, a onsite social services. The Funders Collaborative also invested \$1.1 million into Land Bank Twin Cities, who captures strategic real estate opportunities to benefit people with low to moderate incomes.<sup>66</sup> The Central Corridor Funders Collaborative was active from 2007 to 2018 but left a lasting influence on how the Twin Cities region prioritizes equity in TOD.

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<sup>64</sup> [Affordable Housing Contributes to Equitable Transit-Oriented Development in Saint Paul’s Corridor of Opportunity | HUD USER](#)

<sup>65</sup> [The Role of Community Land Trusts in Fostering Equitable, Transit-Oriented Development: Case Studies from Atlanta, Denver, and the Twin Cities \(niu.org\)](#)

<sup>66</sup> [Land Banking, Real Estate Brokering & Lending – What We Do – Land Bank \(landbanktwincities.org\)](#)

## Strategies Employed:

- *Working groups and community ties*
  - Nine corridor-wide working groups from the public, nonprofit, and private sectors were created to implement ETOD efforts.
  - Working groups hosted shared learning events with diverse stakeholders to build community consensus on solutions for the corridor.
- *Wide range of funding sources*
  - Western U Plaza was supported by a wide range of funding sources including LIHTC, Living Cities funding, HUD Sustainable Communities regional planning grant, and the Twin Cities Community Land Bank.
- *Existing program support*
  - The Metropolitan Council has a Livable Community program, which awards grants to projects that increase housing, support living wage job opportunities, and connects jobs, housing, and transit. This program is over twenty-years-old and has awarded over \$30 million in grants to support equitable TOD projects.

## Successful Outcomes:

- Working groups allowed for the creation of corridor-wide plans and strategies that were implemented at different stages of the Green Line's life cycle.<sup>67</sup>
- Two years after the Green Line was active, the Central Corridor Funders Collaborative reported the benchmarks met or not met since its inception.<sup>68</sup>
  - Total affordable units includes 1,267 new and 2,304 preserved from 2011 to 2016. (10-year goal was 2,540 units total).
  - 44% share of income spent on housing and transportation for low-income households in Baseline year (2010). In 2016, there was a 53% share of income spent on housing and transportation for low-income households.
  - Overall, the number of jobs in corridor increased from 127,815 to 134,337.

## Unsuccessful Outcomes:

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<sup>67</sup> [Central Corridor Funders Collaborative | Saint Paul & Minnesota Foundation \(spmcf.org\)](#)

<sup>68</sup> [CCFC2016Tracker-Web.pdf \(de4vzavwp1bb7.cloudfront.net\)](#)

- Based on reported metrics, the corridor lost 4% (or 252) of business establishments since the Baseline and most of those businesses had 5 or less employees.
- The Central Corridor Funders Collaborative had a sunset date of 2016 so no recent evaluation of the ETOD efforts is available.

**Key Lessons:**

- Existing programs within jurisdictions that promote livability, sustainability, and equity are one of the many mechanisms that further equitable development.
- As shown in the metrics reported by the Central Corridor Funders Collaborative in 2016, only two years after the opening of the Green Line, small businesses were already in decline. Additionally, leasing commercial space has been a historic challenge for TOD. Creative partnerships and opportunities must be implemented into the commercial space allocated in TODs to be truly equitable.
- The mechanisms for funding and planning for ETOD are siloed and there are many parties with the same goals. The Twin Cities region allowing the Central Corridor Funders Collaborative to end only two years after the transit line was in operation limits the future capacity to track displacement and ensure long-standing affordability.

## Section 6. Exploration of ETOD as an Alternative Use for Whiteman Airport

The following section explores ETOD as an alternative use for Whiteman Airport in Pacoima. This exploration includes ETOD's core principles, potential benefits, local and regional context for the justification of ETOD, and subject matter expert (SME) interviews that offer real-life considerations for the implementation of ETOD at this site.

### Concept and Principles

As cities expand transit systems to combat congestion and emissions while staying competitive, the demand for housing near transit also grows. The desire to meet this increase in demand led to the creation of transit-oriented developments (TOD). TODs refer to high-density and mixed use developments that typically increase employment opportunities and amenities near transit stations. However, new housing near transit is often high-end, exacerbating the loss of existing affordable housing options due to market competition. Equitable Transit-Oriented Development (ETOD) includes development and investment decisions that aim to ensure all people, regardless of income level, race, ethnicity, gender, or immigration status, can enjoy mixed-use, walkable and livable communities with transit accessibility.

The original core principles of TOD such as, density, mix of land uses, walkability, and accessibility are all present in ETODs. ETODs go a step further by incorporating community input into decision-making processes and achieving community-oriented advantages, including but not limited to affordable housing, public health enhancements, thriving local enterprises, and environmental sustainability efforts. By emphasizing racial inclusivity and fostering community wealth, ETOD has the potential to catalyze beneficial changes, leading to livelier, more prosperous, and resilient neighborhoods.<sup>69</sup> Without a focus on equity, TODs can increase displacement and contribute to negative health and economic impacts for the community.

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<sup>69</sup> [ETOD-Full-Policy-Plan-with-Appendices-6-15-21.pdf \(chicago.gov\)](#)

# Local and Regional Context

## East San Fernando Valley Light Rail Transit Project

The Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transit Authority (LA Metro) leads the East San Fernando Valley Light Rail Transit (ESFVLRT) Project. This project aims to improve connections between east San Fernando Valley communities and the rest of Metro’s existing and future rail system.<sup>70</sup> The ESFVLRT Project will stretch 9 miles north/south connecting the Sylmar/San Fernando Valley Metrolink station to the G-Line’s Van Nuys Station.



<sup>70</sup> [East San Fernando Valley Light Rail Transit Project - LA Metro](#)

Figure 1. East San Fernando Valley Light Rail Transit Project Area (LA Metro)

The G-Line (shown in orange above) is currently a bus rapid transit line but is scheduled to become a light rail in the coming years. The ESFVLRT Project will primarily run along Van Nuys Blvd. and San Fernando Rd. The southwest corner of Whiteman Airport is located approximately 0.3 miles from the ESFVLRT Project's Van Nuys/San Fernando Station as shown in the figure below.

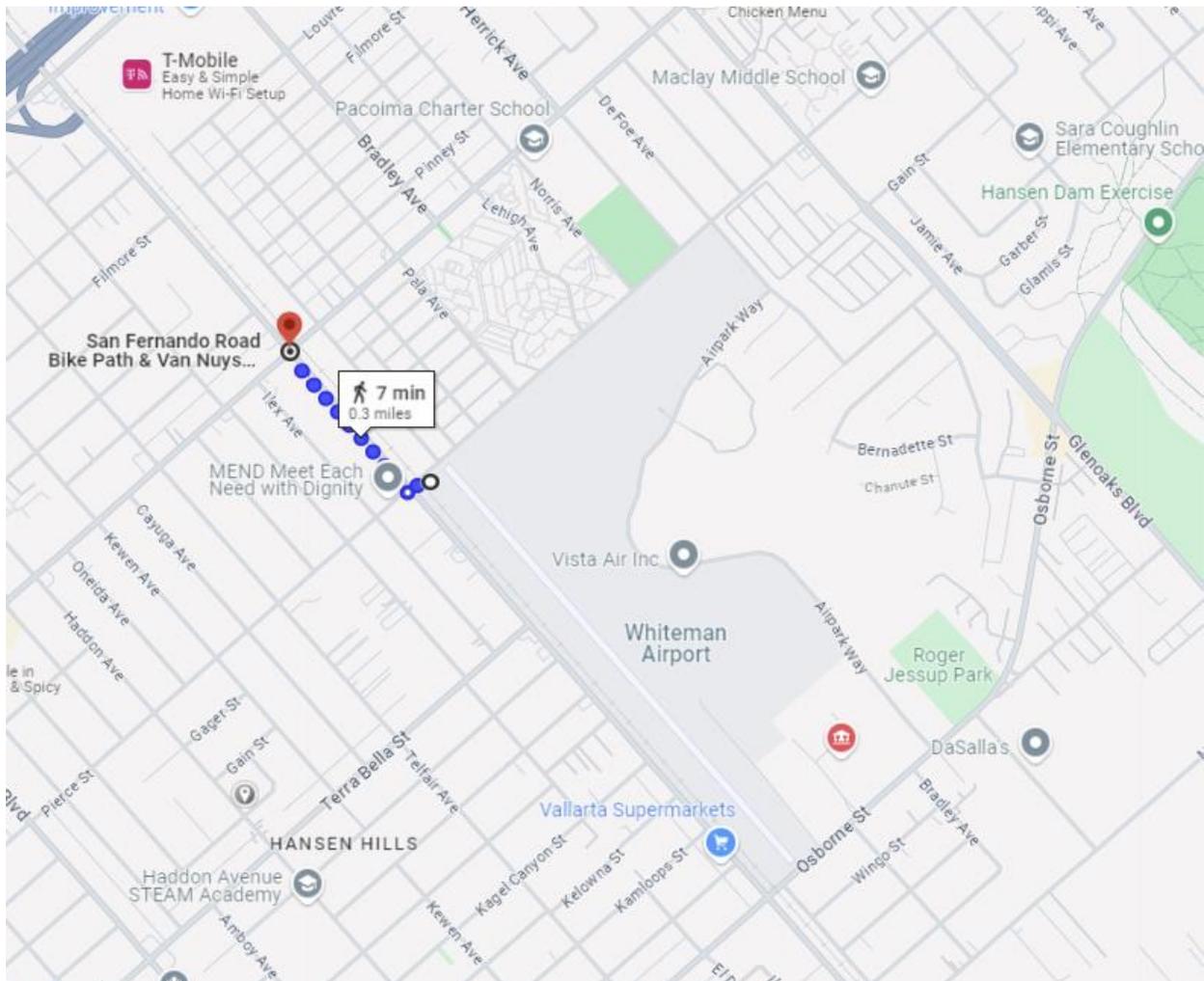


Figure 2. Google Map image of distance between Whiteman Airport and ESFVLRT Station

This proximity indicates that the Whiteman Airport site may be a candidate for equitable transit-oriented development. According to the LA County General Plan, “TODs are areas within a half-mile radius from a major transit stop” (County of Los Angeles Department of Public Works,

2019).<sup>71</sup> Whiteman’s close proximity to an incoming transit station presents a unique opportunity to address issues caused by the Airport while increasing public health, walkability, bikeability, transit access, affordable housing stock, and more.

## Affordable Housing Shortage

Since the 1970s, the State of California has grappled with a housing shortage. State officials estimate we need 180,000 new units of housing per year to meet demand. Despite a steady increase in production, construction has been slowed by sharp rises in interest rates, perpetuating the trend of our housing supply falling short of demand. This housing shortage has led to high home prices and rents.<sup>72</sup> High rents in particular have hit low-income communities, such as Pacoima, the hardest. According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness, the inability to afford housing is the key driver in homelessness.<sup>73</sup> Therefore, increasing the stock of affordable housing is a key measure in proactively addressing the risk of homelessness. Unfortunately, the City of Los Angeles has become the epicenter of the State’s housing and homelessness crisis. To address these issues, Los Angeles has made significant strides in increasing their production of housing, accessory dwelling units (ADUs), and approving deed-restricted affordable units.<sup>74</sup> A key component of this promising trend was the passage of the Transit Oriented Communities (TOC) Incentive Program in 2017.

## Local Push for Affordable Housing

The TOC Incentive Program incentivizes mixed-income and 100% affordable housing projects. In 2016, only 6% of proposed housing units were affordable. In 2021, after this Program’s implementation, 27% of proposed housing units were affordable. As of 2021, the City of LA has approved over 35,000 housing units, 25% of which were designated as affordable to those in the Extremely Low-Income (30% AMI) households.<sup>75</sup> The Affordable Housing Linkage Fee is another tool used by the City of LA to incentivize equitable development. Resulting for a partnership between the Los Angeles’s City Planning Department and the LA Housing

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<sup>71</sup> [TOD-Toolkit.pdf \(lacounty.gov\)](#)

<sup>72</sup> [California housing shortage triggers cycle of despair - CalMatters](#)

<sup>73</sup> [Affordable Housing - National Alliance to End Homelessness](#)

<sup>74</sup> [How Los Angeles Got Serious About Housing | Los Angeles City Planning \(lacity.gov\)](#)

<sup>75</sup> [How Los Angeles Got Serious About Housing | Los Angeles City Planning \(lacity.gov\)](#)

Department, this Linkage Fee ensures that developers either include affordable units in all development or pay a fee towards affordable housing construction elsewhere. Lastly, LA Metro has created the Joint Development Program where they enter a partnership with chosen developers to build TOD on their land. Their goal is to construct 10,000 units of housing on chosen Metro sites with 50% being income-restricted.<sup>76</sup> Although this effort is only taking place on Metro-owned land, there may be an opportunity to lease part of Whiteman Airport land to Metro in the future.

## Implementation

To inform the process of implementation for redevelopment, I asked Humberto Quintana if he thinks ETOD at the site would be economically viable. To achieve TOD's full potential, Humberto suggested partnering with LA Metro's TOC division which has a plethora of tools for advancing transit-oriented development. LA Metro has a designated staff to pursue transit-oriented development, and has already begun TOD efforts throughout the region. Although Metro's ongoing efforts are focused on Metro-owned land, there may be an opportunity to partner given that the land is publicly owned and may be leased to Metro. Recently, Metro partnered with the West Santa Ana Branch Transit Corridor (WSAB) and local jurisdictions to develop a Transit Oriented Development Strategic Implementation Plan (TOD SIP). The TOD SIP includes strategic guidance on the inclusion of equity and sustainability for transit investment and nearby developments. This planning process would be beneficial for the implementation of ETOD at Whiteman Airport.

In terms of funding the redevelopment, further research confirmed that although the traditional form of TIF is no longer available, new funding mechanisms such as Enhanced Infrastructure Financing Districts (EFIDs) and Community Revitalization Investment Areas (CRIAs) create similar opportunities.<sup>77</sup> Both of these tools may be utilized by Los Angeles County and are applicable to restoration, mitigation, and affordable housing.

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<sup>76</sup> [Joint Development - LA Metro](#)

<sup>77</sup> [TIF Document \(caled.org\)](#)

# Section 7. Results

## Foundational Elements for Redevelopment

Given the key takeaways and lessons from the Argument Evaluation, Case Study Analysis, and ETOD exploration, the following foundational elements are recommended for the redevelopment of Whiteman Airport:

**1. Preservation of emergency and public safety services.**

- a. All groups were in general agreement that the Los Angeles County Fire Department Station adjacent to the site is a community asset.

**2. Robust community engagement process prior to Whiteman Airport closure.**

- a. Community engagement process should focus on the site's redevelopment and create working groups around key issues or areas of concern.
- b. The key for successful and effective community involvement seems to be starting early. The more time allowed for the process results in more creative solutions and broad community consensus.

**3. Formation of public and private partnerships for planning and funding.**

- a. Collaboration is needed between local decision makers, community organizations, LA Metro, local land trusts, housing agencies, and nonprofits for a successful outcome.
- b. The leveraging of private monies and philanthropy is also encouraged.

**4. Prioritization of long-term affordability and mixed-income housing.**

- a. Given the overwhelming need for affordable housing in Los Angeles, long term affordability should be a key component in ensuring redevelopment is equitable.
- b. Prioritizing affordable housing also opens opportunities for developer incentives through the TOC Incentive Program, LIHTC, EIFD, or CRIA.
- c. A specific program or TOD Fund should be created to implement affordable housing at TOD sites. The program should include designated staff and ongoing evaluation requirements.

**5. Early intervention by public authorities to reduce potential displacement of existing residents.**

- a. Anti-displacement tools include direct financial relief to vulnerable renters, increase accessory dwelling units as a means of income for homeowners, support the preservation of existing affordable housing and mobile home parks, create preservation funds that provide private and public capital to acquire and rehabilitate at-risk apartments, etc.<sup>78</sup>
- b. Public jurisdictions should leverage the help of local community land trusts to achieve anti-displacement objectives. The implementation of a CLT on Whiteman Airport land would be an easier process given the land is already publicly owned.

**6. Inclusion of an anchor institution.**

- a. An anchor institution such as a North Valley Occupational Center, Los Angeles Mission College or California State University, Northridge satellite campus could leverage more resources for the site and benefit the nearby community with educational, workforce development, or job opportunities.

**7. Prioritization of employment opportunities with a livable wage.**

- a. The current job opportunities at Whiteman Airport are both high-skilled and moderate- to high-salary. Job opportunities at this site must continue to promote the same mix of salaries and union membership.
- b. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) has made significant resources available for the expansion of green jobs and technologies. For example, the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy has created a Solar Design and Installation Training program that is available to high school, undergraduate students, or as an apprenticeship.<sup>79</sup> These are high paying jobs that are projected to be increasing in demand in the coming years, with 12,000 new jobs added in 2022.

**8. Planning and zoning policy changes.**

- a. To allow for the greatest level of flexibility and creativity in redevelopment, local planning and zoning policies must support mixed-use, sustainable, and affordable development. The elimination of parking minimums, expedited permit process,

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<sup>78</sup> [Part-6.-The-Toolbox.pdf \(utexas.edu\)](#)

<sup>79</sup> [Solar Design and Installation Training | Department of Energy](#)

creation of a Specific Plan, or PUD could limit costs or time needed for project completion.

#### **9. Ongoing performance metrics for equity and sustainability**

- a. The redevelopment must not only aim to limit carbon emissions and increase affordable housing options for the community. Performance metrics and ongoing evaluation must be implemented by public jurisdictions to ensure these equity and sustainability standards are met.

## SWOT Analysis

A SWOT analysis is a strategic planning technique used to help a person or organization identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats related to project planning.<sup>80</sup> This analysis will categorize the exploration of ETOD as an alternative use at Whiteman. The strengths and weaknesses components refer to internal elements of the alternative use proposal, whereas the opportunities and threats components refer to external factors that may arise before, during, or after the redevelopment.

### S - Strengths

- ETOD has the potential to leverage incoming infrastructure investments (ESFVLRT Project), rectify historic environmental harms, and address multiple community needs.
- Focus on equity and affordability reduces threat displacement from new development to surrounding community.
- Complementary to ongoing efforts in Pacoima such as the Transformative Climate Communities (TCC) projects that focus on sustainability-related improvements.
- Community concerns from Whiteman such as the threat of crashes, lead emissions, and noise pollution would be eliminated.
- In many cases of ETOD, land must first be acquired by the public jurisdiction or land trust, where in this case, land is already publicly owned.
- Size of the site makes a mixed-use development spatially possible.

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<sup>80</sup> [How to Do a SWOT Analysis \(wordstream.com\)](https://www.wordstream.com/blog/how-to-do-a-swot-analysis)

## W - Weaknesses

- This study doesn't include an economic or feasibility analysis, so it remains unknown if ETOD is confirmed to be a more productive use of the Whiteman Airport land
- All 'successful' large redevelopment and ETOD projects (Austin, Denver, Twin Cities) had early community support and strong political will. In this case, both community members and local decision-makers seem to be at odds on the best path forward.
- Socio-economic characteristics of the area and nearby public housing project may make it difficult to attract developers.
- Site size restraints make it difficult to replicate similar airport redevelopment projects such as Mueller Austin.
- Cost of remediation of the site may be extremely costly and will likely be LA County's responsibility.
- Key component of ETOD is the assumption that people will opt to take transit instead of drive, however, this may not come to fruition.

## O - Opportunities

- Remediation of land will likely require a blank slate which allows for the greatest vision for creativity and innovation in redevelopment.
- The sheer size of this publicly owned land may allow for most, if not all, community priorities to be included in design.
- This may be a unique opportunity to create an activity center or key destination point in Pacoima that attracts people from other parts of the San Fernando Valley.
- Increased property values around redevelopment could increase home equity and generational wealth for homeowners and their families.
- If those housed at the new development do opt to take transit, traffic could be greatly reduced and emissions for the general area could be reduced.

## T - Threats

- Many of the tools and initiatives available to increase affordable housing and limit displacement may either be underfunded or politically unfeasible.

- If LA County opts to sell the site, leaving such a big piece of land in the hands of a private developer could lead to negative implications for the community.
- Green gentrification of the surrounding area remains to be a possibility if the project prioritizes sustainability without ensuring equity.
- Loss of the Airport means loss of regional air capacity, which may cause a ripple effect for nearby or municipally owned airports.
- Given the unique asset the Airport presents in the time of a natural disaster or emergency, the loss of this space and transportation resource may leave the community more vulnerable.

## Section 8. Conclusion

This examination of Whiteman Airport's operational future reveals a nuanced landscape shaped by diverse perspectives and critical considerations. Rooted in its original designation as an environmental justice issue, any redevelopment initiatives must prioritize mitigating environmental impacts to safeguard the well-being of surrounding communities. Comprehensive studies on lead and noise pollution are imperative to comprehend the full extent of environmental harm and inform future decision-making processes.

Community voices underscore the significance of preserving public safety and emergency services, particularly the pivotal role of the Los Angeles County Fire Department Station adjacent to the site. Additional public services in workforce development, education, public health, and economic development stand to enhance the quality of life for local community members. While Whiteman Airport contributes to job creation at a regional level, the direct economic benefits for local residents remain unclear. Exploring alternatives such as airport relocation or offsite facilities away from residential areas could help preserve regional air capacity while minimizing adverse effects on nearby communities.

Lessons learned from various case studies underscore the importance of robust community engagement, early intervention to mitigate displacement risks, and fostering public-private

partnerships for successful redevelopment. Prioritizing long-term affordability, innovative workforce development initiatives, strategic planning, and zoning policy changes are essential pillars for equitable redevelopment efforts.

Moving forward, integrating these foundational elements into redevelopment plans will be crucial for realizing a vision that balances economic vitality with environmental sustainability and social equity. The upcoming Whiteman Airport closure economic analysis led by Los Angeles County and partnership between Pacoima Beautiful and UCLA to explore land use alternatives will be instrumental to informing any future redevelopment. By embracing inclusive decision-making processes and fostering collaboration among stakeholders, Whiteman Airport's transformation has the potential to serve as a model for equitable and sustainable development in the broader Los Angeles County region.

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