

**Executive****NOVEMBER 2024****Project Title:**Reconnecting Communities  
Research**Task Number:** 4146**Start Date:** March 18, 2024**Completion Date:** October 31, 2025**Task Manager:**Doug Adams  
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DRISI provides solutions and knowledge that improves California's transportation system.

## Reconnecting Communities Research

This research will develop several scenarios for an equity-based policy to release surplus land or provide other direct benefits from state land for priority populations.

### WHAT IS THE NEED?

Governor Newsom's California Assembly Bill (AB) 3121 recently established the Task Force to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans, with a special consideration for African Americans who are descendants of persons enslaved in the United States. Additionally, legislation passed in July 2021 allows Tribal communities a right to procure excess land like that of local governments. AB 1180 (Mathis) adds to the definition of "exempt surplus land" to include land transferred by a local agency to a federally recognized California Indian Tribe. By conducting research on reparations, this research will better position the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) as a leader in California's pursuit of racial justice and transportation equity.

In addition, the research aligns with Goal 6 of Caltrans Strategic Plan, to "advance equity and livability in all communities." This research would ensure that transportation-related disparities in underserved communities are addressed or minimized on new projects that involve Caltrans right of way, as well as support land back efforts. These initiatives will ultimately result in vibrant livable places, with a focus on addressing the needs and concerns of underserved communities.

### WHAT ARE WE DOING?

The research team will develop several scenarios for an equity and transformative justice-based policy to release/ relinquish surplus land to Tribal communities and other underserved communities. This project will provide other direct and meaningful benefits from state land relinquishment or transportation project development for priority populations.

The researcher will work with Caltrans staff and other

State agency staff to create an inventory of Caltrans' surplus land and potential surplus land documentation. The research team will identify two advisory groups comprised of members of priority populations, as defined by the Caltrans Office of Race and Equity (CORE).

The final deliverable will be a prepared report that synthesizes existing land relinquishment and reparations policies around two community scenarios (tribal, divided). The research team will develop and recommend performance measures to determine the impact of each policy scenario to benefit priority populations.

## WHAT IS OUR GOAL?

The overall objective of this research will be to inform procedures and policies that will support and prioritize the sale or release of surplus land to Tribal Governments and communities and or individuals that have been impacted by the state for transportation development. In addition to reallocating land, other equitable outcomes could be achieved through programs or policies that support access for priority populations to amenities on public land such as land trusts, greenspace, public charging stations, the expansion of high-speed internet, mitigating environmental hazards, and access to employment in sectors that build and maintain the state's infrastructure.

## WHAT IS THE BENEFIT?

The benefit of this project is to address systemic racial inequities in the public transportation sector for California communities. Considering the legacy of harm that has been caused by state infrastructure, and in alignment with the Caltrans multi-year effort to address systemic inequities, Caltrans aims to advance racial equity throughout the Department's internal and external operations. This research would directly inform CORE's ability to provide leadership and guidance to all divisions, districts, and programs, and more deliberately advance the commitments identified in the Caltrans Equity Statement. As

written, Caltrans intends to "reform our programs, policies, and procedures based on this engagement to avoid harm to frontline and vulnerable communities," and has promised to "prioritize projects that improve access for and provide meaningful benefits to underserved communities."

## WHAT IS THE PROGRESS TO DATE?

The project initiated in March 2024. Caltrans Right of Way has been layered with the California Department of General Services (DGS) Affordable Housing Opportunities, Tribal Land, and Disadvantaged Communities in Geographic Information System (GIS) maps. Environmental Justice advisory groups have been assembled, and researchers will begin meeting with these groups in January 2025. Project will be completed Oct. 31, 2025.

## IMAGES



**Image 1:** Excess Site and Tribal Communities. Sources: California Department of Transportation; California Department of General Services State Excess Sites – Affordable Housing Opportunities website.



**Image 2:** Excess Sites and Disadvantaged Communities.  
Sources: California Department of Transportation;  
California Department of General Services State Excess  
Sites – Affordable Housing Opportunities website.