



**Berkeley Department of Transportation (BerkDOT)  
Community Listening Sessions with High School,  
College, and Religious Groups of Color**

*DRAFT Summary of Findings – November 2021*

## Introduction

The City of Berkeley partnered with Fehr & Peers and Equitable Cities to conduct three separate listening sessions with high school students of color, college and university students of color, and religious minority groups of color in the City of Berkeley during the months of October and November 2021. The listening sessions had two primary purposes: 1) to discuss the groups' collective and individual experiences and perceptions around and priority interests for improving racial justice outcomes in the context of traffic enforcement in the City; and 2) to hear the groups' thoughts and perceptions of transportation safety in broad terms and gauge their interest in actions that could enhance mobility justice for all racial minorities within the City.

The City and Fehr & Peers managed participant recruitment, whereas Equitable Cities facilitated all three 90-minute listening sessions over Zoom. There was a total of 20 participants across all three listening sessions. Each participant received a \$50 e-gift card at the completion of each session. The breakdown of participants by gender and race/ethnicity were as follows:

- **High School Student Group** included 3 female participants and 4 male participants of color
- **College Student Group** involved 1 male participant and 4 female participants of color
- **Religious Minority Group** involved 2 male participants and 3 female participants of color

A detailed questionnaire was used to facilitate discussions in all three listening sessions. The questionnaire focused on several key questions and topics such as favorite and least favorite places to visit in the City; transportation infrastructure; mobility challenges; unsafe and unwelcoming places and people; police; policy and funding decisions; alternatives for traffic enforcement; and improved access and mobility. This summary report encapsulates key findings from the three listening sessions and concludes with several recommendations to improve overall safety access and mobility in the City of Berkeley.

## Findings

### Participants' Favorite Places to Visit Within the City of Berkeley

Participants in each listening session were asked to name their favorite place to visit in Berkeley along with what they like most about the place. **Most participants from all three groups mentioned the Berkeley Marina and the Rose Garden as their favorite places to visit within the city.** Other locations mentioned included places such as South Side of Campus, Big C Hike, San Pablo Park and Downtown Berkeley. Ironically, however, Downtown Berkeley (and to a lesser degree: San Pablo Park) was also frequently mentioned as a least desirable location for several of the participants. See the next section on the least favorite places to visit to understand their concerns with Downtown Berkeley.

*“Berkeley Marina is one of my favorite places because that place has a lot of green spaces, a park, and sightseeing” – Male, College Student Participant*

*“San Pablo Park is my favorite because it is close to my place [of residence]; and I like the field where I can go do cardio and practice lacrosse.” – Male, High School Student Participant*

*“Berkeley Downtown near the high school area, where generally there is lot to do there and it’s just really enjoyable place to be.” – Female, Religious Minority Participant*

### **Participants’ Least Favorite Places to Visit Within the City of Berkeley**

Participants in each listening session were asked to name their least favorite place to visit in Berkeley along with what they dislike most about the place. **Most participants from all three groups mentioned Telegraph, Berkeley High, and Downtown Berkeley as their least favorite places to visit within the city.** These places were their least favorite places to visit in the city due to several reasons, including feeling uncomfortable and unwelcomed particularly on crowded streets in Downtown Berkeley and among the homeless population and encampments. A few participants also mentioned North Side of Campus and San Pablo Park amongst their least favorite places to visit.

*“I have a love-hate relationship with Telegraph because I enjoy walking through it and experiencing the various areas of culture and urban life. But at the same time, I often feel uncomfortable when I’m walking on Telegraph.”*

*- Female, College Student Participant*

*“I don’t like the area near Peet’s Coffee because it stinks and the place in general has different vibes, which I don’t like.” – Male, High School Student Participant*

*“I think some blocks along University Avenue feel a bit unsafe, especially towards the end of University Avenue near the freeway exit. I think overall, if I were to say any place in Berkeley that I would not like to be at, it’s usually because of the homeless populations on the streets. –*

*Female, Religious Minority Participant*

### **Participants’ Perceptions of Berkeley’s Transportation Infrastructure**

Participants in each listening session were asked to describe their views on the overall quality of Berkeley’s transportation infrastructure, along with their views on pedestrian, bicycle, and street traffic safety feature in the city. **Interestingly, there were many similarities in the views expressed by the college students and members of the religious minority group compared to those shared by the high school students.** For example, most of the participants in the college student and religious minority listening sessions favorably viewed the existing transportation infrastructure within the city. Overall, both groups felt that the infrastructure was

accessible, reliable, and connected them to key destinations throughout the city. Additionally, both groups shared positive views on the existing bike and pedestrian infrastructure in the city. They noted that bike stations are well placed and accessible for people in the city but could be enhanced with additional signage and speed management, particularly that of motor vehicles.

Comparatively, participants in the high school listening session viewed the existing transportation infrastructure less favorably. The high school students shared that BART was not reliable and was always crowded, especially during school hours. Many noted the degree to which the lack of reliability and overcrowded transit affected their daily lives and schedules, particularly during COVID and their ability to get to places on time. A few high school students noted that both BART and AC Transit are “always dirty and packed with commuters.” Lastly, several students expressed concerns about the number and presence of homeless people at station spaces, making it more unwelcoming and uncomfortable for them to make the best use of the services. Overall, the high school student stated that they preferred riding bicycles over riding BART and AC Transit, but expressed some concern related to the high speed of vehicles, which discourages them from biking in and around the city.

*“I would say there is pretty decent quality transportation infrastructure. I feel like having access to BART is nice, and the AC Transit System has been really helpful as a student because we get free bus rides. That can take you all the way into San Francisco, or Alameda, or kind of anywhere it runs.” –Female, College Student Participant*

*“Overall, regarding public transportation, I would say it's very efficient. There are a lot of buses that go pretty much everywhere.” – Male, College Student Participant*

*“I don't take the bus that much, but for that reason, BART, because it can be kind of dirty. And sometimes there are homeless people there too. And sometimes they like to yell a lot. With respect to bike/ped infrastructure, the crosswalks are like “fine,” but sometimes the cars drive so fast and crazy.” –Male, High School Participant*

*“On Milvia Street, I feel like the bike lanes should not have been put there. I feel like in that one area, we need a stop sign because the way that these people are driving and how they're riding their bikes, it's dangerous in a way, and the people in the cars won't stop at all. Like there'll be speeding through the street. Cause now it's a one way, so there'll be speeding through it and not even stopping for pedestrians at all.” –Female, High School Participant*

*“I feel the Ford bike stations are all over the place, which I think makes transportation through bikes more accessible for people because it's like a cheap alternative to taking BART or driving.” –Female, Religious Minority Participant*

*“Like people usually don't like to go to the BART station because there might be a lot of homeless people, which I've seen in my personal experience. And then there's also a lot of insanitation around the stations. So as for the bicycles, I think, the roads are perfect for biking,*

*except I think that bike theft is a decent problem in Berkeley. So, a lot of people, would prefer Ford bikes because if it's not a personal bike, and people can be more relaxed about where they can safely park their bike.” –Female, Religious Minority Participant*

## **Participants’ Overall Perceptions on Mobility Challenges**

**When asked to describe the biggest challenges they and/or their family face in getting around Berkeley, the feedback shared by the participants varied greatly.** The biggest concerns for college students were the availability of vehicle parking, increased likelihood of parking tickets, and the perceived abundance and lack of necessity of one-way streets in the city. The college students expressed how difficult it is to navigate the city’s crowded streets and find a suitable and safe vehicle parking space in timely manner without getting parking tickets. In fact, one female participant stated that she had gotten multiple parking tickets and had grown discouraged by the overall lack of parking. Several college students also mentioned that far too many streets are one-way; and, due to poor signage, it becomes stressful while driving to figure out one-way versus two-way streets, causing a few of them to accidentally enter the wrong lane.

While a few high school students did express parking concerns for their family members, the majority strongly pointed out the challenges they face while skating and walking on the streets. They mentioned that drivers don’t wait for them and other pedestrians to cross, regardless of their age or ability. They spoke passionately about near-death experiences due to almost getting hit multiple times by vehicles while biking, skating, or simply crossing the street. Lastly, many of the high school students that identified as female shared concerns with how often they get verbally harassed by mostly, but not exclusively, men on the streets of Berkeley while walking to and from school and elsewhere throughout the city. Most of the harassment shared by the female students was sexual in nature, even after they revealed their ages to the perpetrators.

Members of the religious minority group highlighted challenges related to public transportation reliability and service during the weekends, as “city buses don’t run on weekends.” This forces many of them to be heavily dependent on other family members to travel around the city because none of them drive or own personal vehicles. They also stated that buses are packed, and because of crowdedness, it becomes an inconvenient and unsafe travel option. These concerns were elevated during the time of COVID, due to passengers being in close proximity to each and aggressive (i.e., pushing other passengers) on overcrowded buses. Lastly, participants expressed safety concerns while walking along the streets at various times of the day due to perceived spike in the homeless population in the city.

*“One thing I noticed is that there are so many one-way streets and you can't always tell, like if it's open. So maybe it would be more helpful to have more one-way signs. And then another thing, this isn't for me, but this is where my family is facing challenges, is the parking issue.” –  
Female, College Student Participant*

*“There are certain things that are inappropriate like --a lot of people don’t understand that I’m underage, they don’t really understand or get it. So that’s another thing. And they’ll do that [stare and make sexual advances] in cars too. And it’s uncomfortable. So being a woman and being a woman of color and then being a woman of color and part of the LGBTQ community (because most of the time it is old white men just staring), it’s just uncomfortable.” –Female, High School Student Participant*

*“No one in the family drives except my mom. So, we are either relying on her or heavily relying on the bus. But a lot of the time, the buses are packed and crowded, so if there are too many people, I can’t get home on time, or I have to wait to catch a later bus, which is usually a big inconvenience. –Female, Religious Minority Participant*

### **Participants’ Insights on Unsafe and Unwelcoming Places in the City**

**When asked to share details about locations, areas, or neighborhoods that make them feel unsafe or unwelcomed in the city, the majority of participants shared similar concerns about a number of key destinations throughout the city, particularly Downtown Berkeley, Telegraph, and San Pablo Park.** For example, many of the participants perceived Downtown Berkeley to be an unsafe area due to the high homeless population, traffic, and personal safety concerns. For a number of the college students, the areas surrounding Piedmont Crescent made them uncomfortable and unwelcomed due to the majority white population and overall lack of diversity in the area. Several female college students also shared that they felt unsafe, particularly during the night, when they had negative experiences of strangers following them and verbally harassing them, especially in areas closer to Telegraph or near Downtown Berkeley. A number of high school students also expressed similar concerns and experiences near Downtown Berkeley and San Pablo Park, where people made insensitive comments about their physical features and racial identity.

Participants in the religious minority listening session expressed similar concerns about their safety due to heavy traffic and an increasing homeless population. They noted southwest and the west side of Berkeley as being a bit more crowded with homeless people, which makes it unsafe to walk through those areas. They also noted that there are some areas of the city, such as the northern side of Berkeley, which is perceived as having a higher white population and higher socio-economic status making them “feel like the odd ones out” and where they experience microaggressions.

*“I feel like anytime I walk down Telegraph...I know that I’m going to get comments. Once, I was walking back to my car at night after class. There was like one time when I was walking past People’s Park and I was followed by this guy and he was making a bunch of comments.” – Female, College Student Participant*

*“I feel in Downtown Berkeley, where there are a lot of older men, and it's hard to ignore the things people say about my body and how they look at me. It's very hard in those two spots, especially Downtown Berkeley...because it's a lot of people. So, it's like you have this fear that something is going to happen.” –Female, High School Student Participant*

*“That kind of feeling that I've had has been less about religion and more about gender for me. I don't know, just generally I feel more uncomfortable in the downtown areas. Because it's a lot more crowded and there are a lot more homeless people, and that just generally makes me a little more cautious in terms of safety, like sexual harm or something like that, that's what's on my mind.” –Female, Religious Minority Participant*

### **Participants' Insights on Unsafe and Unwelcoming People in the City**

**When asked to share details about the people they encounter, and whether they make them feel unsafe or unwelcomed in the city, the overwhelming majority of the concerns were shared by the female participants in all three listening sessions as compared to the male participants.** For example, female participants in the college listening sessions mentioned that they feel safer during the daytime as compared to walking late at night and having to encounter someone in the street while en route to and from their respective destinations. A high school female participant shared concerns with encountering aggressive and rude male and female cyclists while en route to school or while departing school in the afternoons. Female participants in the religious minority group shared that they had faced a number of issues while commuting and using public transit. They stated that white residents of the community would verbally assault and harass them by spewing racist comments, which made them scared to walk on the streets.

*“I'm not afraid of being physically assaulted necessarily. I just don't want people to say things that makes me feel uncomfortable.” –Female, College Student Participant*

*“Some biker people, I don't know why, some white men, just love to say mean stuff to students walking home, like ‘get off the road’.” –Female, High School Student Participant*

*“One time, I was on an AC Transit bus when I was told to go back to my country, by someone else on it. So, like, I immediately got off and tried to escape myself from the situation, and it was kind of traumatic to deal with.” –Female, Religious Minority Participant*

### **Participants' General Impressions of Berkeley Law Enforcement**

**When asked to share details about their general impressions of law enforcement in the city, the participants in all three listening sessions shared similar perspectives.** In addition to sharing their general impressions of law enforcement in the city, participants in all three listening sessions were asked to share whether they worried about being treated unfairly and being physically harmed or imprisoned by Berkeley police officers because of their race, age, or religion.

During discussions with college students, the majority of Asian American participants shared less concern for their demographic group and more concern for their peers' friends and fellows, particularly those from the Latino or Black communities due to how “we have stereotyped crime and harassment based on race and ethnicity.” Similarly, many of the participants in the religious minority listening session had also never experienced personal issues with the police but expressed awareness and concerns about how “police [in general] had killed or hurt black community members and other people of color.” The high school students, on the other hand, had mixed feelings about law enforcement. A few of them shared personal experiences where Berkeley police were kind, welcoming, and easy to talk to. However, the majority shared a number of bad experiences (personal and/or family) with Berkeley police that they believed was due to their race and ethnicity.

*“In comparison to other groups, such as the Latino or Black communities, I believe there would be fewer [concerns or issues]. I think they [Blacks and Latinos] are definitely at a higher risk of being like, stopped or checked in on more than Asian Americans.” –Female, College Student Participant*

*“They don’t care about your race. They don’t care about your age. They don’t care about your gender. As long as they see that you’re an African American, you’re screwed. Or if you’re just a person of color, you’re screwed. It doesn’t matter if you’re a woman. You’re a man. You’re gay, you’re bisexual. You’re a kid. You’re an adult. You’re old. It doesn’t matter.” –Female, High School Student Participant*

*“I think about many stories over the past couple of years, about how the police have, you know, killed or hurt black men and other people of color.” –Female, Religious Minority Participant*

## **Participants’ Views on Policy and Funding Decisions**

***When asked to share whether they feel the City of Berkeley should allocate more money for transportation improvements to lower-income neighborhoods and communities of color that have historically been underfunded, the overwhelming majority of the participants in all three listening sessions supported the idea.*** There was consensus in all three listening sessions in support of the city allocating more money to lower-income neighborhoods and communities of color that have historically been underfunded. However, there were a couple of participants in the high school listening session that felt that transportation was not the biggest issue in the city and thus the money should be used to tackle larger problems such as homelessness.

*“In order to bridge the differences between lower income communities and higher income communities, they should start not underfunding things.” –Female, College Student Participant*



*“Berkeley doesn’t have a similar thing where it’s like all equal. I feel like having a fair equalizer or making it based on income level or anything like that would also help serve underfunded communities and communities of color.” –Female, Religious Minority Participant*

## **Participants’ Views on Shifting Traffic Enforcement Responsibilities Away from Police Officers**

**When asked whether they thought it was a good or bad idea for the City to consider moving traffic enforcement responsibilities away from police officers and instead assigning these responsibilities to a specialized set of city employees who would not carry weapons or have the power to detain or arrest people, every participant in each of the three listening sessions believed it to be a good idea.** On this topic, all the three groups, i.e., college students, high school students, and religious minority groups, expressed a positive response and supported the idea of moving traffic enforcement responsibilities away from police officers. The participants in the college student listening sessions expressed that they believe it will “make marginalized communities feel safer overall.” They also suggested that removing the funds from the police department will give police less power. Lastly, they shared that shifting these responsibilities to a different entity separate from law enforcement and that is well trained in anti-racism would “really ease some of the disproportionate burdens that may be placed on low-income folks or people of color.”

*“I think that it would be a good idea because we’ve seen time and time again that police officers are likely to kill people of color, especially black people, for no reason, just because of a traffic violation. So, I feel like if the city, or if local government cares about people of color and marginalized communities, they’re going to take steps towards making sure that that never happens again.” –Female, College Student Participant*

*“It would probably be a good way to limit the kind of prejudice that results in extreme cases like death and violence.” –Female, Religious Minority Participant*

## **Recommendations**

### **Participants’ Key Recommendations to Improve Overall Safety, Access, and Mobility in the City of Berkeley**

The following recommendations represent a compilation of the listening session participants’ ideas for improving transportation safety in the City of Berkeley. The recommendations are not listed in order of importance.

- Focus on creating more jobs to reduce the homeless population because building student housing on People’s Park is a bad idea as it is going to displace all the homeless people.

- Create better traffic signage to make Berkeley easier to navigate as there are a lot of one-way streets, and sometimes it's confusing which roads are one-way or not.
- Encourage UCPD or whomever is patrolling at night to also focus in majority-minority area to protect the safety of minorities from potential criminals in the community.
- Focus on improving the safety of minorities by relocating traffic enforcement to BerkDOT but do not forget to also focus on other polarizing issues/concerns such as homelessness and verbal harassment of high school students and women.
- Provide more funding for low-income communities and make transportation more efficient and reliable.
- Increase bike and pedestrian infrastructure.
- Implement improved signage and navigation around schools and institutions to improve interactions between automobiles and other modes of transportation.
- Involve more people of color in the “new” traffic safety patrol team. In terms of safety, the City of Berkeley needs better police training to investigate cases without resorting to aggressive and violent approaches.
- Make public transit even more accessible and so that there are more people using public transit instead of each person using their own private vehicles.

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