

Community-Based Transportation Planning (CBTP) Program Evaluation

April 8, 2022

Prepared by the Metropolitan Transportation Commission and
the Association of Bay Area Governments



ASSOCIATION OF BAY AREA GOVERNMENTS
METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Introduction to the Community-Based Transportation Planning Program

Program Overview

The Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) initiated the Community-Based Transportation Planning (CBTP) program in 2002 following recommendations from the 2001 Regional Transportation Plan's Environmental Justice Report. The original impetus for the program was to plan for investments that would fulfill mobility gaps identified by low-income communities as part of the Lifeline Transportation Network effort.¹ Over time, the CBTP program has increasingly recognized solutions that are multimodal and extend beyond investments in fixed route transit, such as active transportation improvements or programs to leverage new transportation technologies, such as expanded bike share program coverage or subsidized transportation network company (e.g., Uber or Lyft) fares.

The focus of the CBTP program is to work with communities that have historically been underserved by or excluded from the transportation planning process to identify mobility challenges and prioritize solutions. MTC adopts program guidelines to inform the planning process and set expectations on deliverables that should emerge from the CBTP process. The CBTP program focuses on engaging with residents of Equity Priority Communities, which are defined based on concentrations of underserved populations, such as people with low incomes, people of color, people with disabilities, people residing in severely rent-burdened households, and more.² Additionally, the CBTP guidelines provide flexibility to plan for other "Transportation-Disadvantaged Areas" that are not considered Equity Priority Communities, such as in rural areas or in communities recently affected by wildfire.

Given that each neighborhood is unique and has its own challenges and priorities, there is considerable flexibility in the form that CBTP planning documents take, though the guidelines specify that they all must fulfill several baseline requirements. These requirements include assessing existing conditions, engaging with members of the community, documenting preferred solutions, and discussing next steps for funding and implementation. Completed plans are published on the MTC website.³

As the regional planning agency, MTC provides funding to County Transportation Agencies (CTAs) for CBTP planning work and establishes guidelines for using CBTP funds. CTAs have historically led the on-the-ground planning process, with transit agency and city staff serving in advisory capacities. Community-based organizations (CBOs) are engaged throughout the process by serving on steering committees and in some cases, assisting with meeting facilitation and data collection during the planning process.

Described in detail later in this report, CBTP recommendations span modal categories, recognizing solutions that improve active transportation, transit, and driving in order to meet the mobility needs of historically underserved communities. CBTPs commonly recommend

¹ To read the full Lifeline Transportation Network Report, visit https://files.mtc.ca.gov/library/pub/24404_1.pdf

² For more information on Equity Priority Communities, visit <https://mtc.ca.gov/planning/transportation/access-equity-mobility/equity-priority-communities>

³ To read completed CBTPs, visit <https://mtc.ca.gov/planning/transportation/access-equity-mobility/community-based-transportation-plans-cbtps>

low-cost capital improvements to active transportation or transit infrastructure, such as new crosswalks or seating at bus stops. Investments that would increase the frequency of existing transit routes or extend service into early morning or evening are also common. Other frequent recommendations include new programs to serve the community, such as bicycle safety classes or subsidized transit fares.

CBTPs rely on a wide array of funding sources provided by all levels of government to implement the recommendations. Potential funding sources include MTC's regional programs (e.g., Lifeline Transportation Program or Active Transportation Program), county sales tax revenues (e.g., Measure T in Napa County or Proposition K in San Francisco), transit operating budgets, and city or county capital improvement budgets.

To date, MTC has allocated approximately \$4 million to the CBTP program. Nearly 50 CBTPs have been completed in communities located in all nine Bay Area counties, with 12 communities revisiting their plans to update recommendations.

Program Evaluation Methodology

MTC originally established guidelines for the CBTP program in 2002. The guidelines were updated once since the program's inception, in 2018.⁴ The 2018 program guidelines update established a requirement that MTC evaluate the program at the close of the planning cycle. This requirement created an opportunity to assess the program guidelines and make any revisions prior to the next program funding cycle, which will come from MTC's One Bay Area Grant (OBAG) program in Fiscal Year 2022/23.

Staff kicked off the program evaluation in summer 2021 by cataloguing the recommendations from all of the current CBTPs, disregarding any CBTPs that had been superseded by a more recent plan. Staff analyzed the recommendations to distill the most common types of recommendations across all CBTPs. These findings are summarized in the following section.

The next step in the program evaluation was to brief the MTC Policy Advisory Council on the program's current status, most common recommendations, and overarching objectives for the program evaluation. Feedback from the Policy Advisory Council informed the objectives and methods used in the program evaluation.

The program evaluation had two primary objectives:

1. **Understand the outcomes of the CBTP process to better support implementation:** staff sought to understand the most common types of projects recommended through CBTPs and examined the funding and implementation outcomes for recommendations, including the factors that helped or hindered implementation.
2. **Identify the strengths and shortcomings of the existing CBTP planning process to inform revisions to the guidelines:** staff sought firsthand accounts of what it was like to contribute to a CBTP, including the challenges and opportunities posed by the current guidelines.

⁴ To read the 2018 CBTP guidelines, visit https://mtc.ca.gov/sites/default/files/CBTP-Guidelines_2017-2021_Cycle.pdf

In December 2021 and January 2022, staff conducted interviews with staff from all nine CTAs to hear more about their experience with the CBTP program. Staff then briefed the CTA Planning Directors, the MTC Policy Advisory Council, and the Joint MTC Planning Committee with the ABAG Administrative Committee on common themes emerging from those conversations and proposed changes to the guidelines in response to common themes in February 2022.

Staff sought input from city and CBO representatives as well, though turnover and limited bandwidth proved to be a challenge in gathering feedback. Staff were able to speak with two city representatives but were unable to speak with any CBO representatives. This remains an area for improvement in future evaluations of the CBTP program.

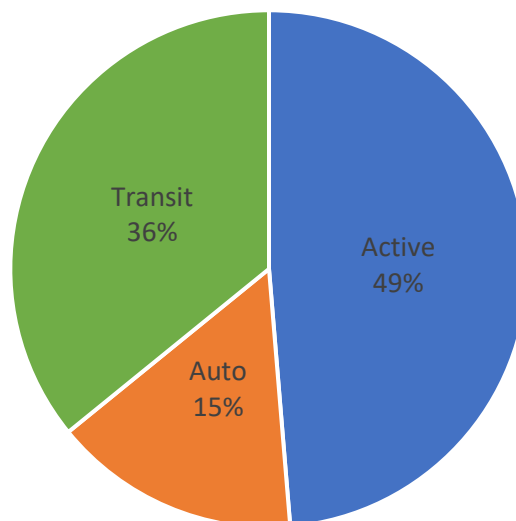
Program Evaluation Findings

Common Recommendations

In total, staff catalogued just under 700 recommendations from the completed CBTPs, categorizing each by mode of transportation and the type of improvement. This effort required some assumptions or simplifications on the part of MTC staff, such as when a recommendation was overly broad or was multimodal in nature (i.e., complete streets enhancements that would improve conditions for cyclists, pedestrians, and transit riders were classified as active transportation enhancements for simplicity).

As illustrated in Figure 1, just under half of all recommendations relate to active transportation, with 36 percent of recommendations relating to transit and the remaining 15 percent relating to auto. This illustrates both the wide-reaching universe of mobility needs in historically underserved communities but also the broad array of solutions to meet those needs. Furthermore, this assessment underscores the need for flexible funding sources that can fund multimodal improvements and for multiple implementing agencies, including local Departments of Public Works and transit operators, to be involved in the planning and implementation phases to deliver on recommendations.

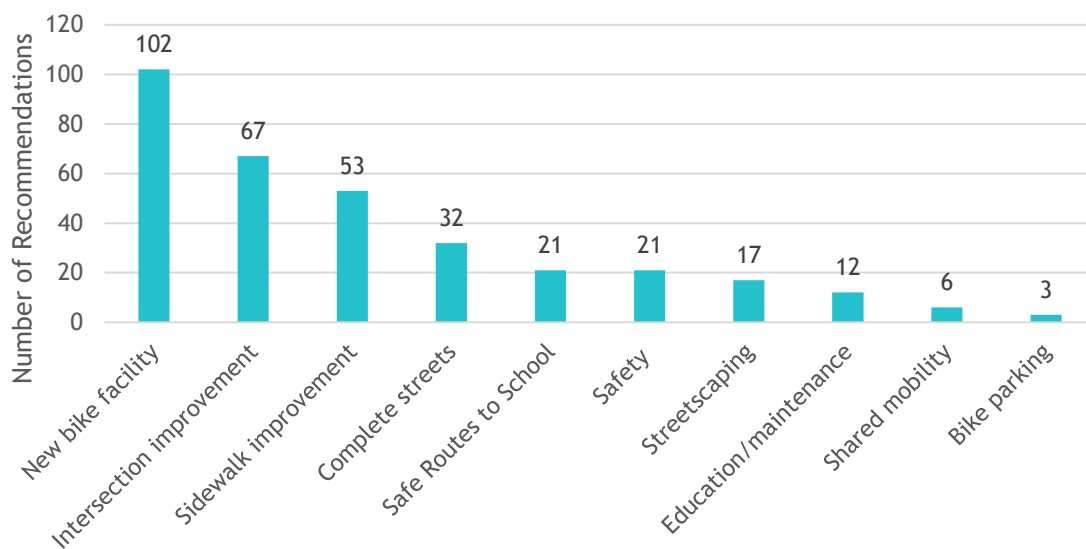
Figure 1. Community-Based Transportation Plan Recommendations by Mode



More specific information on the types of recommendations that correspond to each of those three modal categories is provided below. The overarching trend is that improvements tend to focus on lower-cost capital improvements for active transportation and transit, and on innovative mobility solutions for auto modes.

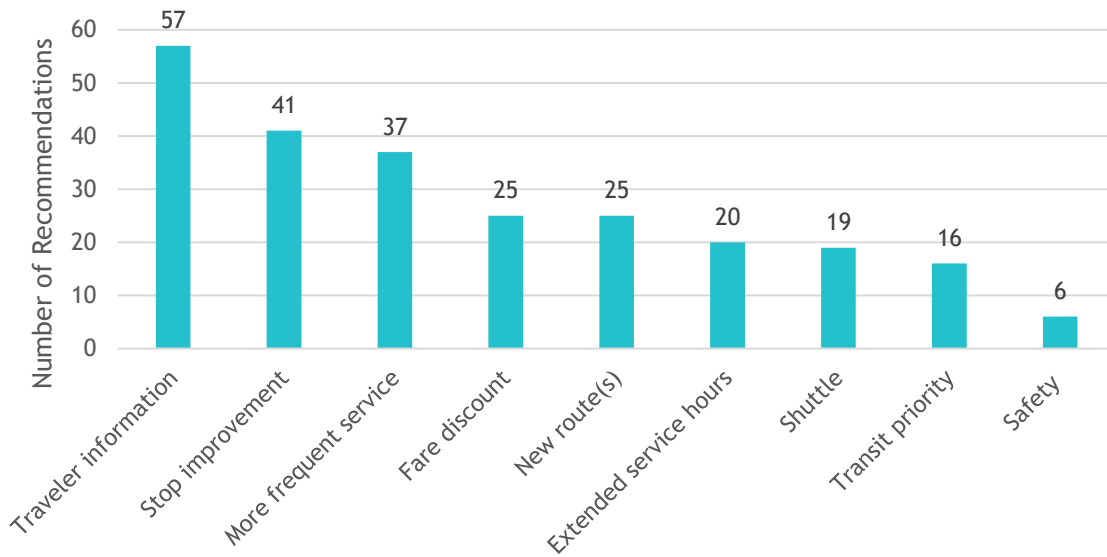
The most common active transportation recommendations include new bike facilities (e.g., new or extended bike lanes or multi-use paths), intersection improvements, sidewalk improvements, and complete streets improvements (e.g., traffic calming enhancements, “right-sizing” widths or number of lanes on a corridor). Other recommendations speak to safety, education, and access to shared mobility (e.g., bike share or scooter share expansion). Figure 2 includes a full breakdown of the most common active transportation recommendations.

Figure 2. Most Common Active Transportation Recommendations



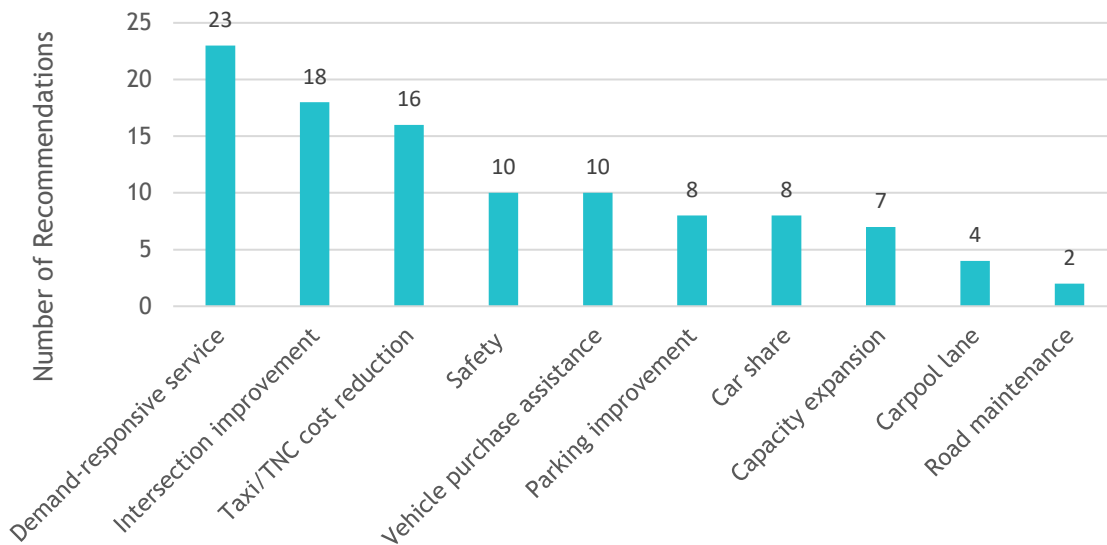
Turning to transit, the two most common recommendation types are low-cost capital improvements. The most common recommendation is to improve traveler information through multilingual signage, real-time arrival signs, and travel training. The next most common recommendation type speaks to improvements at stops and stations, such as seating and shelters at bus stops and improvements to BART station plazas. CBTPs also regularly identify a need for more frequent service, particularly in off-peak and weekend periods. There is also interest in fare discount programs for youth, people with low incomes, or all passengers. Other recommendations include new fixed route service needs, a need to extend service hours to earlier or later in the day, new shuttle services, transit priority enhancements, and transit safety improvements. Figure 3 summarizes the full set of most common transit recommendations.

Figure 3. Most Common Transit Recommendations



Recommendations for enhancing automotive mobility are less common, due in part to the fact that residents of Equity Priority Communities are less likely to own a vehicle than those residing outside of these neighborhoods. The most common recommendation is to institute new demand-responsive automobile services, which would allow access to the convenience of automotive modes without the cost of owning a personal vehicle. More specifically, these recommendations envisioned vanpools or dial-a-ride services connecting the community to services like education and healthcare. The next most common set of recommendations speak to intersection improvements like traffic signals or turning lanes, which could also benefit pedestrians and cyclists. CBTPs, particularly those produced in the last five years, commonly recommend measures to reduce the cost of using taxis or transportation network companies, including subsidies or vouchers. Other somewhat common recommendations include safety enhancements and assistance purchasing a personal vehicle. Capacity expansion projects (i.e., road widenings or interchange expansions) were not commonly recommended in CBTPs. Figure 4 lists the full summary of auto recommendations.

Figure 4. Most Common Auto Recommendations



Planning Process

Across interviews with CTA and city staff, there was general agreement that the overall direction provided by the current program guidelines was clear and worked well. This suggested that major revisions to the program guidelines in the 2022 revision were not necessary. That said, several themes emerged across interviews with multiple partner agency staff, which can inform minor changes to the guidelines.

1. Planning funds are not sufficient for today's costs.

The most common theme across all interviews was that the \$1.5 million allocated across the nine counties from OBAG2 was not sufficient to cover the costs of producing CBTPs. In particular, CBTPs by nature involve in-depth, repeated engagement with both members of the public and key jurisdictional and non-governmental partners. This engagement requires substantial staff time, elevating the cost of producing a CBTP. Partners reported supplementing regional CBTP funding with county or city funds to compensate for higher costs. Some partners also identified that low contract amounts made consultant procurement difficult.

2. Partners want flexibility to plan for people, not places.

CBTPs have always been geographically specific, seeking to identify specific projects to meet the needs of residents of specific communities. Multiple partners raised the issue that there are people facing systemic mobility barriers residing outside of EPCs, such as people with low incomes living in rural areas, and that the current program design limited the ability to plan for these types of needs. Partners expressed appreciation for the ability to designate additional "Transportation Disadvantaged Areas," or areas where CBTPs could be produced as a way to address transportation needs in communities that are not designated as EPCs.

3. The role of cities in producing CBTPs should be elevated.

The role of the city in the CBTP process was another common theme, with county partners expressing a variety of suggestions on ways to involve city staff. At minimum, there was agreement that including city representatives throughout the planning process, either by including local staff on steering committees or briefing local elected officials at key points, increased the likelihood that a plan's recommendations receive funding or proceed to implementation. Some county staff expressed interest in allowing cities to lead the CBTP process, given that cities may be better equipped to engage in neighborhood-level planning. This model, while not explicitly stated as an option in the 2018 guidelines, has been piloted in San Francisco and San Rafael. City staff also had varied opinions on this topic. Some indicated that counties may have more bandwidth to take on this extra planning work (particularly relevant for smaller cities with small staffs), while others agreed that cities could be the logical lead for these efforts.

4. Contracting barriers, restrictions on funds, and limited bandwidth are a challenge to CBO participation.

The CBTP program guidelines encourage CTAs to set aside up to 10 percent of the CBTP project budget for CBO compensation. However, few partner staff reported successfully compensating CBOs for their participation. While there was agreement on the importance of compensating CBOs and residents for their time and effort, partners reported a variety of logistical barriers to carrying out this intent.

For one, CBTP planning funds currently come from federal funding sources, allocated via OBAG grants. There are unique restrictions that come with using federal funds, including increased contracting requirements and limitations on the types of activities that can be supported by those funds. CBOs, particularly those with smaller staffs and limited resources, may not have the expertise needed to enter into a contract in compliance with federal funding requirements. Federal funds also cannot be used for things like cash incentives paid directly to participants. While these activities may be supported via more flexible county or local funding supplements, partners expressed interest in receiving flexible funds from MTC that can be used to compensate CBOs and residents, as is recommended in the guidelines.

Additionally, partners underscored that CBOs are currently working at or over capacity; many are facing simultaneous demands to respond to the COVID pandemic, the housing affordability crisis, and other pressing community needs. As such, CBOs may not have the bandwidth to engage on CBTPs on the timeline that CBTP project managers envision. Partners shared best practices from their experiences, such as providing schedule flexibility for organizations to respond on their timeline, opting to hold one-on-one meetings with CBOs instead of meeting with them as a group to facilitate scheduling, and attaching specific tasks to CBO contracts to manage expectations.

5. Outreach fatigue and delayed implementation are a challenge to sustaining CBO partnerships.

On the topic of CBO partnerships, city and county staff also mentioned that some CBOs do not want to partner on efforts like CBTPs because delayed implementation and overall fatigue with continuous engagement and no delivery (in other words, outreach fatigue) has significantly weakened the trust that CBOs and residents place in planning agencies. This

highlights the importance of implementing plan recommendations, as well as the need for thoughtful engagement in sustaining meaningful and trusting partnerships with CBOs.

Funding and Implementation Outcomes

CTA and city staff also provided information on their experience with funding and implementing the recommendations included in CBTPs. Overall, partner agency staff often did not have complete information on the current funding and implementation status of CBTPs that had been completed, particularly for older CBTPs or for recommendations where the partner agency was not involved in funding or implementing. Through discussions on the process of funding and implementing CBTP recommendations, partner agency staff reported a number of barriers that led to limited realization of CBTP aims. Feedback related to funding and implementation outcomes will be helpful as MTC seeks to revise its funding policies to support equitable outcomes. Five themes emerged as commonalities shared across multiple interviews.

1. Cities are primary implementers, but can lack buy-in.

While CTAs are the default planning lead under the current guidelines, many of the recommendations included in CBTPs are not within the CTAs' purview to implement. Instead, many recommendations are best implemented by city Departments of Public Works or Transportation. However, partners identified that city agencies were not always bought in on CBTPs and did not always prioritize their implementation. Some partners mentioned that buy-in from elected officials can be particularly impactful in spurring local action, and that presenting on CBTPs at City Council meetings had been worthwhile. That said, requiring City Council adoption involves another logistical layer and city staff time that may be in short supply. Furthermore, some CTAs have pursued a countywide CBTP model, with recommendations spanning multiple cities. Partners were concerned about the additional logistical burden of having to pursue multiple City Council adoptions. On the other hand, some CTAs currently request City Council adoption of their Countywide Transportation Plans, structuring the documents into city-specific chapters to facilitate local adoption.

2. CBTPs should leverage a broad array of potential funding sources for implementation.

The Lifeline Transportation Program is a competitive funding program managed by MTC that resources projects that result in improved mobility for residents with low incomes in the nine San Francisco Bay Area counties. The program has allocated nearly \$300 million to over 300 projects sponsored by CTAs and transit operators since its inception in the early 2000s. Historically, Lifeline has been a key funding program for implementing CBTP recommendations, though over time, several fund sources within Lifeline have either been depleted or have expired. Currently, the remaining fund sources are largely eligible for transit operations benefiting people with low incomes. As a result, projects seeking Lifeline funds compete for a smaller and less flexible pot of money. While partners acknowledged that there are a wide range of funds within and outside of MTC's control that can support the implementation of CBTP recommendations, they also expressed the need to better align CBTP needs with a diverse portfolio of fund sources. This reflects a shift within MTC to a more broadened approach for Lifeline to integrate equity into all funding programs.

3. Technical assistance from MTC is needed.

When partners were asked what MTC could do to better support CBTP planning and implementation, technical assistance was a common response. To assist with the planning process, partners expressed interest in receiving pre-processed data on existing conditions in Equity Priority Communities, something that MTC is well-poised to provide at scale. There was also interest in regular convenings of partner agency staff working on CBTPs to share experiences and best practices. Contracting is another challenge area where MTC may be able to provide regional resources, particularly when it comes to contracting with CBOs.

Technical assistance would also help with funding and implementation. City partners communicated that project development technical assistance to bring CBTP recommendations from an idea to a “shovel ready” project would greatly help these projects compete for external funding.

4. Overly general recommendations are a challenge to implement.

Reflecting on the experience of implementing CBTP recommendations, a common challenge across partners was that some recommendations included in CBTPs were overly general. An example of an overly general recommendation is “Make Main Street safer.” In this example, there is no information about the specific safety challenge on the corridor or the desired intervention.

As time passes and staff turnover occurs, partners may find themselves struggling to remember what the particular needs were if they weren’t well-documented in the plan. It can also make it difficult to understand when work has been completed and the community’s need has been addressed.

5. Implementation that doesn’t involve the CTA is difficult to monitor.

The guidelines require CTAs to document a process for monitoring funding and implementation outcomes of CBTPs, but execution of this requirement has been mixed, with limited specificity. One challenge is that the guidelines are general and do not delineate the types of information that should be tracked or how it should be tracked.

A more difficult challenge that partners highlighted is that the wide variety of recommendations included in CBTPs are not all funded or implemented by the CTA, even though they are charged with monitoring implementation. Communication channels for cities or transit agencies to advise the CTA that a recommendation was implemented do not currently exist, and some information would be difficult or impossible for CTAs to gather on their own. One partner shared that the only way they would know if a local street improvement like a safer pedestrian crossing was implemented would be for them to pass by it in person. While the desire is not to add extra work for partners, understanding implementation status is vital, particularly when it comes to reporting back to the communities on what recommendations have been delivered or are making progress.

Revisions to the 2022 CBTP Program Guidelines

The program evaluation concluded that there was general support for the 2018 CBTP guidelines from partners, while also highlighting areas where the guidelines could be

improved to better support the stated goals of the program. Key revisions to the guidelines relate to the following six themes.

1. MTC will provide more funding for planning.

There was nearly unanimous feedback across partners that more planning funds were needed. In 2018, OBAG2 provided just under \$1.5 million for the CBTP cycle spanning 2018 to 2021. For the upcoming cycle, the CBTP program will leverage a combined pot of funding from OBAG3 and the second funding round of California's Regional Early Action Planning grant (REAP 2.0). Applying an even greater emphasis on equity than prior cycles of OBAG, these two funding sources together will make \$3 million available to County Transportation Agencies for CBTPs. This funding will be allocated based on the share of the region's low-income population, with upper and lower bounds on funding received in line with the methodology used to allocate funds in 2018. The guidelines also remove the cap on CBTP cost, which had been limited at \$100,000.

In addition, MTC staff is identifying and developing new strategies that can help with CBO and community engagement and compensation. Staff also plans to develop a technical assistance program to further develop CBTP project recommendations to improve project readiness for funding. Finally, staff is looking at ways to expand the opportunity to incorporate the option of participatory budgeting, which was piloted through two recent CBTPs in San Francisco and Vallejo.

2. Cities will be more closely involved in the CBTP process.

While exact suggestions varied from interview to interview, there was a consistent message that city participation in the process of planning, funding, and implementing CBTPs was critical. Partners shared best practices that worked for them and their constituents, and the guidelines codify three of these approaches that are already being implemented in CBTPs across the region. First, the guidelines formalize the requirement that one or more city representatives sit on the CBTP steering committee. Second, the guidelines add the requirement that the City Council adopt the CBTP. Third, the guidelines introduce the option for the CTA to pass funds along to a city agency so that the city leads the CBTP process. Together, these changes present the opportunity to increase buy-in from local staff and elected officials, which could lead toward better funding and implementation outcomes.

3. Guidelines recommend compensating a wider range of participants.

The 2018 guidelines recommended that CTAs set aside budget to compensate CBOs for their involvement. Understanding that CBO compensation can present logistical and administrative barriers, the guidelines continue to leave this as a recommendation and not a requirement. However, the 2022 guidelines add the suggestion of compensating residents as well as CBOs, understanding that these are two separate constituencies. Compensation could take many forms, including providing meals or on-site childcare at outreach events or offering participant incentives like free transit cards.

4. MTC will assist partners with project scoping.

The program evaluation revealed that partners were not always able to fulfill the required components as outlined in the CBTP guidelines. In particular, sections on implementation and

monitoring were varied in level of specificity. To assist partners with project scoping, the guidelines introduce a requirement for MTC staff to review and approve each CBTP scope of work before work begins. This will help ensure that CBTPs are set up to meet the expectations of the program from the start. This will also present an opportunity for MTC staff to share best practices and provide guidance to county or local staff based on program experience.

5. CBTPs will have more meaningful connections to completed and ongoing plans.

Although CBTPs are geographically focused at the neighborhood level, it is still critical to understand how community planning work relates to other ongoing or recently completed planning efforts. The guidelines include a requirement to document relevant plans that touch the study area to ensure that planners understand community needs that have already been expressed and whether or not the needs have been met. In communities where a CBTP has already been produced, this is an opportunity to assess the implementation status of recommendations and the degree to which mobility challenges highlighted in those documents remain. To facilitate funding and implementation of recommended projects, the guidelines require CBTPs to document the process for integrating recommendations into documents like local capital improvement programs or countywide transportation plans so that recommendations can be prioritized for funding and construction.

6. Implementation chapters of CBTPs will be more specific.

CBTPs were required to outline next steps for implementation in the 2018 guidelines, though the guidance was general. As a result, the implementation chapters vary considerably between CBTPs. The 2022 guidelines leverage best practices from MTC's planning work to provide more specific instruction on the details to include. Namely, the guidelines now require that CBTPs include details such as a cost estimate for each recommendation, prioritization between recommendations, identification of the lead agency for implementation, and documentation of potential funding sources. Requiring more detail in the implementation chapter advances the implementation conversation and can lead to better implementation outcomes. The guidelines also require partners to establish a process for informing the CBTP steering committee of implementation outcomes; this change seeks to honor the contribution of community members by letting them know when recommendations have been delivered.

Questions for Future Program Evaluations

This program evaluation provides useful insights that have informed changes to the program's guidelines and spurred discussions with peers throughout MTC regarding how agency policies and programs could better support equity through the lens of CBTP implementation. Looking ahead, staff recommend additional areas to consider in the next CBTP evaluation. The subsequent program evaluation should be completed before the end of the next funding cycle (FY2022/23-FY2025/26) to both revisit the themes explored in this document and address the following questions.

1. What is the experience of CBOs in the CBTP process, and what can be done to further empower communities and meet their needs?

While the evaluation includes input from CTA staff, as well as a limited number of city staff, MTC staff was unable to connect with representatives from CBOs that had participated in CBTPs to hear their perspectives. Hearing more about CBO and community experiences and the ways the guidelines could be adjusted to facilitate more meaningful CBO and community input is critical to the future of the program.

2. What is the funding and implementation status of CBTP recommendations?

The program evaluation gathered perspectives on the process of funding, implementing, and monitoring CBTP recommendations, but did not go so far as to gather information on funding or implementation status for individual recommendations included in CBTPs. Understanding the share of CBTP recommendations that have received funding or been implemented would help to measure the efficacy of the CBTP program in meeting the transportation needs expressed by CBTP participants. It could also help to supplement qualitative information on barriers and success factors relevant to funding and implementation that partners reported as part of this program evaluation. However, data collection is likely to be a resource-intensive effort given that many CBTPs were completed more than 10 years ago; the total number of all CBTP recommendations; the variety of potential funding and implementing authorities; and the lack of specificity in some recommendations. Over the next few years, MTC staff should consider ways to assist CTAs in monitoring the implementation of CBTP recommendations, such as by establishing uniform reporting processes or collating city capital improvement documents.