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Environmental justice in action: Oakland's Fruitvale Transit Village

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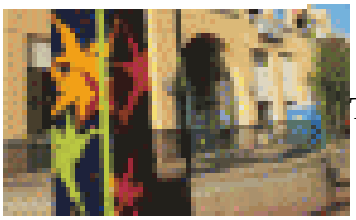
The Fruitvale Transit Village project is the result of a broad-based partnership among public, private, and nonprofit organizations working together to revitalize a community using transit-oriented development. It?s located in California?s Bay Area adjacent to the Fruitvale Bay Area Rapid  Transit District (BART) station in Oakland. Fruitvale, one of Oakland's seven community districts, is a low-income, predominantly minority community experiencing economic stress. This case study focuses on the incorporation of environmental justice principles into the planning and design of the Fruitvale Transit Village.

The Fruitvale Transit Village is the brainchild of the Unity Council, a community development corporation formed in 1964 by activists who wanted to create a forum for working on issues important to Fruitvale's Latino community. The origins of the project date back to 1991, when BART announced plans to construct a multi-layered parking facility next to the Fruitvale station. Although the community agreed that new parking was necessary, the design and location of the facility did not sit well with Fruitvale residents and business owners. Members of the community were concerned that the proposed structure would increase traffic and pollution and further separate the Fruitvale neighborhood from the BART station. The Unity Council galvanized neighborhood opposition to the parking structure design and location, arguing that any development around the BART station should be guided by a broad-based community planning process.

Faced with this strong community opposition, BART withdrew its proposal and agreed to work with the Unity Council on a plan for the area. During the next several years, the Unity Council engaged local stakeholders in a comprehensive visioning and planning process that laid out the parameters of the Fruitvale Transit Village. The Transit Village includes a mixture of housing, shops, offices, a library, a child care facility, a pedestrian plaza, and other community services all surrounding the BART station. The project reduces traffic and pollution in and around Fruitvale because community residents have access to a range of goods and services within easy walking distance of the transit station.

The Fruitvale Transit Village project illustrates a number of key themes and effective practices that are central to incorporating the principles of environmental justice into transportation planning and design.

For more information, go to the Fruitvale Village Web site [1]and read an article on the Natural Resources Defense Council's Switchboard blog, "The Remarkable Story of Oakland's Fruitvale Transit Village," [2] Parts 1 and 2.

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Links:
[1] http://www.unitycouncil.org/fruitvale/overview1.htm
[2] http://switchboard.nrdc.org/blogs/kbenfield/the_remarkable_story_of_oaklan.html