

Accessible Futures:

Sharing. Listening. Learning.



Conference Proceedings

August 2026

Acknowledgements

The Accessible Futures conference came to life through the vision, advocacy and collaboration of many people. From the initial idea two years ago to the ongoing efforts that brought it forward, this conference has been a collective achievement rooted in the strength of the disability community and the dedication of our local jurisdictions and community partners.

We extend our gratitude to the community members who joined us, the conference committee for their leadership and vision, and our partners at the Center for Independent Living in Berkeley, California. Special thanks to MTC-ABAG staff, the keynote speakers, lunchtime entertainers, facilitators, panelists, support staff and consultants who helped shape and ensure this event was a success.

Above all, we recognize that the Accessible Futures conference is the result of a collaborative effort made possible only through the shared commitment and vision of everyone involved.

Table of Contents

Accessible Futures: Sharing. Listening. Learning. — Conference Proceedings.....	1
Background	5
Proceedings Purpose	5
Conference Overview	6
Conference Proceedings.....	9
Welcome	9
Transportation Sessions	10
Breakout 1: Transportation Policy: Understanding the Transportation Landscape and Mobility Challenges Around the Region	10
Breakout 2: Transit Navigation: Accessible Transit Mapping and Wayfinding	12
Breakout 3: Riding the Bus: Exploring Changes to the Public Transit System	13
Breakout 4: Transportation When You Want It: Taxis, Ride-Hailing and On-Demand Transportation.....	15
Housing Sessions	17
Breakout 1: Understanding Affordable Housing and Opportunities for Impact	17
Breakout 2: Housing Preservation: Single-Family Renovations, Modifications and Aging in Place.....	19
Breakout 3: Accessibility Starts at Home: Approaches to Universal Design Standards	21
Breakout 4: Tenant Protections: Strategies for Keeping People Housed	23
Environment Sessions	25
Breakout 1: Understanding Climate Actions and Expanding Access to Public Spaces Around the Region	25
Breakout 2: Get Out and Play! Ensuring Accessible Recreation Across the Region.....	26
Breakout 3: Climate Change: Impacts on People with Disabilities.....	29
Breakout 4: Strengthening Communities in the Face of Climate Change: Preparing for Emergencies	31
Economic Empowerment Sessions	33
Breakout 1: Economic Empowerment: Barriers and Opportunities to Employment ...	33

Breakout 2: Workplace Advocacy: Asking for What You Need	35
Keynote.....	37
Plenary and Conference Resolution.....	38
Closing Keynote.....	39
Appendix 1. Conference Program	40
Appendix 2. Conference Recording and Materials	40

Background

In June 2025, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) and Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) hosted Accessible Futures: Sharing. Listening. Learning. — a two-day conference aimed at bringing together members of the disability community from across the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area to identify the unmet needs and gaps in services for persons with disabilities across the topics of transportation, housing and the environment.

The primary objectives of the conference were to:

1. convene the community in a centralized regional forum to lay the foundation for building a robust network of individuals, advocates and organizations;
2. summarize the conference proceedings for the purpose of advancing community goals and action items; and
3. identify opportunities for future collaboration among conference participants.

The conference took place at the Bay Area Metro Center in San Francisco and online, and it brought together more than 400 participants, both in person and online, over two days.

Conference participants had the opportunity to:

- Engage with community leaders and advocates across the nine Bay Area counties in a welcoming and fully accessible environment;
- Share lived experience and priorities with policymakers and invited elected officials; and
- Develop partnerships and identify opportunities for future collaboration.

The conference program is included as Appendix 1.

Proceedings Purpose

These proceedings serve as the published record of the Accessible Futures: Sharing. Listening. Learning. conference held June 16 and 17, 2025. They summarize the conference activities and reflect the comments, perspectives and sentiments shared by participants on topics including transportation, housing, climate, economic empowerment and related issues. The proceedings are intended to:

- 1) document the barriers identified by disabled Bay Area residents and the policy considerations raised during the conference; and
- 2) serve as a resource for agency and organizational staff, leadership and conference participants seeking to better understand issues affecting the disability community and related legislative and policy developments across the San Francisco Bay Area.

These proceedings were written by MTC-ABAG staff with consultant support and guided by a group of conference advisors who were instrumental in planning and organizing the conference. The proceedings will be posted on the MTC website and shared with partners throughout the region, including staff and leadership at MTC-ABAG, Bay Area cities, counties, transit agencies, transportation authorities and non-profit organizations. The proceedings also will be shared with State of California agencies, including Caltrans, the Department of Rehabilitation, the Office of Emergency Services and the Health & Human Services Agency.

Conference Overview

The conference was organized across four topics: transportation, housing, the environment and economic empowerment. It opened and closed with remarks from internationally renowned disability rights expert and Executive Director of The Center for Independent Living, Dr. Victor Pineda. It also featured welcoming remarks from MTC leaders and fourteen breakout sessions across the two-day event. On the second day, United States Representative Lateefah Simon (CA-12) delivered a keynote speech.

The conference also featured networking sessions, plenary sessions and entertainment from Bay Area comedians Jade Theriault and Nina G. Throughout the conference, participants had access to a community resource board to share useful tips with other conference participants, a community town hall comment board to share topics of priority to be captured in the conference proceedings report, and video testimonials to share other topics of importance with the community. Attendance at the conference exceeded 400 participants over the two days with 182 people attending in person and 229 attending online. Participants included individuals, advocates, disability rights organization staff, and public agency and local jurisdiction staff.

On the second day of the conference, participants approved a 24-page draft resolution addressing critical issues facing the Bay Area's disability community. The resolution is available at tinyurl.com/khnb6u4n.

The full conference program is included as Appendix 1 and is available on the MTC website at: mtc.ca.gov/about-mtc/public-participation/accessibility/accessible-futures-conference along with videos of each session, transcripts and materials. MTC-ABAG staff also produced a conference wrap-up video that is available at: mtc.ca.gov/news/wrapup-video-accessible-futures-conference. Additionally, photos from the conference are available at: mtc.ca.gov/news/accessible-futures-conference. mtc.ca.gov/about-mtc/public-participation/accessibility/accessible-futures-conference mtc.ca.gov/news/wrapup-video-accessible-futures-conference mtc.ca.gov/news/accessible-futures-conference

Organization

These proceedings are organized in chronological order of the conference program as follows:

1. Welcome
2. Breakout Sessions 1
 - a. Transportation: Understanding the Transportation Landscape and Mobility Challenges Around the Region
 - i. Understanding Affordable Housing and Opportunities for Impact
 - ii. Understanding Climate Actions and Expanding Access to Public Spaces Around the Region
 - iii. Breakout Sessions 2
 - iv. Accessible Transit Mapping and Wayfinding
 - b. Housing Preservation: Single-Family Renovations, Modifications and Aging in Place
 - i. Get Out and Play! Ensuring Accessible Recreation Across the Region
 - ii. Economic Empowerment: Barriers and Opportunities to Employment
 - iii. Breakout Sessions 3
 - iv. Riding the Bus: Exploring Changes to the Public Transit System
 - c. Accessibility Starts at Home: Approaches to Universal Design Standards
 - i. Climate Change: Impacts on People with Disabilities
 - ii. Breakout Sessions 4
 - iii. Transportation When You Want It: Taxis, Ride-Hailing, and On-Demand Transportation
 - iv. Tenant Protections: Strategies for Keeping People Housed
 - d. Strengthening Communities in the Face of Climate Change: Preparing for Emergencies
 - i. Workplace Advocacy: Asking for What You Need
 - ii. Keynote
3. Plenary & Conference Resolution
4. Closing Keynote
5. Closing Keynote

“There is so much emphasis on what we [the disability community] need and no emphasis on what we can bring to the table. In my experience, hanging out with people is the best way to really educate people without them knowing they’re being educated.”

Conference Proceedings

Welcome

Speakers

- **Nick Roethel, Chief Operating Officer, MTC-ABAG**
- **Sue Noack, Chair, MTC; Councilmember At Large, City of Pleasant Hill**
- **Dorene M. Giacomini, MTC Commissioner representing the U.S. Department of Transportation**
- **Dr. Victor Pineda, Executive Director, Center for Independent Living**

Attendance

In-person: ~150 | Online: 65

Abstract

MTC-ABAG Chief Operating Officer Nick Roethel kicked off the conference followed by welcoming remarks from MTC Chair and Pleasant Hill Councilmember At Large, Sue Noack, Commissioner Dorene M. Giacomini and Dr. Victor Pineda.

Key Themes Heard

- Shape and build a more accessible future together through listening, learning, and sharing stories, ideas and lived experiences.
- Accessibility as a fundamental right, not an add-on.
- The community's voice must drive policy and design.
- Focus on solutions, not just grievances.

Key takeaway: The future of the Bay Area must be designed with disabled people at the center, and accessibility must become the default condition of public life, not something people have to continually request or fight for.

“It’s easy to get frustrated. It’s easy to point out what’s broken, but this conference isn’t just about the problems. It’s about organizing for solutions. Let’s build and focus our energy on shaping a future that works for all of us. Your voices matter, your experiences matter and your ideas will shape what is to come next.” — Dorene M. Giacomini

Transportation Sessions

Breakout 1: Transportation: Understanding the Transportation Landscape and Mobility Challenges Around the Region

Facilitator

Naomi Armenta, Transportation Consultant, Nelson\Nygaard Consulting Associates

Panelists

- **Warren Cushman, Community Organizer/Systems Change Advocate, Community Resources for Independent Living; Member, MTC Regional Network Management Customer Advisory Group**
- **Drennen Shelton, Transportation Planner, MTC-ABAG**

Attendance

In-person: ~60 | Online: 45

Abstract

A presentation on transportation planning and improvement projects around the region and a conversation about priorities for funding.

Presentation Summary

- **MTC's Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plan:** plan introduction and overview of ongoing efforts to improve transit, including improved mapping and signage; streamlined regional paratransit trips; a mobility management system and a Clipper card for paratransit.
- **Ongoing advocacy:** summary of efforts for a regionwide measure to help fund paratransit projects

Key Themes Heard

- **Challenges:** Lack of accessible transportation options; inaccessible bus stops; insufficient operator training; high paratransit fares; disabled people have lower incomes but often face higher transportation costs.
- **Needs:** Accessible bus stop improvements; ongoing disability etiquette training for front line staff; solutions that consider diverse disability needs; simple feedback and issue-resolution processes; greater employment of people with disabilities in transit agencies to incorporate lived experience into system design.

Key takeaway: The Bay Area must replace fragmented, reactive and unequal transportation access with a coordinated, affordable and dignified system designed with disabled people at the center.

Participant Recommendations

- Prioritize affordable, subsidized transit fares and accessible infrastructure.
- Require comprehensive disability sensitivity training for all employees, particularly front-facing staff.
- Increase hiring of people with disabilities into key transportation roles.
- Address and consider the accessibility concerns and experiences of the full spectrum of intersectional riders.
- Implement a simple, fast, public feedback channel to resolve accessibility issues.

“Folks with disabilities, generally speaking, have less money to work with and have high transportation costs. We don’t have fare equity. We don’t have equal fares with people on fixed public transit. What would it look like to have fares that are the same as everyone else?”

Breakout 2: Accessible Transit: Mapping and Wayfinding

Facilitator

Ron Brooks, CEO, Accessible Avenue

Panelists

- **Gordon Hansen, Mapping and Wayfinding Project Manager, MTC-ABAG**
- **Jumana Nabti, Manager of Access Programs, BART**

Attendance

In-person: ~50 | Online: 50

Abstract

A short presentation on MTC's Regional Mapping & Wayfinding Project and a conversation about regional transit navigation.

Presentation Summary

- **Wayfinding project vision:** improve customer experience through standardized maps, signs and materials across 27 agencies; explore digital information tools; improve accessibility and inclusivity of transit travel.
- **Project timeline:** prototype designs have been completed and are in the process of evaluation and refinement based on actionable feedback; tools for accessible navigation will be tested.
- **Disability community outreach:** BART workshops with disability community helped shape prototypes, adding network colors and icons; large alphanumeric stop IDs; tactile panels and wheelchair-height info panels with translations.
- **Accessibility Working Group:** development of a group made up of members with varying disabilities, transit agency staff and members of the public that meets regularly to share their lived experiences.

Key Themes Heard

- **Challenges:** Lack of agencies working closely with the community to better understand how signage and wayfinding affect accessibility; having inclusive design that takes into consideration size accessibility to ensure larger people with wider and deeper wheelchairs can navigate comfortably; issues around emergency evacuation programs for those without access to transportation.
- **Needs:** Better regional transit integration, including Clipper; clear communication about service disruptions and alternative routes; access to power for mobility and medical devices at transit facilities; audio versions of signage; and a voluntary evacuation assistance registry.

Key takeaway: The Bay Area’s wayfinding system must help riders complete the full transit journey — not just read a sign — by providing clear, consistent, multimodal and accessible information that works across agencies, across disabilities and under real-world conditions.

Participant Recommendations

- Mandate coordination among transit agencies to ensure seamless fare payment, transfers, and information-sharing.
- Require standardized accessible, real-time updates across all agencies for service changes, detours, temporary stop relocations, and alternate routes.
- Institutionalize ongoing outreach to incorporate the lived experiences of the disability community into planning and operations.
- Ensure inclusive design through audio signage, access to charging, and appropriately sized seating, doorways, lifts and securement areas.
- Integrate transit agencies’ active participation in emergency preparedness.

“I took transit today and it was a hard trip and friction filled! The system is complicated and hard. Just imagine a system where, because wayfinding was done correctly, signs are simple. Icons and information are clear, accessibility is built in and navigation of that system doesn’t take a lot of energy. It’s about creating a system that we can use that’s a lot easier than the one that exists right now.”

Breakout 3: Riding the Bus: Exploring Changes to the Public Transit System

Facilitator

Naomi Armenta, Transportation Consultant, Nelson\Nygaard Consulting Associates

Panelists

- **Catherine Callahan, Mobility Manager and Public Transit Advocate**
- **Michelle Rousey, Bay Area Transit Advocate; member, California Disability and Aging Community Living Advisory Committee**
- **Joshua Saunders, member, BART Accessibility Task Force (BATF) Advisory Committee**
- **Roland Wong, member, MTC Policy Advisory Council**

Attendance

In-person: ~50 | Online: 18

Abstract

A conversation to prioritize the changes needed to the fixed-route transit and paratransit systems.

Presentation Summary

- **Lived realities:** impact of transit cuts on people who use paratransit and related services.
- **Mobility management: share knowledge, travel training and show others that it is possible to get around.**
- **Paratransit eligibility:** need to expand paratransit services and service areas.
- **Hayward paratransit:** new on-demand ride service for wheelchair users that has significantly increased efficiency and decreased travel time.

Participant Recommendations

- Strengthen cross-agency collaboration to ensure seamless, coordinated and accessible regional transit.
- Revise paratransit eligibility and geographic rules to decouple paratransit service areas from the fixed-route system to reflect real travel needs.
- Protect critical bus lines and service frequency that support riders with disabilities, including access to paratransit, seating and reliable service.
- Improve bus, bus stop, station and transit hub accessibility through better ramps, priority seating, wayfinding, sidewalk improvements and accessible built environments.
- Improve disability awareness, compassion training and operational policies for front-line staff, including preventing early departures.
- Ensure that transit efficiency projects (e.g., Muni Forward) do not undermine access for people with disabilities.
- Expand participation in transit advisory committees and paratransit coordinating councils, with clear accountability.

Key Themes Heard

- **Challenges:** Paratransit fares often cost twice the amount to travel on fixed route limiting access; restrictive service boundaries limit regional travel; inadequate sidewalks and boarding areas limit access and usage; efficiency-driven transit operations can compromise accessibility by reducing service frequency and limiting seating options; early departures, insufficient accommodations, strollers and luggage create barriers to access; transit agencies are often unresponsive to input.
- **Needs:** More accessibility around bus stops is required, particularly for wheelchairs; stronger cross-agency coordination and relationships between transit agencies and advisory groups; protection for paratransit when fixed-route service is

reduced; compassionate customer service; centering the experiences of disabled people; recognizing accessibility as a shared responsibility rather than an individual burden.

Key takeaway: The Bay Area must build a transit system that does more than technically accommodate disabled riders — it must deliver affordable, respectful, coordinated and genuinely usable service across buses, paratransit and the environments that connect them.

Breakout 4: Transportation When You Want It: Taxis, Ride-Hailing and On-Demand Transportation

Facilitator

Ron Brooks, CEO, Accessible Avenue

Panelists

- **Steven Aquino, Bay Area Freelance Technology Journalist**
- **Catherine Callahan, Mobility Manager and Public Transit Advocate**
- **Erin McAuliff, Acting Director of Accessible Services, San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency**
- **Vinay Pimple, Member, MTC Policy Advisory Council**

Attendance

In-person: ~40 | Online: 16

Abstract

A conversation about existing on-demand services and what is or is not working.

Presentation Summary

- **Same day paratransit:** need for greater availability; challenges of wheelchair access, door-to-door service, service animals, access to technology, and legal compliance including training and background checks.
- **Accessible taxi industry:** SFMTA's commitment to accessible taxis.
- **Equal transportation access:** need for expanded hours for on-demand public transportation.
- **On-demand transit: need to organize to get more cities onboard as it provides convenience, a sense of autonomy and agency for people with disabilities.**

Key Themes Heard

- **Challenges:** Inconsistent paratransit and on-demand services across the region; fragmented local programs; trip distance limits that restrict cross-county travel;

poor interagency coordination and lengthy transfers; advance-booking requirements for paratransit; and difficulty obtaining customer support from rideshare providers.

- **Needs:** Greater availability of wheelchair accessible vehicles as a part of on-demand programs, including same-day accessible van service; more data on the range of accessible services offered, and more data on the differences in service, quality, cost, range and timeliness across service providers.

Key takeaway: The Bay Area must move beyond fragmented, next-day paratransit and build an on-demand transportation system that gives disabled riders the same spontaneity, flexibility and practical mobility that everyone else expects.

Participant Recommendations

- Collaborate across regions to develop a consolidated Bay Areawide transportation and paratransit system that allows for cross-county travel and regional consistency without distance limitations.
- Expand subsidized on-demand transportation services and same day paratransit services to provide affordable, timely, quality services including door-to-door services and wheelchair accessibility.
- Collaborate with on-demand transportation companies to ensure accessible communication channels, reliable customer service, and ease of booking.
- Collect and share accessibility data related to transportation service, including data on quality, cost, range, timeliness and accessibility as compared to individually-owned cars.

“The ADA requires, as a minimum, next day paratransit service in a shared ride environment. That’s how it was defined back in 1990. And that largely is how it is still defined. There is nothing sacred about next-day, shared-ride paratransit. It is not the thing that we should be striving for. It was agreed upon 35 years ago, and of course, a lot has changed. Paratransit has never been comparable to fixed route transit for folks without disability. It simply isn’t.”

Housing Sessions

Breakout 1: Housing: Understanding Affordable Housing and Opportunities for Impact

Facilitator

Fatimah Aure, Senior Manager, The Kelsey

Panelists

- **Micaela Connery, Co-Founder and CEO, The Kelsey**
- **Rev. Sophia DeWitt, Chief Program Officer, East Bay Housing Organization**
- **Carolina Reid, Associate Professor, I. Donald Turner Distinguished Professor in Affordable Housing and Urban Policy, University of California, Berkeley**

Attendance

In-person: ~30 | Online: 16

Abstract

An introduction to affordable housing in the Bay Area and a conversation about challenges and opportunities for impact.

Presentation Summary

- **Housing affordability crisis:** housing shortages, high housing costs, insufficient subsidies, lengthy development processes and rising income inequality.
- **Need for the 3 Ps:** production of more affordable housing, preservation of the existing affordable housing, and strengthening of tenant protections.
- **The Kelsey's disability forward housing model:** incorporates physical, mobility and sensory access needs, with proximity to transit and amenities.
- **Disability forward design:** considers the built environment, the building and decision-making process as well as the operation and programming of the building.
- **Advocacy process:** identify the appropriate agency, request a meeting, prepare a clear ask, define participant roles, share personal stories, leave behind a one-pager and follow up afterward.

Key Themes Heard

- **Challenges:** Disabled people are disproportionately affected by the affordability crisis; SSI and disability income levels are fundamentally misaligned with market rents; the region builds too little housing for people with low incomes.
- **Needs:** Increase affordable housing, expand incentives for accessible housing development, ensure accessible housing processes and environments, strengthen tenant protections, simplify financing for accessibility-focused projects and services, and build on progress toward higher accessibility requirements.

Key takeaway: The Bay Area must treat affordable housing for disabled residents as both a housing supply issue and an accessibility issue by building more deeply affordable homes, preserving existing housing, strengthening tenant protections, funding supportive services, and making the entire housing system — from design to application to residency — truly accessible.

Participant Recommendations

- Strengthen tenant protections for people with disabilities.
- Ensure accessibility in both housing design and administrative processes.
- Expand incentives for developers to build and maintain accessible housing.
- Make the 5% accessibility requirement permanent and continue raising standards.
- Increase affordable, accessible housing through targeted funding and streamlined approvals.
- Simplify financing for accessible housing and integrated support services.

“Inclusive design really takes into account all the diverse access needs on physical, mobility, sensory [levels], but also around things that codes never talk about — accessibility of how close to transit or what the amenities are around your site, accessibility in terms of how people who use supportive services are able to live in their homes and have service providers come in and out, accessibility around how the building thinks about materials and experiences, and services and programs for folks who might have health-related disabilities or wellness needs, design elements that think of people with cognitive disabilities.”

Breakout 2: Housing Preservation: Single-Family Renovations, Modifications and Aging in Place

Facilitator

Jessica Lehman, Disability Organizer

Panelists

- **Jen Collins, Operations and Finance Director, Oakland Community Land Trust**
- **Jonathan Dena, Community Impact Manager, Habitat for Humanity East Bay/Silicon Valley**
- **Michelle Starratt, Housing Director, Alameda County Housing Department**

Attendance

In-person: ~20 | Online: 11

Abstract

An introduction to the critical and complicated work of home preservation and a conversation around what is available and what is needed.

Presentation Summary

- **Single-family rehab program:** importance of making existing housing accessible as population ages and experiences decreased mobility. Residents prefer to age in place, which can be more affordable than other long-term care options, but only with home modification support and streamlined funding for rehab programs.
- **Home preservation:** as an oversubscribed need with many challenges. Additionally, deferred maintenance is common and often results in long overdue repairs that are both costly and critical. Funding limitations often require prioritizing what to repair now versus later.
- **Using a Community Land Trust model:** preserve existing affordable housing as a permanent solution and allows folks to live in and own their own homes while ensuring that the resale value of the home remains affordable for future residents.

Key Themes Heard

- **Challenges:** Inaccessible housing limits aging in place, while funding for home modifications is often insufficient; many programs exclude people who do not fit typical eligibility profiles; navigating multiple agencies and resources is complex; and the needs of people living on SSI are frequently overlooked.
- **Needs:** Address both structural adaptations, like ramps, that enhance safety and independence comprehensively; clear, simple language communication and concise one-page guides to help people access services; collective advocacy to ensure development priorities include accessibility and aging in place options.

Key takeaway: The Bay Area must treat home preservation, accessibility modifications and aging in place as core housing policy priorities by investing in existing homes and repair programs, expanding support for renters and homeowners, and building systems that make it possible for disabled people to stay safely and independently in their communities.

Participant Recommendations

- Expand housing preservation and home modification programs as cost-effective affordability strategies.
- Create a streamlined system to assess housing needs and connect residents to modification resources.
- Promote universal design in new and existing housing through standards, incentives and disaster-resilient policies.
- Improve access to information on accessible housing, including available features, costs and trusted service providers.

“You should never have an exception for accessibility.”

Breakout 3: Accessibility Starts at Home: Approaches to Universal Design Standards

Facilitator

Dana Matlaw, Consultant, Nelson\Nygaard Consulting Associates

Panelists

- **Beth Kenny, Former Member, City of Alameda Commission on Persons with Disabilities & Disability Justice Advocate**
- **Tyler Mayo, Title 24 Regulations Manager, Codes and Standards Division, State of California Department of Housing and Community Development**
- **Tristan Suire, Planner, City of Alameda**
- **Veronica Turdean, Associate Construction Analyst and Chapter 11A Code Access Specialist, California Department of Housing and Community Development, Codes and Standards Division**

Attendance

In-person: ~30 | Online: 7

Abstract

An overview of opportunities for ensuring accessible housing production, promising regional practices, and a conversation to identify opportunities to further these efforts.

Presentation Summary

- **State design standards:** overview of HCD's authority over universal design standards.
- **Chapter 11A:** accessibility requirements for privately funded residential buildings.
- **Local policies:** universal design ordinances are not required, but many jurisdictions in the Bay Area have adopted universal design policies and goals.
- **Advocacy:** how people can engage elected officials to pursue universal design standards through coalition building.

Key Themes Heard

- **Challenges:** Accessible, universally designed housing is often unaffordable and scarce, retrofits are costly, current accessibility standards do not meet all disability needs, and affordable housing developments often fall short of serving the large number of low-income residents with disabilities.
- **Needs:** Advocacy to pressure elected officials and local leaders to develop universal design ordinances.

Key takeaway: The Bay Area must move universal design from an optional concept to a stronger housing standard by closing loopholes, broadening accessibility beyond mobility alone, applying access across all income levels and housing types, and making homes usable enough that disabled residents do not have to keep asking for what should have been built in from the start.

Participant Recommendations

- Expand universal design standards (e.g., visual alarms for the deaf, larger weight-bearing ramps, etc.).
- Advocate for universal design ordinances that prioritize accessibility in all housing types, particularly for building types that do not require ADA compliance.
- Provide jurisdictions with universal design ordinance technical assistance to ensure that policies are effective and codified.
- Align affordability and accessibility to ensure affordable housing projects meet accessibility needs.
- Advocate for community and development policies and priorities that ensure people with disabilities can live independently within the community.

“There are a lot of accessibility needs that really aren’t in the fair housing standards.”

Breakout 4: Tenant Protections: Strategies for Keeping People Housed

Facilitator

David Driskell, Principal, Community Planning Collaborative

Panelists

- **Irene Farnsworth, Anti-Displacement Program Manager, Bay Area Housing Finance Authority**
- **Eddie Ytuarte, Disability and Housing Activist**

Attendance

In-person: ~30 | Online: 7

Abstract

An overview of current regional approaches to tenant protections and a conversation about challenges and opportunities for keeping people housed in the Bay Area.

Presentation Summary

- **Bay Area Housing Finance Authority:** created by the legislature to advance preservation and production of affordable housing and tenant protections (3 Ps).
- **Bay Area eviction study:** not enough public data to help public agencies and advocates understand who is most impacted.
- **Starting a tenants union:** Oakland Tenants Protection Union is one of the strongest in the Bay Area due to its cooperation and strong advocacy.
- **Housing availability:** some deed restricted affordable housing is not truly affordable to many residents because prices are pegged at “area median income” and levels are skewed by the many high-income earners in the Bay Area.
- **Funding:** funding has to be at the top of the list, especially when we talk about all 3 Ps.

Key Themes Heard

- **Challenges:** Concern from tenants regarding service animals, smoking from other residents, things not getting fixed on time; tenant legal services largely depend on federal funding; recent retraction in philanthropy.
- **Needs:** Tenant unions to create safe spaces for vulnerable populations; regionalized tenant protections; information regarding the Bay Area housing inventory and the number of empty units; resources for informal evictions with habitability concerns; eviction moratorium like during COVID; housing subsidies for seniors (continued support of San Francisco as a model); free tenant mediation services.

Key takeaway: The Bay Area must move universal design from an optional guideline to a stronger housing norm by closing loopholes, broadening accessibility beyond mobility alone, embedding access across all income levels and housing types, and organizing locally so that disabled residents do not have to keep asking for homes that should have been designed for them in the first place.

Participant Recommendations

- Advocate for tenant protections through the creation of tenant unions.
- Provide resources on informal evictions and free tenant mediation services.
- Prepare for diverse funding options in the wake of federal funding cuts.
- Mandate accessibility standards in all new construction.
- Expand housing affordability programs including subsidies for seniors.
- Greater data-sharing around inventory of housing units and vacancies.
- Provide a centralized hub of information sharing for housing projects and tenant protections for people with disabilities.

Environment Sessions

Breakout 1: Environment: Understanding Climate Actions and Expanding Access to Public Spaces Around the Region

Facilitator

Meghan Weir, Consultant, Nelson\Nygaard Consulting Associates

Panelists

- **Natasha Daniels**, Senior Environmental Planner, San Francisco Estuary Partnership
- **Michael Germeraad**, Resilience Planner, MTC-ABAG
- **Yeymi Reyes**, Marketing Communications, Bay Area Regional Energy Network

Attendance

In-person: ~15 | Online: 10

Abstract

An introduction to environmental policy work at MTC-ABAG and a conversation to explore opportunities.

Presentation Summary

- **San Francisco Estuary Partnership:** bay protection work with accessible water trail access and STRAW (Students and Teachers Restoring Watersheds) shoreline restoration program.
- **Bay Area Regional Energy Network (BayREN) EASE Home program:** provides energy efficiency funding for low-income households.
- **Plan Bay Area 2050:** urban greening efforts and accessible building retrofit strategies in the plan.

Key Themes Heard

- **Challenges:** Communication barriers are an environmental justice issue, and information sharing is inequitable, often limited to people with agency connections; lack of accessible internal trails and paths in parks and open spaces; maintaining accessibility, especially with climate change impacts.
- **Needs:** Materials in multiple languages, including ASL, with specialized technical term training for interpreters; centralized information hub alongside local outreach; spaces that accommodate both disability access and pets; charging stations for wheelchairs and mobility devices in green spaces; new decision-making processes with disability community involved in the planning stages.

Key takeaway: The Bay Area must treat climate action and access to public space as connected equity issues by designing environmental programs, outdoor spaces and public communications so disabled residents can fully participate as users, stewards and decision-makers.

Participant Recommendations

- Create a regional portal with all environmental programs, available in multiple languages and accessible formats.
- Require new parks and green spaces to accommodate both disability access and pet access.
- Expand access to charging stations for wheelchairs and mobility devices in parks, trails and other green spaces.
- Conduct ongoing accessibility audits of existing green spaces to maintain and improve access over time.
- Prioritize disability-led planning from project inception.
- Use non-digital methods (radio, community centers, printed materials, etc.) alongside digital platforms for information.

Breakout 2: Get Out and Play! Ensuring Accessible Recreation Across the Region

Facilitator

Mallika Gupta, Consultant, Nelson\Nygaard Consulting Associates

Panelists

- **Lily Brown, Active Transportation Planner, MTC-ABAG**
- **Camille Cauchois, Assistant Transportation Planner, MTC-ABAG**
- **Dee (Diane) Dohm, Active Transportation Planner, MTC-ABAG**
- **Emily Seelenfreund, Executive Director, BORP Adaptive Sports and Recreation**
- **Sofia Zander, Zander Westbrook Design**

Attendance

In-person: ~20 | Online: 10

Abstract

An overview on regional recreational opportunities and a conversation to identify community needs and expand accessible options.

Presentation Summary

- **Bay Trail design guidelines:** updating the guidelines for the 500-mile trail around San Francisco and San Pablo Bay (currently 70% complete), focusing on climate resilience, equity and robust design using the “People, Place, Purpose” framework with accessibility considerations integrated throughout the guidelines.
- **Bay Trail Needs, Operations and Maintenance Assessment:** aims to identify access and amenity needs across the trail system and create interactive online apps with accessibility information.
- **Bay Wheels adaptive bikeshare programming:** a partnership of MTC and BORP, provides adaptive cycling opportunities in Berkeley, San Francisco and San José.

Key Themes Heard

- **Challenges:** Limited transportation to recreational areas; paratransit restrictions on destinations without physical addresses; safety and communication issues on trails; and insufficient adaptive recreation and accessibility features such as tactile wayfinding and visual supports.
- **Needs:** More power chair charging stations and comprehensive mapping of existing charging infrastructure; better trail etiquette and safety protocols.

Key takeaway: The Bay Area must treat accessible recreation as a regional mobility and public-space issue by making parks, trails, adaptive programs and outdoor amenities easier to reach, easier to understand, safer to use, and designed for disabled residents as full participants in community life.

Participant Recommendations

- Improve paratransit access to recreational areas, including locations without physical addresses.
- Install and map accessible charging stations at major recreational sites.
- Improve trail safety through e-bike management and enhanced communication accommodations.
- Expand adaptive recreation programs and equipment options.
- Install tactile and audio wayfinding systems at recreation and trail access points.
- Create a centralized system for reporting and addressing maintenance issues.
- Conduct regular accessibility audits with input from the disability community.

“Put something like a shaded bus stop over outlets. If someone is sitting there and needs to charge their chair for three hours to get going. If they are sitting in

the sun, they are going to be dead by the time they're charged. Also, when it's raining."

Breakout 3: Climate Change: Impacts on People with Disabilities

Facilitator

Meghan Weir, Consultant, Nelson\Nygaard Consulting Associates

Panelists

- **Dawn Skaggs, Chief Program Officer, World Institute on Disability**
- **Jess Rivet, Community Task Force Volunteer, World Institute on Disability**
- **Alina Engleman Ph.D., Associate Professor, California State University, East Bay**
- **Alex Ghenis, Community Member**
- **Marcie Roth, CEO and Executive Director, World Institute on Disability**

Attendance

In-person: ~15 | Online: 8

Abstract

A presentation on how environmental changes affect people with disabilities, and a conversation about needs, opportunities and policy interventions.

Presentation Summary

- **Climate impacts:** disproportionately affect people with disabilities.
- **Disability-led solutions:** global examples from Australia, Kenya and the Pacific Northwest highlight disability-led approaches to climate resilience and emergency response.
- **Policy frameworks:** international frameworks, including the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Sendai Framework, call for people with disabilities to be included as leaders in disaster planning and recovery.
- **Housing vulnerability:** housing shortages disproportionately affect people with disabilities, increasing their risk during climate emergencies.
- *Key Themes Heard*
 - **Challenges:** Retrofitting accessibility rather than building it from the outset; existing infrastructure can increase climate risks for people with disabilities, and some adaptation measures may create new accessibility barriers; emergency preparedness systems often lack accessible heating, cooling and evacuation options; and students with disabilities face unique challenges during power outages, including limited evacuation options when elevators are unavailable.
 - **Needs:** Accessibility from the bottom up; embed accessibility in planning and program design from the start; break down organizational silos that hinder effective climate action; leverage the disability community's expertise through peer

networks, mutual aid and community-led preparedness efforts; and recognize people with disabilities as leaders in building climate resilience.

- **Key takeaway:** Climate change is already intensifying the risks disabled people face, but the solution is not merely to protect disabled communities — it is to center disabled people as leaders, planners and innovators in climate resilience, emergency preparedness, housing and public systems.

Participant Recommendations

Integrate accessibility from the start — build accessibility into all climate solutions and infrastructure projects and engage people with disabilities from the onset of planning.

- Ensure emergency services information is accessible and available and that college campuses have accessible evacuation plans in order to close emergency preparedness gaps.
- Break down silos between housing, disability, and climate agencies and advocates to coordinate effective solutions and foster cross-sector collaboration.
- Leverage the disability community's expertise and problem solving in resilience planning and support peer ambassador programs/community-led preparedness initiatives.

“We can’t layer on accessibility. We can’t add in inclusion. We have to be doing that as a way that we function on a daily basis if we want to approach climate justice and building communities that are truly whole-community resilient.”

Breakout 4: Strengthening Communities in the Face of Climate Change: Preparing for Emergencies

Facilitator

Meghan Weir, Consultant, Nelson\Nygaard Consulting Associates

Panelists

- **Sheela Gunn, Emergency Preparedness Coordination, Center for Independent Living**
- **Jess Rivet, Community Task Force Volunteer, World Institute on Disability**
- **Marcie Roth, CEO and Executive Director, World Institute on Disability**
- **Dawn Skaggs, Chief Program Officer, World Institute on Disability**

Attendance

In-person: ~10 | Online: 9

Abstract

A short presentation about emergency response and a conversation about the practical things you can do to prepare for the next disaster.

Presentation Summary

- **Alameda County's preparedness research findings:** no common understanding of what "preparedness" means for people with disabilities; friends, family and neighbors serve as the most crucial first responders; mental health represents the biggest impact during climate emergencies.
- **"Infinite Access:** " a platform that delivers emergency alerts in multiple accessible formats (audio, visual, tactile); EPA funding cuts prevented its launch in the Bay Area despite it being their intended first market.
- **Practical preparedness strategies:** traditional disaster kits are not practical for many people with disabilities.

Key Themes Heard

- **Challenges:** Communication barriers make it difficult for people with disabilities to communicate needs and receive accessible emergency alerts; emergency situations often create unaddressed mental health impacts; evacuation infrastructure and planning remain inadequate, especially in multi-story buildings; and property managers and emergency personnel often lack training on disability evacuation needs.
- **Needs:** Reframe the disability community's role in emergency preparedness — rather than being viewed as liabilities, people with disabilities should be recognized

as resources with expertise in crisis navigation; move beyond individual preparedness to institutional accountability; build community connections during “blue sky days,” i.e., non-emergency times.

Key takeaway: The Bay Area must strengthen emergency preparedness for climate change by building disability-led systems of communication, planning, housing coordination and community support before disasters happen — so disabled people are not left behind, but recognized as essential leaders in resilience.

Participant Recommendations

- Ensure emergency alerts are accessible to the deaf, blind and disabled.
- Provide mental health support during and after emergencies.
- Require accessible evacuation planning and training for multi-story building managers and staff.
- Foster connections between emergency responders and disability communities during non-emergency times.
- Expand disability representation on Access and Functional Needs committees.

“It can’t all be on the individual and yet we have to continue to do everything we can on an individual level to meet our needs that aren’t being met by the system.”

Economic Empowerment Sessions

Breakout 1: Economic Empowerment: Barriers and Opportunities to Employment

Facilitator

Eileen Norman, Executive Director, San Francisco In-Home Supportive Services Public Authority

Panelists

- **Peter DeHaas, Founder and Executive Director, San Francisco Disability Business Alliance**
- **Ricardo Perez, IT and Green Energy Sector Business Consultant, California Department of Rehabilitation**

Attendance

In-person: ~20 | Online: 10

Abstract

A conversation about the practical issues for transitioning to employment and entrepreneurship as a pathway to self-employment.

Presentation Summary

- **Entrepreneurship:** an alternate path to traditional employment for the disability community.
- **Inclusive hiring:** the California Department of Rehabilitation supports job seekers and promotes skills-based hiring through employment trial periods rather than resume screening.

Key Themes Heard

- **Challenges:** Systemic barriers in finding employment despite educational training; concerns around losing access to SSI (Supplemental Security Income), SSDI (Social Security Disability Insurance) and Medicaid benefits as earnings rise.
- **Needs:** Disclosing disability and requesting accommodations without triggering stigma; reliable in-home care necessary for workforce participation; opportunities to have leadership listen to the lived experiences and needs of the disability community.

Key takeaway: The Bay Area must move beyond seeing disabled people as job seekers who need accommodation and instead build an economic system where disabled

people can work, lead, create businesses, earn fairly, keep their benefits and supports, and participate fully in the region's economic life.

Participant Recommendations

- Continue and expand collaboration with the California Department of Rehabilitation's education and employment programs.
- Explore and implement merit-based and other inclusive hiring practices to address hiring bias.
- Implement benefits reform and provide commensurate benefit packages, considering the need for in-home care and loss of state/federal benefits.
- Increase structural support for care providers.
- Provide regular opportunities for dialogue between the disability community and decision-makers.

“Entrepreneurship offers a powerful path to self-determination — allowing us to design our workspaces, set our own hours and build our accommodations by default, not exception.”

Breakout 2: Workplace Advocacy: Asking for What You Need

Facilitator

Naomi Armenta, Transportation Consultant, Nelson\Nygaard Consulting Associates

Panelists

- **Camiel Hayes, Campus and Vocational Program Coordinator, Center for Independent Living**
- **Hoa Le, M.D., Co-Founder, Reach Career Mentoring**
- **Jill Noffsinger-Day, Area Director for Human Resources, US Foods**
- **Ricardo Perez, IT and Green Energy Sector Business Consultant, California Department of Rehabilitation**
- **Jennifer Yang, M.D., Co-founder, Reach Career Mentoring**

Attendance

In-person: ~10 | Online: 10

Abstract

A conversation about advocating for yourself in the workplace and critical decisions when thinking about work.

Presentation Summary

- **Reach Career Mentoring:** a disability-led career mentorship program.
- **US Foods internships for adults with disabilities:** creates welcoming work experiences and stresses the importance of mentorship.
- **Knowing your rights in the workplace:** need for accountability to ensure workplaces are equitable and accessible.
- **Workplace accommodations:** misconceptions and need to foster more dialogue between hiring managers and jobseekers with disabilities.

Key Themes Heard

- **Challenges:** Hiring bias and discriminatory pay practices rooted in stigma and misinformation; employment barriers including irrelevant job requirements such as driver's license mandates; inaccessible physical and digital work environments; how and when to request accommodations; losing access to benefits and having to turn down high salary jobs.
- **Needs:** Flexibility in job requirements, including part-time work; reimagine job placement away from tokenism and toward meaningful roles that reflect individual passions, expertise and aspirations.

Participant Recommendations

- Increase opportunities for dialogue and collaboration between hiring managers and people with disabilities.
- Implement anti-bias and accommodation request trainings for hiring managers.
- Design physical spaces and digital platforms with universal design principles.
- Develop transparent guidelines on how and when to request accommodations.
- Increase job flexibility by offering part-time, remote and flexible options.
- Advocate for policies that decouple essential benefits from income thresholds.
- Match roles to individual passions, expertise and long-term aspirations, rather than limiting hires to symbolic or low-impact positions.
- Conduct regular pay equity audits to identify and correct discriminatory practices.
- Eliminate irrelevant job requirements and focus on skills and competencies directly tied to the role.

Allow for customization of roles to better fit diverse needs and strengths.

“It’s very common that people decide for you what the job should be for you. Finding the opportunity of what brings you joy and being able to do that work is super important.”

Keynote

Speaker

Lateefah Simon, U.S. Representative, California District 12

Facilitator

Nicole Bohn, Disability Access Consultant

Attendance

In-person: ~150 | Online: 60

Abstract

Remarks from Congresswoman Lateefah Simon who represents California's 12th Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives followed by a group discussion facilitated by Nicole Bohn, Disability Access Consultant.

“Your being here and lifting [your] voices and demanding that the Bay Area has a vision and transportation policies that center people with disabilities — it’s about time. We deserve it. It’s our fundamental right to mobility. It is a human right.” — Congresswoman Lateefah Simon (CA-12)

Plenary and Conference Resolution

Facilitator

InterEthnica and Winter Consulting Teams

Attendance

In-person: ~100 | Online: 45

Abstract

The plenary and conference resolution session served as the culminating gathering of the Accessible Futures Conference, bringing together participants to review a draft resolution based on the ideas, concerns and priorities raised throughout the previous day and a half of breakout sessions and discussions.

Participants supported moving the draft forward as the “sense of the conference,” while continuing to revise it after the conference through additional community input. The plenary therefore functioned not as the end of the conference process, but as the beginning of a more formal, coordinated, disability-led effort to shape policy and accountability across the Bay Area.

The Center for Independent Living is continuing to support and help advance the next phase of the resolution.

Closing Keynote

Speaker

Dr. Victor Pineda, Executive Director, Center for Independent Living

Attendance

In-person: ~100 | Online: 20

Abstract

Dr. Pineda reflected on the enduring legacy of the Section 504 Sit-in as a catalyst for disability rights, while charting a bold path forward through inclusive urban design and smart city innovation to ensure a barrier-free future for all.

“The conference resolution we shared today is not symbolic. It’s a declaration of purpose, of unity, a regional blueprint and a line in the sand. It not only identifies unmet needs, but unrealized opportunity and potential. But let me be clear: none of this happens if we play it safe. None of this happens if we go back to business as usual. We can’t keep pretending we are not in a fight for our collective future.” — Dr. Victor Pineda

Appendix 1. Conference Program

Conference Program on the MTC website. <https://mtc.ca.gov/digital-library/5058617-accessible-futures-conference-program>

Appendix 2. Conference Recordings and Materials

Conference recordings and materials on the MTC website's Accessible Futures Conference webpage. <https://mtc.ca.gov/AccessibleFutures>