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Connect, Rebuild, Prepare: Community-Informed Transportation Planning After the 2025 L.A. Fires

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Connect, Rebuild, Prepare: Community-Informed Transportation Planning After the 2025 L.A. Fires

The January 2025 Eaton and Palisades fires destroyed homes and roads across L.A. County. The experience revealed how urgently transportation systems must restore mobility and access after a fire or other major disaster—even though rapid transportation rebuilding can lock in unsafe road designs and miss chances to advance long-term resilience and community priorities.

UCLA Luskin Center for Innovation researchers examined how collaborative community engagement can shape safer, more equitable transportation rebuilding and evacuation planning in their report, [*Collaborative Community Engagement for Post-Disaster Transportation Rebuilding: Opportunities for Los Angeles After the 2025 Fires*](#). They drew lessons from the Luskin Center for Innovation’s evaluations of California’s [*Transformative Climate Communities*](#) program, which empowers communities and local governments to co-design and implement climate investments at the neighborhood scale. The report examines the challenges and opportunities of applying this partnership model to post-fire rebuilding and offers recommendations to advance meaningful community engagement and interagency coordination.

Rebuilding transportation systems after a disaster is not just about restoring mobility—it’s about restoring a sense of community. Transportation agencies should join community conversations as early as possible after an event, to enable rebuilding that responds to community priorities and evolving risks rather than returning to pre-fire vulnerabilities.

SUMMARY OF POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Integrate** evacuation into transportation planning conversations
2. **Join** existing community-organized recovery and rebuilding conversations
3. **Consult** place-based community-based organizations (CBOs) in burn areas
4. **Support** CBO capacity through funding and partnerships
5. **Restructure** long-term transportation planning engagement processes



A drone captures structures damaged by the Palisades Fire in January 2025. Photo: Ringo Chiu / Shutterstock

RECOMMENDED POLICY ACTIONS FOR CITY AND TRANSIT AGENCIES

1 **Integrate evacuation into transportation planning conversations.**

Treat evacuation routes, procedures, and communication systems as a priority transportation design issue, not something for emergency departments to manage separately.

Evacuation challenges in fire-affected communities can be an entry point for broader community discussions about transportation priorities.

2 **Join community-organized recovery and rebuilding conversations already underway.**

Engage early and consistently in recovery discussions convened by community groups, coalitions, and local councils to listen, learn, and co-develop strategies that reflect survivors' lived experiences and capacity for participation.

Listening sessions can help identify opportunities to coordinate with housing, public health, and land-use planning processes, ensuring that transportation decisions align with the full spectrum of community recovery goals.

3 **Consult place-based community-based organizations (CBOs) for their expertise in burn areas.**

Recognize the expertise of local CBOs as trusted messengers who can connect agencies with residents and represent those who may be absent from planning processes.

This approach can foster trust, alleviate participation fatigue, and ensure that engagement yields tangible outcomes for affected communities.

4 **Support CBO capacity through funding and partnerships.**

Enable place-based CBOs to engage meaningfully in transportation planning while also filling other essential roles in post-fire recovery and rebuilding.

Funders and government agencies should compensate CBOs for their time, expertise, and convening capacity.

Also partner with regional transportation education and advocacy organizations to provide technical support and transportation literacy to minimize the time burdens for CBOs in participation.

5 **Consider how to restructure long-term transportation planning engagement processes to incorporate elements of the Transformative Climate Communities (TCC) model.**

Institutionalize interagency coordination, accountability, and equity by adapting TCC's Collaborative Stakeholder Structure—a model that formalizes partnerships among government agencies, CBOs, and residents.

Embedding such frameworks, even a scaled-down version, into local transportation and hazard-mitigation plans can help establish shared accountability, regular communication, and transparent decision-making.

To learn more, see [Collaborative Community Engagement for Post-Disaster Transportation Rebuilding: Opportunities for Los Angeles After the January 2025 Fires.](#)