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Past Pathways, Present Inequities: Historical Transit Access in San Francisco's Lakeview, Oceanview, Merced Heights and Ingleside Terraces Neighborhoods

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Issue

The LOMI Community History Preservation Project is a strategic initiative by the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA) Streets Division to assess and address the historical consequences of transportation policy decisions on marginalized communities. The Lakeview, Oceanview, Merced Heights, and Ingleside Terraces (LOMI) neighborhoods are home to multigenerational communities of color (Figure 1). Many residents in these areas are homeowners but have limited disposable income, which can create financial challenges. Notably, two of these neighborhoods (Oceanview and Ingleside) are designated by SFMTA as Equity Strategy Neighborhoods, communities that have high economic and social needs.

Since the mid-20th century, San Francisco has undergone significant demographic shifts due to deindustrialization and large-scale urban renewal projects. These development patterns have led to the gentrification of certain neighborhoods, displacing many Black residents to outer neighborhoods such as LOMI. To frame an examination of this era, this research was guided by two primary questions:

- What is the historical impact of SFMTA's policy decisions on residents in LOMI neighborhoods?
- Based on this impact, how can the agency be enabled to improve community engagement for future decision-making?

Study Approach

In order to understand how access to public transportation has been shaped by past SFMTA decisions, a qualitative analysis of historical documents, books, and digital archives was conducted

to analyze public transit developments in LOMI neighborhoods between 1938 and 1971. Ten interviews were also conducted with current and former residents to gain insight into community perceptions of transit access, the unique challenges they face, and SFMTA's role in their neighborhood. Archival review and interviews were supplemented by analysis of race and socioeconomic data from the U.S. Census and SFMTA. Utilizing GIS, maps were created to visualize shifts in LOMI's population and how transit features have evolved in the region from the 20th century to today.

Key Findings

Archival Findings

- Rider dissatisfaction with SFMTA was a citywide issue from the late 1950s into the 1970s, with critiques focusing particularly on service delays, rude operators, and inconsistent schedules.
- Despite the city's acquisition of Market Street Railway, SFMTA made few service improvements to the outer neighborhoods. In LOMI, buses came every 20+ minutes, while more central areas had faster service.
- While dissatisfaction with stagnant SFMTA decision-making was widespread, LOMI residents experienced an even greater disconnect with the agency. Though four community organizations existed in LOMI by 1972, SFMTA had limited contact, and mentions of the agency in local papers were sparse compared to other city departments.

Interview Findings

- Residents consistently identified limited access to essential destinations, such as grocery stores and health care facilities

Oceanview, Merced Heights, and Ingleside Neighborhoods in San Francisco, CA (2025)

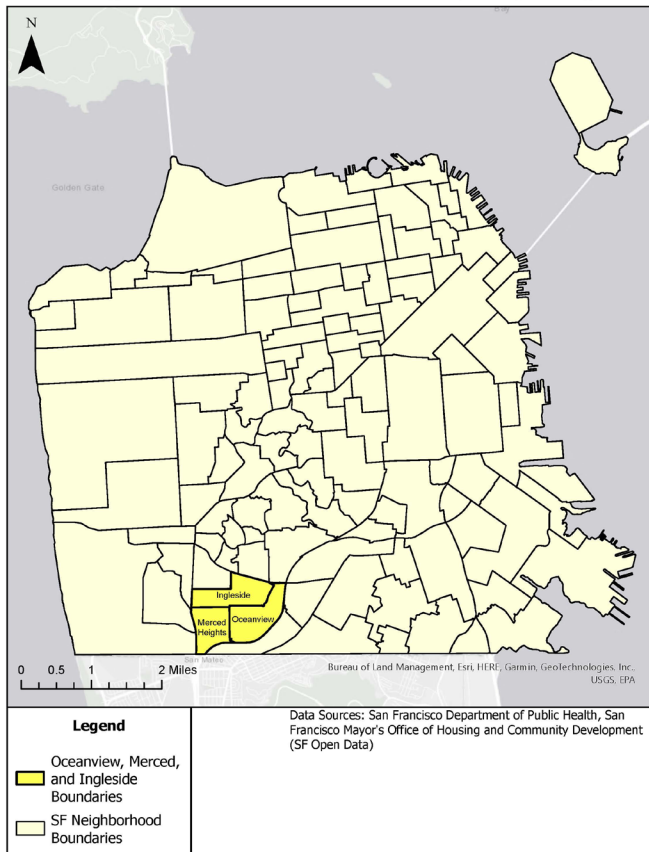


Figure 1. Figure 1. Oceanview, Merced Heights, and Ingleside Neighborhoods in San Francisco, CA (2025)

as key transportation concerns, especially for those without private vehicles.

- Despite the predominantly older demographic of most interviewees, only one respondent mentioned using SFMTA's paratransit services. This suggests potential gaps in paratransit awareness, outreach, or accessibility.
- Residents often expressed frustration with the lack of safe access to bus stops and the availability of parking. They expressed dissatisfaction with inadequate curb ramps and difficulty boarding and alighting buses, particularly among people with disabilities and seniors.
- Six of the 10 interviewees reported switching to personal vehicles as their primary mode of transportation over time. Interviewees cited difficulty accessing and carrying groceries, as well as challenging commutes to work, as their primary motivations for switching.



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- Four interviewees mentioned racial dynamics in the area by touching on topics such as demographic shifts, the historical displacement of Black residents, and the long-term impacts of redevelopment projects. Interviewees tended to view this shift negatively and, in part, blamed local government agencies.
- Residents shared their appreciation for the increase in frequency and reliability of buses and trams, as well as the improvement in cleanliness on public transportation

Recommendations

Assessment of historic and present-day transit access needs of LOMI residents informed the following policy recommendations:

- Meeting Stakeholders Where They Are: Representatives from SFMTA should attend existing "intercept events" run by local organizations in LOMI. This allows for SFMTA to consistently obtain feedback and suggestions from LOMI residents and organizations, fostering a strong relationship of trust with the community.
- Implementing a "No-Wrong Door" Approach: Train SFMTA staff on how to provide or guide residents toward the services they need that SFMTA may not provide.
- Expanding Accessibility Efforts for Senior and Disabled Residents: Target improving ramp access, increasing bus operator awareness of the needs of disabled and senior riders, and creating transit routes that are more accessible.
- Increase Accessibility to Essential Services: Build new transit routes in LOMI to provide more access to restaurants, cafes, grocery stores, hospitals, and health care facilities.
- Improve Engagement with Non-English Speakers: In order for public transit to be accessible to all LOMI residents — including LOMI's diverse older adult population — outreach materials and signs should be provided in the most frequently spoken languages, Chinese and Spanish.