

## Advancing Transportation Justice and Climate Action in San Diego

As a grant-funded partner in the Climate Change Health and Equity (CCHE) network, Environmental Health Coalition (EHC) has been working toward transportation justice, zero emission freight, and climate justice for the long-term benefit of environmental justice (EJ) communities in San Diego County. Their efforts align with the overall [CCHE Theory of Change](#) as part of Strategy 3.

Through their CCHE-funded activities, EHC fostered regional coalition building around mass transit as a solution to improving air quality and reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. EHC has contributed to a transformed culture of collaboration and trust between residents, labor groups, and local government. In 2018, EHC established the San Diego Transportation Equity Working Group (SDTEWG), which was a base of five organizations (now six) that articulated a narrative transit strategy for San Diego. SDTEWG eventually developed the 10 Transit Lifelines, which enumerates the top priorities of transit-riders. SDTEWG promoted the 10 Transit Lifelines to the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG), which consequently played an integral role in elevating EJ communities in SANDAG's 2021 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP). After EHC's advocacy efforts and a successful signature collection process led by labor groups, Measure G qualified for the November 2024 ballot, which would fund nine of the 10 Transit Lifelines within a RTP. In early September 2024, EHC launched the Transit Riders Union to elevate residents' voices and advance policy from the transit rider perspective. Additionally, EHC's work to reform San Diego County's Air Pollution Control District (APCD) deepened relationships with APCD representatives to reinforce community-led advocacy efforts. As a result of their ongoing work, EHC recently secured funds that boosted community engagement, ensured funding for transit solutions, and directed funding to frontline communities. EHC's CCHE-funded activities are outlined at a high-level in their [2022 CCHE Theory of Change \(slide 20\)](#), and described in more detail below.



### Mission:

*Address the disproportionate health impacts suffered by communities of color and low-income communities as a result of environmental racism.*

## Policies, Activities, and Initiatives Advanced During the CCHE Initiative

**Created an affordable, efficient mass transit system that prioritizes EJ communities.** SDTEWG proactively took action to ensure adequate funding to bring the RTP to fruition by launching a countywide ballot initiative for transit funding. EHC's most notable success with affordable mass transit was the Youth Opportunity Pass (YOP). The YOP campaign was supported by EHC and led by Mid-City CAN (MCC), and although it is in a pilot phase, SANDAG Reports [an improved transit culture among younger residents](#).

**Established Zero Emission Vehicle (ZEV) policies and transition plans for existing and new cargo projects in Barrio Logan and West National City; provided input to Port's Maritime Clean Air Strategy (MCAS).** EHC partnered with a coalition of organizations including SANDAG, Port of San Diego, City of San Diego, and CalTrans to develop a blueprint for transitioning to 100% Heavy Duty ZEV by 2030. SANDAG released the electrification blueprint in January 2024. Prior to its finalization and public release, EHC reviewed and provided edits and comments. Throughout 2021, the Port developed the MCAS, a guiding document for reaching zero-emissions. EHC provided extensive feedback throughout the MCAS process and engaged the community with numerous email campaigns to Port Commissioners.

**Adopted Climate Action Plans with air quality protections, the retention of climate investments for EJ communities to support the plans' implementation, and promotion of state policies to advance the transition to full electrification of California's transit.** EHC has seen significant progress in their advocacy efforts, including:

- Through AB 617, EHC created an emission reduction plan with specific goals to reduce cancer risk in portside communities. The plan was approved in 2021 and over the past three years, EHC has supported implementation.
- AB 423 completely reformed the APCD to prioritize community needs. As of 2021, the APCD includes three representative positions that are reserved for public appointees; EHC has advocated to fill these positions with representatives that bring EJ, public health, and environmental perspectives to the APCD. The revised structure has supported efforts to improve air quality.
- APCD regulates more industrial facilities to ensure that these facilities reduce emissions associated with negative health outcomes. In late 2022, the Port planned to accept a cement corporation as a new tenant, which would have brought more heavy diesel truck traffic into Barrio Logan. However, a coalition of community members, medical professionals, and AB 617 steering committee members, successfully prevented the cement corporation from becoming a tenant in the Port. The APCD was an ally in EHC's advocacy efforts.
- If Measure G passes in the November 2024 election, then EHC will celebrate substantive progress in advancing climate action plans, climate investments, and transit electrification.

## Select Resources and Media

- [Carolina Martinez, Environmental Health Coalition: "Expanding mass transit is best way to limit gas price pain and respond to climate emergency," San Diego Union Tribune](#)
- [Environmental Health Coalition: "How air pollution is disproportionately impacting minority communities in San Diego," PBS News Hour](#)
- [SANDAG Regional Medium-Duty & Heavy-Duty ZEV Blueprint](#)

**Organized activities to increase the number of supporters and freshen the pool of participants to bring new ideas and energy into efforts.** EHC grew internal capacity by hiring a Transportation Justice Organizer (TJO) in 2022. EHC's TJO deepened relationships to better understand community needs and concerns, while activating community advocates and hosting EHC's monthly Community Action Team (CAT) meetings. MCC hosted the Improving Transportation in City Heights (ITCH) community team, and both ITCH and CAT members conducted power analyses, strategized advocacy efforts, and continued to build community support. These groups kept community members engaged in the work, and EHC has worked to identify community residents with leadership potential, invited them to participate in community meetings, actions, and trainings, and provided the opportunity for them to join an EHC volunteer CAT.

**Hosted coalition meetings for community members of SDTEWG partner groups.** SDTEWG actively worked with elected officials to advance transportation goals and secured funding by engaging SANDAG, the San Diego Metropolitan Transit System (MTS), and San Diego County Supervisors in addressing transit policy and project priorities. SDTEWG uplifted concerns that were critical for improving environmental health, transportation justice, and climate justice.

**Formed a taskforce of community leaders who focus on planning and policymaking to advance transportation equity.** Across organizations in the SDTEWG, hundreds of residents were educated and mobilized to support transportation justice for EJ communities. This engagement was critical in both the RTP adoption and MCAS passage and laid the groundwork for future community activity as EHC implemented transit solutions. Additionally, SANDAG defined equity for their own work, which led to increased funding and support for grassroots organizations to engage in local planning and policymaking efforts.

**Developed stronger relationships with unions and workers in transit-dependent sectors.** EHC has long held a close relationship with the International Brotherhood of International Workers (IBEW) 569 and the Laborers Local 89. Measure G provided an opportunity to deepen the relationship and grow the collective impact. Since 2022 EHC and their union partners have worked collaboratively to qualify and pass Measure G.

**Ensured low-income truck drivers were not left behind through the ZEV transition.** In 2023, EHC completed a series of four outreach events at the Port of San Diego to educate independent truckers about transitioning to ZEV trucks and the financing/incentives that could be provided for their transition. Interested truckers were connected to CALSTART for technical assistance in accessing financing.

# Key Partners

Organization	Type
Advanced Clean Fleet Coalition	Government Partner
Center on Policy Initiatives	Community Partner
City Heights CDC	Community Partner
City of San Diego	Government Partner
Mid-City CAN	Community Partner
Portside AB 617 Steering Committee	Government Partner
SANDAG	Government Partner
SanDiego350	Community Partner

## Insights from CCHE Initiative

- **It can be challenging to balance funding needs and opportunities with vision and priorities as funders have yet to recognize transit as a solution for climate change.** While EHC has developed transit-oriented strategies and solutions to reduce GHG emissions and toxic air pollution, the funding agenda for climate, health, and equity has yet to prioritize grants for transit-related work. EHC noted they have felt pressure to pursue funding that is not entirely aligned with their priorities. EHC co-led a group of 12 nonprofits that secured a \$22 million grant from the Strategic Growth Council’s Transformative Climate Communities program and a \$20 million Community Change Grant from the Environmental Protection Agency. These funds will support a suite of climate resiliency projects and infrastructure investments in environmental justice communities.
- **Funders are shifting their funding practices to include racial justice and EJ.** EHC can now openly discuss racial justice and EJ issues with funders, when these topics would deter funders not too long ago. This shift in the “climate” of funding opportunities allowed EHC to pursue new funding opportunities.
- **“If you want to go fast, go alone, but if you want to go far, go together.”** EHC and SDTEWG bring together partners and residents in productive ways and foster positive synergy. By taking a measured approach, fostering collaboration, and maintaining consistent communication with residents, EHC is making significant strides in achieving their priorities.
- **The need for base building and additional local organizers has increased over time.** Residents involved in the CAT and other EHC initiatives are already stretched across various projects. With new funding opportunities and EHC’s expanding capacity, there is a continuous need for more on-the-ground support and resident engagement in local organizing and base building.

## Looking Ahead

EHC work continues to ensure clean air and a healthy environment in San Diego. In the short term, EHC is closely monitoring and pushing for the passage of Measure G in November 2024. If it passes, there will be a sustainable funding mechanism to implement solutions outlined in the 10 Transit Lifelines; EHC will then pivot to ensure implementation. If the measure does not pass, EHC will continue to utilize the power of community and the SDTEWG to advance the 10 Transit Lifelines. Looking further ahead, EHC will strengthen relationships and build structures to support ongoing transit improvements and policy changes aimed at reducing emissions and enhancing air quality.