

ADVOCATING FOR REPARATIVE OUTCOMES ALONG I-375

A RESIDENT GUIDE

December 2024

The I-375 Reconnecting Communities Project is a key opportunity for Detroiters—especially those with ties to Black Bottom and Paradise Valley—to help shape a just and equitable future for areas affected by the I-375 highway conversion to a surface road. Funded through the Infrastructure for Rebuilding America (INFRA) Grant Program, this project aims to reduce environmental harm, improve accessibility, and center the voices of communities that have historically been marginalized.

As the most advanced project of its kind in the country, I-375 is a national model for how infrastructure initiatives can address historical injustices while prioritizing community leadership in shaping the future.¹

As a resident, this is a critical time to advocate for outcomes tied to I-375 that build a more resilient, thriving, economically equitable place where Detroiters can meet their unique needs and prosper. This guide explains how you can get involved to influence reparative outcomes for Black Bottom, Paradise Valley, and Detroit as a whole.



An I-375 Overview

The I-75/I-375 corridor, which first opened in June 1964, has “aged out of its usefulness” and is slated for redevelopment, which will bring the I-375 portion back to road grade and reconnect it with the street grid. This project follows the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), which requires agencies like MDOT to proactively assess environmental, social, and economic impacts before making decisions to ensure the effects of their proposed actions are harmonious with the community.

2014

Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) publishes a Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) study to assess the corridor’s transportation needs and evaluate redevelopment options.

2017

MDOT begins an Environmental Assessment (EA)^{*} to comply with the NEPA process, addressing environmental, social, and economic impacts of the project.

2020

MDOT publishes the EA. The public comment period extends until February 19, 2021

March 2022

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) issues a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), after determining that the plan would not cause harm to the human or natural environment.

September 2022

MDOT receives \$105 million from the U.S. Department of Transportation’s INFRA Grant Program to support the \$300 million project.

2025

Construction is expected to begin.

*The EA was used to determine whether the I-375 project would have significant impacts on the environment or community. Though MDOT opted for an EA rather than a more extensive Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), public engagement remained a crucial part of the process.

Public involvement in the NEPA process

For Detroiters looking to make their voices heard in future transportation projects, understanding when and where to engage in the NEPA process is vital. Public comment periods, hearings, and advisory councils like the Local Advisory Committee (LAC) provide opportunities for meaningful involvement and opportunity to ensure that future development projects in Detroit are equitable, centered on community needs, and driven by a shared vision.

Land Opportunities and Challenges

The I-375 resurfacing will free up 30 acres of excess land for potential development, creating opportunities for a vibrant new district. However, uncertainties remain about the land, which involves coordination among City, State, and Federal agencies.³

The City of Detroit is leading an extensive community engagement effort to develop a Neighborhood Framework to help determine the future of this land. The plan will address zoning and land use, urban design and neighborhoods, mobility, open space, history, and arts and culture.⁴

While uncertainties remain about the lands future, these uncertainties are opportunities for residents to stay engaged and advocate for priorities that include developments opportunities that create equitable opportunities, addresses past injustices, and produces reparative outcomes.

LAND DISPOSITION OVERVIEW ⁵	
City of Detroit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The value of excess land is determined by its intended use. The City of Detroit’s Planning and Development Department has initiated the Land Use Framework planning process. This process will serve as the foundation for determining how resources from the land sale will be allocated. The Detroit Department of Transportation (DDOT) will retain authority over streets that connect to the new boulevard, which will influence the final land use and value considerations.
MDOT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <u>MDOT’s Real Estate Procedure Manual</u> outlines the process for handling “excess real property” that is no longer needed for operation, maintenance, or safety. The process begins at least one year after the project is completed and placed in service. It starts with an Engineering Review, as detailed in Section 7.3 of the manual. MDOT has stated its intent to use the value of remaining excess real property to address historic environmental justice impacts and social equity concerns. However, specific details on these commitments, including the transfer of land, are still being developed in coordination with the State, City, and federal government.
U.S. Dept. of Transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The USDOT will work with MDOT, the State of Michigan, and the City of Detroit to establish guidelines governing the transfer and use of excess land. Though there is intent to prioritize historic environmental justice impacts and social equity considerations, the details of these guidelines remain undefined.

Equitable Engagement & reparative outcomes

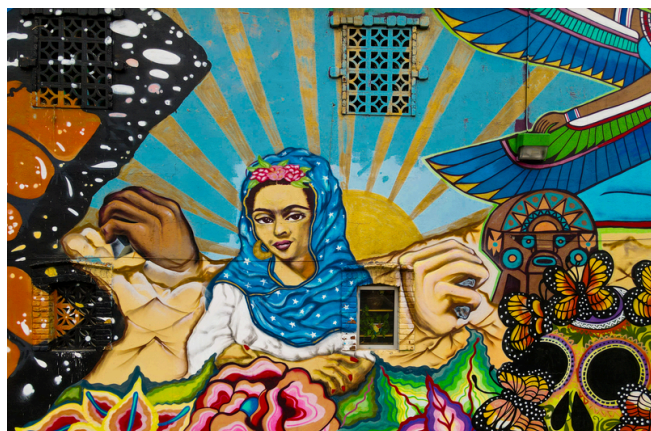
What is Equitable Engagement?

Equitable engagement is a planning approach that prioritizes community voice to address past injustices and close equity gaps. It involves shifting power, creating reparative solutions, and fostering inclusive participation to ensure historically excluded residents are part of decision-making.⁶



LEVELS OF ENGAGEMENT⁷

Power-sharing (Collaboration & decision-making)	▶ Two-way exchange that creates a strong, long-term bond between an organization or decision-maker and the community by integrating the community in the decision-making processes and placing decisions in their hands.
Co-designing (involvement/consulting)	▶ Two-way exchange that strengthens peer networks and contributes to sustainable programs and initiatives. Community members are involved throughout processes and their input is integrated into plans.
Co-learning (feedback/input)	▶ Two-way exchange that establishes transparent dialogue and a feedback loop that offers the community an opportunity to provide input on plans, concepts, policies, or programs.
Informing (one-way communication)	▶ This involves one-way communication out to the community to provide objective information.
Marginalization (exclusion)	▶ Excludes certain populations from decision-making and creates barriers for participation.



What are reparative outcomes?

Reparative outcomes are created by developing programs, investments, and policies to address past economic inequities.⁸ They ensure outcomes for historically marginalized groups will surpass the status quo. These efforts are inclusive and drive systemic change for a more equitable future. They strengthen trust, foster collaboration, and prioritize community progress.⁹

What's the Difference Between Reparative Outcomes and Reparations?

Reparations address past harms through direct actions like financial compensation or restitution.¹⁰ Reparative outcomes focus on making changes now—investing in neighborhoods and creating opportunities that help communities thrive long-term. Both are important, but reparative outcomes offer a way to start building a more equitable future today.

How to Recognize Progress in Your Community

- Progress in your neighborhood can look a variety of ways. Start by asking:
Are residents' voices being heard in decisions that affect us?
- Changes should focus on fairness and correcting past wrongs, using facts and community input to guide them.
- Talk to local decision-makers, go to meetings, and look around to notice what's happening. Ask:
Are the changes improving the quality of life for everyone, especially for people who've been historically, presently, or systemically left out or held back?
- Progress is fair when it closes the gaps between groups. It's even stronger when it addresses root causes and creates lasting change for everyone in the community.

Is progress equitable?¹¹

Groups are sharing in the same rate of progress, but gaps remain.

Equitable



Is progress just?

Gaps between groups closing.

Just



Is progress reparative?

Growth closes gaps and offsets past inequities.

Reparative



Building a Just Future Along I-375

The I-375 highway removal project gives Detroiters a chance to address the harm done to Black Bottom and Paradise Valley, two historically Black communities through the 1950s. When the freeway was built, it displaced Black residents, businesses, and community spaces. Now, this project can become a way to right past wrongs and ensure a better future for everyone.

As a resident, advocating for reparative outcomes means:

Understand the history

Recognize the damage caused by the original freeway and why it's important to involve those most affected in shaping the project's future.

Speak up for fairness

Push for Black Detroiters to have access to contracts, jobs, and opportunities tied to redevelopment, along with affordable housing and support for Black businesses.

Shape the design together

Join conversations about the future boulevard's design and future land use to ensure it reflects the community's needs.

Demand long-term benefits

Advocate for protections against displacement and investments that will help families and businesses thrive for generations.

Advocate for reparative outcomes tied to the excess land

The excess land from the project holds the potential to create a thriving future for areas once known as Black Bottom and Paradise Valley. Its value and use will depend on market forces, time, and complex City and State processes. Residents should stay informed and push for transparency in how this land will be used to benefit the community.

This is not just about righting the wrongs of the past; it's about building a resilient, thriving, and fairer Detroit. Where everyone's voice is valued and people are able to meet their unique needs and prosper.

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