

# PRIORITY EQUITY COMMUNITIES METHODOLOGY

Technical Methodology and Analysis

ADOPTED  
APRIL 4, 2024



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INNOVATING FOR A BETTER TOMORROW



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SCAG is the nation's largest metropolitan planning organization, representing six counties, 191 cities and 19 million residents. SCAG undertakes a variety of planning and policy initiatives to encourage a more sustainable Southern California now and in the future.

## VISION

Southern California's Catalyst for a Brighter Future

## MISSION

To foster innovative regional solutions that improve the lives of Southern Californians through inclusive collaboration, visionary planning, regional advocacy, information sharing, and promoting best practices.



# PRIORITY EQUITY COMMUNITIES METHODOLOGY

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# **Priority Equity Communities Technical Methodology and Analysis**

## 1. Introduction

Residents in the SCAG region face a range of economic and social impacts, which could result in adverse impacts on health, education, employment, housing choice and conditions, rates of incarceration and life expectancy that vary vastly based on race, income and where people live. More specifically, institutional and systemic racism, as documented and experienced by people of color, particularly Black and Indigenous people, continues to impact access to more equitable, sustainable and prosperous futures in Southern California.

Recently, federal, state and local jurisdictions have developed "equity area" definitions—for example, Disadvantaged Communities, Priority Populations, or Equity Focus Communities—to target analysis, investment and policy benefits in historically marginalized communities. Each definition differs to serve its own purpose, and, as a result, highlights different areas of the region. SCAG developed an equity area definition, called Priority Equity Communities, to assess the effects of the Regional Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy on priority populations, per statutory requirements. Staff [presented](#) the Priority Equity Communities as part of the Connect SoCal 2024 Equity Analysis to SCAG's Regional Council and Policy Committees in June 2023.

This document provides additional technical methodology and analysis beyond the description provided in the [Connect SoCal 2024 Equity Analysis Technical Report](#), including equations used to develop data, county-level averages that serve as thresholds for priority population criteria and a comparison to other commonly used equity areas.

The [Priority Equity Community boundary](#) is available for viewing and download from the [SCAG Regional Data Platform](#) in CSV, KML, shapefile and GeoJSON formats.

**For comments or questions about Priority Equity Communities, please contact Annaleigh Ekman at [environmentaljustice@scag.ca.gov](mailto:environmentaljustice@scag.ca.gov).**

## Community Input

Feedback on the Connect SoCal 2020 Environmental Justice Technical Report suggested the creation of a new equity area definition to clarify the multiple varieties of equity areas used in the analysis, including Senate Bill (SB) 535 Disadvantaged Communities, Environmental Justice Areas, and Communities of Concern. SCAG developed the concept of Priority Equity Communities from an example developed by the Bay Area's Metropolitan Transportation Commission, another Metropolitan Planning Organization in the state of California. Based on that example, SCAG tailored the definition of Priority Equity Communities to suit the SCAG region with guidance from stakeholders. Priority Equity Communities replaces the need for multiple equity area definitions used in previous Environmental Justice Technical Reports.

Several sources of community input provided valuable feedback to shape the methodology for Priority Equity Communities. In coordination with the development of Connect SoCal 2024, SCAG engaged residents and staff of community-based organizations, local jurisdictions, regional partners (councils of governments, county transportation commissions, air districts, health departments), universities, transit agencies, the business community and elected officials through public workshops, events, surveys and meetings. Topical survey questions, interactive poster boards and presentations prompted feedback on the region's view on equity concepts, including specific calls for feedback on the development of Priority

Equity Communities. SCAG received general support for the initial list of criteria provided, though several criteria were modified based on feedback. Participants also elevated additional populations, including people experiencing homelessness, veterans, farm workers, LGBTQ+ community members, college students and children in foster care. Each of these groups experience unique barriers to transportation and are often exacerbated by intersectional identities with race and poverty. In response to this input, SCAG discussed some of these populations in the Connect SoCal 2024 technical reports and will explore how policies and programs can be shaped to meet unique needs.

During the development of Priority Equity Communities, SCAG also built off previous efforts to develop Transportation Equity Zones (TEZs) in partnership with several stakeholders, including community-based organizations, as described in the [Mobility Innovations and Pricing Report \(March 2022\)](#). TEZs were used to identify “areas that currently experience transportation-related burdens and may face disproportionate impacts from future mobility innovations” as part of a community-based approach to transportation planning and mitigation efforts. SCAG revisited the stakeholder feedback documented in the Mobility Innovations and Pricing Report while developing the methodology for Priority Equity Communities, which identifies a broader set of inequities from environmental and demographic factors beyond transportation.

More details on the outreach efforts for Connect SoCal 2024 can be found in Section 4.1 of the [Equity Analysis Technical Report](#) and the [Public Participation Technical Report](#). SCAG staff will continue to monitor comments received through SCAG’s outreach efforts and consider changes in the next cycle of plan development.

### Note on Terminology

Language and terms connected to equity, identity and representation are constantly evolving. Some terms used in original sources, including legislation, do not always represent current best practices, and may in fact be offensive, triggering or erasing to some communities. In this report, the term “people of color” is used to describe people who identify as non-white and/or Hispanic/Latino and who are impacted by racism. Federal guidance refers to racial and ethnic “minority” persons or communities, which no longer describes the demographic makeup of the SCAG region. SCAG recognizes that people of color is not a perfect term; grouping people into a single category can diminish the unique experiences of individuals, particularly Black and Indigenous people who are disproportionately burdened by the effects of racism. Moreover, the data used in this analysis falls short of distinguishing people who experience racism, relying on aggregate racial and ethnic groups defined at the federal level. SCAG aims to evaluate the impacts of policies and plans in a way that acknowledges this understanding, including by sharing results disaggregated by race/ethnicity whenever feasible.

There are several terms frequently used to collectively describe marginalized population groups. SCAG has used terms like *disadvantaged*, *vulnerable* and *underserved* to describe people who live in state- or federally defined Disadvantaged Communities or to describe populations that have been systematically denied the opportunity to participate fully in aspects of economic, social and civic life. Some of these populations have been outlined in the [Federal Executive Order 13985](#), including Black, Latino, and Indigenous and Native American persons, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and other persons of color; members of religious minorities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) persons; persons with disabilities; persons who live in rural areas; and persons otherwise adversely affected by

persistent poverty or inequality. In this report, SCAG uses “priority populations” to refer to populations in the definition of Priority Equity Communities.

## 2. Technical Methodology

Priority Equity Communities are census tracts in the SCAG region that have a greater concentration of populations that have been historically marginalized and are susceptible to inequitable outcomes based on several socioeconomic factors. The socioeconomic factors defined in **Table 1** were selected based on statutorily protected populations and refined with input gathered through the outreach process and are referred to in this report as “priority populations.” The U.S. Census Bureau 2017-2021 American Community Survey 5-Year (ACS) estimates are used to define each of the thresholds for the priority populations. **Table 2** describes the tables and columns where ACS estimates can be found, along with the calculation used to establish each criterion. The Limited Vehicle and Transit Access factor also relies on a geographic overlay with SCAG High Quality Transit Corridors (HQTC). More information on HQTCs, including a definition and map, is available in the Transit/Rail chapter of the [Connect SoCal 2024 Mobility Technical Report](#).

**Table 1. Priority Population Descriptions**

Priority Population	Census Data Description
People of Color	People who do not identify as non-Hispanic White, including the following racial and ethnic categories: Native American, Asian, Black, Hispanic/Latino, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander and Multiracial/Other.
Low-Income Households	People living below the 200 percent Federal Poverty Level (FPL). In 2019, a family of three earning less than \$21,330 was classified as living at the FPL, and a family of three earning less than \$43,440 was classified as living below 200 percent FPL.
Vulnerable Age Groups	Older adults over 65 years of age and children under 18 years of age.
People with Disabilities	People with one or more of six types of difficulties (i.e., hearing, vision, cognitive, ambulatory, self-care and independent living).
People with Limited English Proficiency	People above five years of age, who do not speak English at least "well" as their primary language or have a limited ability to read, speak, write, or understand English at least "well."
Limited Vehicle and Transit Access	Households with more members than vehicles owned that are not within a census tract that intersects with a High Quality Transit Corridor.
People without a High School Diploma	People 25 years and over without a high school diploma or higher level of education.
Single Parent Households	Householders with no spouse or partner present with children of the householder under 18 years old.
Housing Cost Burdened Households	Households spending 30 percent or more of their household income on housing- or rent-related costs.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau and U.S. Department of Health & Human Services

**Table 2. Priority Equity Community Criteria Data Sources and Calculations**

Category	Table ID	Table Name	Code	Column Name	Label	Percent of Census Tract Calculation
People of Color	B03002	Hispanic or Latino Origin by Race	A	B03002_001E	Estimate!!Total:	(A-B)/A
			B	B03002_003E	Estimate!!Total!!Not Hispanic or Latino!!White alone	
Low-Income Households	S1701	Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months	C	S1701_C02_001E	Estimate!!Below poverty level!!Population for whom poverty status is determined	D/C
			D	S1701_C01_042E	Estimate!!Total!!Population for whom poverty status is determined!!ALL INDIVIDUALS WITH INCOME BELOW THE FOLLOWING POVERTY RATIOS!!200 percent of poverty level	
Vulnerable Age Groups	S0101	Age and Sex	E	S0101_C01_001E	Estimate!!Total!!Total population	Older Adults = F/E Under 18 = G/E
			F	S0101_C01_030E	Estimate!!Total!!Total population!!SELECTED AGE CATEGORIES!!65 years and over	
			G	S0101_C01_022E	Estimate!!Total!!Total population!!SELECTED AGE CATEGORIES!!Under 18 years	
People with Disabilities	S1810	Disability Characteristics	H	S1810_C03_001E	Estimate!!Percent with a disability!!Total civilian noninstitutionalized population	H
People with Limited English Proficiency	S1602	Limited English Speaking Households	I	S1602_C04_001E	Estimate!!Percent limited English-speaking households!!All households	I
Limited Vehicle and Transit Access	B08201	Household Size by Vehicles Available	J	B08201_001E	Estimate!!Total:	Limited Vehicle Access = (K+L+M+N+O+P+Q+R+S+T)/J  <i>Note: Limited transit access is determined by finding census tracts that intersect with the 2022 HQTC with a 50 ft buffer to account for streets running adjacent to census tracts.</i>
			K	B08201_008E	Estimate!!Total!!1-person household!!No vehicle available	
			L	B08201_014E	Estimate!!Total!!2-person household!!No vehicle available	
			M	B08201_015E	Estimate!!Total!!2-person household!!1 vehicle available	
			N	B08201_020E	Estimate!!Total!!3-person household!!No vehicle available	
			O	B08201_021E	Estimate!!Total!!3-person household!!1 vehicle available	
			P	B08201_022E	Estimate!!Total!!3-person household!!2 vehicles available	
			Q	B08201_026E	Estimate!!Total!!4-or-more-person household!!No vehicle available	
			R	B08201_027E	Estimate!!Total!!4-or-more-person household!!1 vehicle available	

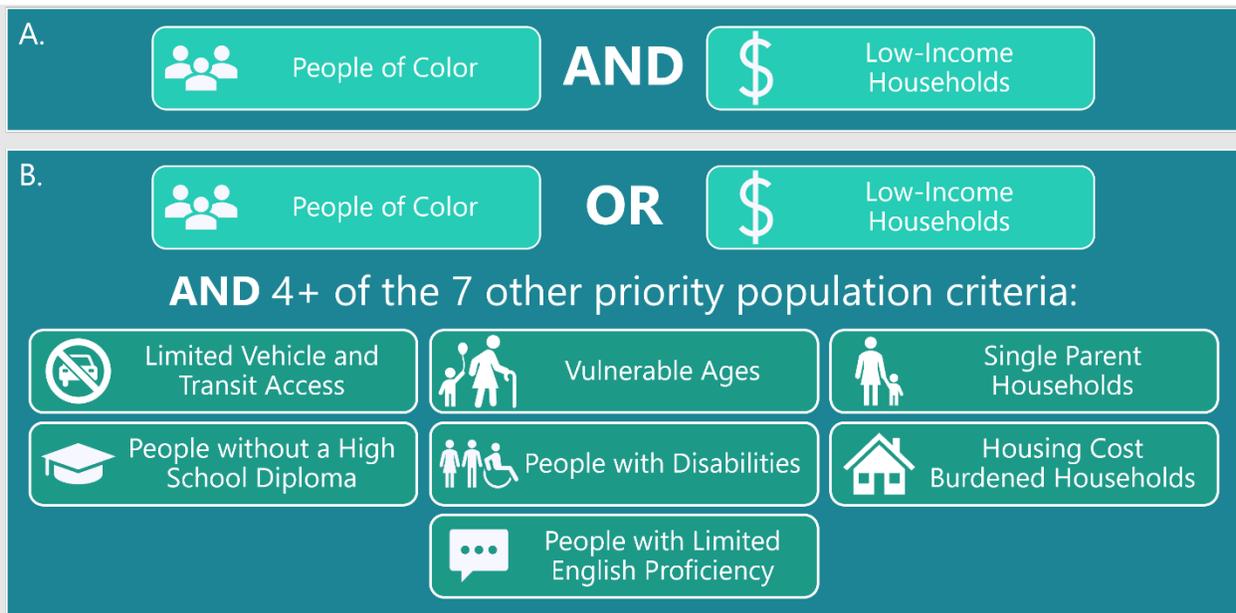
Category	Table ID	Table Name	Code	Column Name	Label	Percent of Census Tract Calculation
			S	B08201_028E	Estimate!!Total!!4-or-more-person household!!2 vehicles available	
			T	B08201_029E	Estimate!!Total!!4-or-more-person household!!3 vehicles available	
People without a High School Diploma	S1501	Educational Attainment	U	S1501_C02_014E	Estimate!!Percent!!AGE BY EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT!!Population 25 years and over!!High school graduate or higher	100-U
Single Parent Households	B11012	Households by Type	V	B11012_001E	Estimate!!Total:	(W+X)/V
			W	B11012_010E	Estimate!!Total!!Female householder, no spouse or partner present!!With children of the householder under 18 years	
			X	B11012_015E	Estimate!!Total!!Male householder, no spouse or partner present!!With children of the householder under 18 years	
Housing Cost-Burdened Households	DP04	Selected Housing Characteristics	Y	DP04_0110E	Estimate!!SELECTED MONTHLY OWNER COSTS AS A PERCENTAGE OF HOUSEHOLD INCOME (SMOCAPI)!!Housing units with a mortgage (excluding units where SMOCAPI cannot be computed)	Home Owner Cost Burdened = (Z+AA+AC+AD)/(Y+AB)
			Z	DP04_0114E	Estimate!!SELECTED MONTHLY OWNER COSTS AS A PERCENTAGE OF HOUSEHOLD INCOME (SMOCAPI)!!Housing units with a mortgage (excluding units where SMOCAPI cannot be computed)!!30.0 to 34.9 percent	
			AA	DP04_0115E	Estimate!!SELECTED MONTHLY OWNER COSTS AS A PERCENTAGE OF HOUSEHOLD INCOME (SMOCAPI)!!Housing units with a mortgage (excluding units where SMOCAPI cannot be computed)!!35.0 percent or more	
			AB	DP04_0117E	Estimate!!SELECTED MONTHLY OWNER COSTS AS A PERCENTAGE OF HOUSEHOLD INCOME (SMOCAPI)!!Housing unit without a mortgage (excluding units where SMOCAPI cannot be computed)	
			AC	DP04_0123E	Estimate!!SELECTED MONTHLY OWNER COSTS AS A PERCENTAGE OF HOUSEHOLD INCOME (SMOCAPI)!!Housing unit without a mortgage (excluding units where SMOCAPI cannot be computed)!!30.0 to 34.9 percent	

Category	Table ID	Table Name	Code	Column Name	Label	Percent of Census Tract Calculation
			AD	DP04_0124E	Estimate!!SELECTED MONTHLY OWNER COSTS AS A PERCENTAGE OF HOUSEHOLD INCOME (SMOCAPI)!!Housing unit without a mortgage (excluding units where SMOCAPI cannot be computed)!!35.0 percent or more	
			AE	DP04_0136E	Estimate!!GROSS RENT AS A PERCENTAGE OF HOUSEHOLD INCOME (GRAPI)!!Occupied units paying rent (excluding units where GRAPI cannot be computed)	Renter Cost Burdened = (AF+AG)/AE
			AF	DP04_0141E	Estimate!!GROSS RENT AS A PERCENTAGE OF HOUSEHOLD INCOME (GRAPI)!!Occupied units paying rent (excluding units where GRAPI cannot be computed)!!30.0 to 34.9 percent	
			AG	DP04_0142E	Estimate!!GROSS RENT AS A PERCENTAGE OF HOUSEHOLD INCOME (GRAPI)!!Occupied units paying rent (excluding units where GRAPI cannot be computed)!!35.0 percent or more	

A census tract is determined to be a Priority Equity Community if there is a concentration above the county average of one or both of the following conditions:

1. BOTH low-income households and people of color OR
2. EITHER low-income households or people of color AND of four or more of the following:
  - i. Vulnerable Ages
  - ii. People with Disabilities
  - iii. People with Limited English Proficiency
  - iv. Limited Vehicle and Transit Access
  - v. People without a High School Diploma
  - vi. Single Parent Households
  - vii. Housing Cost Burdened Households

The image below illustrates the two methods for determining Priority Equity Communities, where the concentration of indicated populations must be above the county average.



**Table 3** describes the average percent of each priority population for census tracts within each of the six SCAG counties. Census tracts that had percentages exceeding these county averages meet that component of the priority population criteria.

**Table 3. Average Percent of Priority Populations by County in SCAG Region**

Priority Population	Imperial	Los Angeles	Orange	Riverside	San Bernardino	Ventura
Low Income	49.8%	32.4%	22.5%	31.9%	35.2%	23.6%
People of Color	88.3%	73.4%	58.2%	64.8%	70.7%	54.4%
Older Adults	13.7%	14.0%	16.0%	16.6%	12.6%	15.9%
Under 18	27.5%	21.1%	21.4%	23.5%	25.8%	22.4%
People with Disabilities	14.2%	10.2%	9.0%	12.1%	11.9%	11.1%

Priority Population	Imperial	Los Angeles	Orange	Riverside	San Bernardino	Ventura
Limited English-Speaking Households	25.2%	12.8%	8.1%	8.5%	6.4%	6.6%
Limited Vehicle Access	53.8%	50.8%	43.1%	44.0%	47.7%	40.9%
Home Owner Cost Burdened	28.4%	36.6%	31.4%	32.7%	30.1%	32.6%
Renter Cost Burdened	54.6%	56.8%	54.2%	57.1%	55.3%	58.3%
People without a High School Diploma	29.4%	20.6%	13.0%	17.9%	19.1%	14.7%
Single Parent Households	9.1%	6.5%	5.0%	6.4%	7.8%	5.1%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2017-2021 American Community Survey, 2017-2021 estimates

### 3. Analysis

Figure 1 shows the proportion of each county’s population living in Priority Equity Communities. Overall, Priority Equity Communities cover 50.8 percent of the region’s population.

- Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority

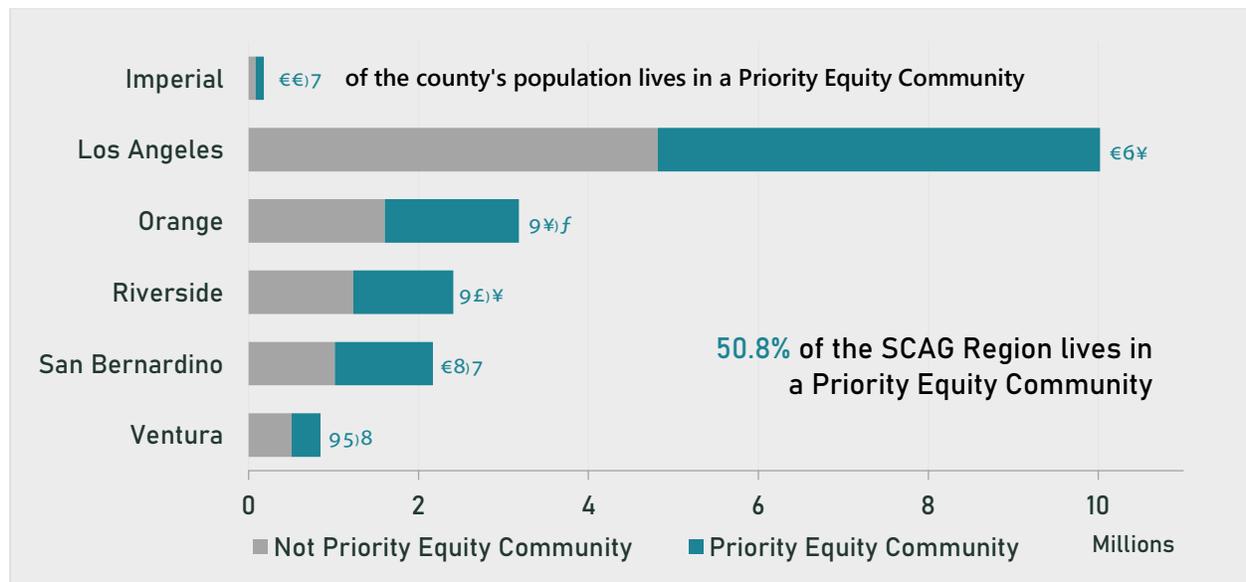
**Table 4. Percentage of Population in Local, State, and Federal Equity Areas Covered by Priority Equity Communities**

Equity Area Definition*	Agency	Purpose	% Cover by Priority Equity Communities
CEJST Disadvantaged Communities	CEQ	Targets funding in communities most impacted by climate change, pollution and environmental hazards, per the Justice40 Initiative.	87.6%
ETC Disadvantaged Communities	US DOT		85.1%
SB 535 Disadvantaged Communities	CalEPA/OEHHA	Targets investment in the state’s “most burdened communities” while reducing pollution that causes climate change	84.1%
EQI Priority Populations	Caltrans	Targets transportation-specific priority population areas for state funding and provides guidance to improve the analysis of project impacts and identify opportunities to advance equitable outcomes during project planning, development, and design.	70.1%
TEZs	SCAG	Identifies areas that currently experience transportation-related burdens and may face disproportionate impacts from future mobility innovations.	97.4%
EFCs	LA Metro	Identifies and targets investment into communities most in need of improved access to opportunity from a mobility standpoint.	93.2%

\*Equity Areas as of March 2024

Map 1 illustrates the geographic coverage of the Priority Equity Communities.

**Figure 1. Population in Priority Equity Communities by County**



Note: Percentage of each county’s population in Priority Equity Communities is shown.

Source: SCAG 2023, developed with data from U.S. Census Bureau ACS, 2017-2021 and High Quality Transit Corridors

### Comparison to Other Equity Areas

As mentioned in the introduction, several federal, state and local jurisdictions developed equity area definitions that cover all or part of the SCAG region. They defined these “equity areas,” sometimes called Disadvantaged Communities, Priority Populations, or Equity Focus Communities, to target analysis, investment and policy benefits in historically marginalized communities. Each equity area definition and methodology differ to serve its own purpose, and as a result, highlights different areas of the region. With the proposed definition of Priority Equity Communities, **Table 4** demonstrates the significant overlaps with the following equity area definitions:

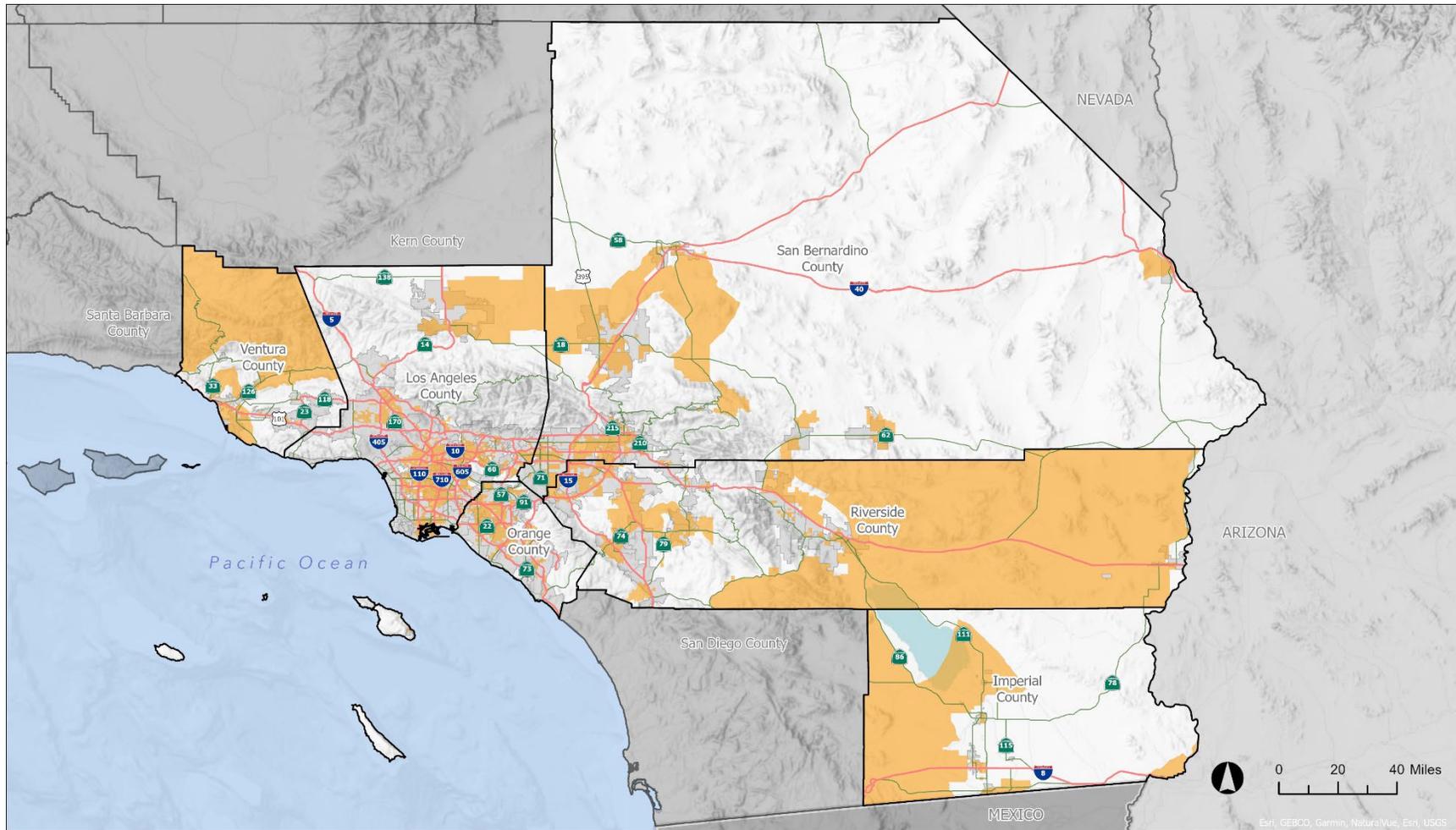
- Disadvantaged Communities, per the [Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool \(CEJST\)](#), U.S. Council on Environmental Quality
- Disadvantaged Communities, per the [Equitable Transportation Community Explorer \(ETC\)](#), U.S. Department of Transportation
- [SB 535 Disadvantaged Communities](#), per CalEnviroScreen 4.0, CalEPA and California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA)
- Priority Populations, per the [Transportation Equity Index \(EQI\)](#), Caltrans
- [Transportation Equity Zones \(TEZs\)](#), SCAG
- [Equity Focused Communities \(EFCs\)](#), Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority

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\*Equity Areas as of March 2024

**Map 1. SCAG Connect SoCal 2024 Priority Equity Communities**



- Freeway
- Other State Highway
- SCAG Counties
- City Boundaries
- Priority Equity Communities

Priority Equity Communities are census tracts in the SCAG region that have a greater concentration of populations that have been historically marginalized and are susceptible to inequitable outcomes based on several socioeconomic factors.

Source: SCAG 2023, developed with data from U.S. Census Bureau ACS, 2017-2021 and SCAG 2023 High Quality Transit Corridor



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