

NEW STUDY HIGHLIGHTS IMPACT OF UNEVEN TRANSIT ACCESS ON LOW-INCOME COMMUNITIES

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For Immediate Release

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Low-Income Communities Can't Get to Jobs

New Brookings Institution study finds uneven transit service cuts off families from regional job centers

For Immediate Release

May 12, 2011 – Oakland, CA. – A new report released today by the Brookings Institution presents a clear and dire picture of the significant transportation challenges facing low-income workers and job applicants.

The report, "[Missed Opportunity: Transit and Jobs in Metropolitan America](#)," reveals the stark and enduring obstacles faced by low-income people and communities of color in getting to regional job centers. This first-of-its-kind analysis of transit access in the nation's 100 largest metropolitan regions found that:

- **Across all metro areas, the typical worker can reach only about 7 percent of their region's jobs in a one-way, 45-minute transit commute.**
- **Three-quarters of low- and middle-skill jobs cannot be accessed even by a one-way, 90-minute transit commute.**
- **Residents of low-income suburban neighborhoods face some of the biggest challenges, they cannot access more than 77 percent of low- and middle-skill jobs via transit.**
- **Recent and looming cuts in local transit service pose a significant challenge for people who rely on public transportation to access jobs. For example, proposed transit cuts in Milwaukee, Wis., would cut off 25,000 jobs from transit access.**

Clearly, the impact of these challenges in metro regions is stark.

The Brookings study shows that low-income residents in the Kansas City metro area can only access 23 percent of the region's jobs via transit. The region recently received a HUD-DOT-EPA regional Sustainable Communities Planning grant that they are using to develop a focused investment plan along key transportation corridors to better connect people to work, generate reinvestment and new jobs along these corridors, and re-attract residents to the urban centers that have been losing population.

In the Twin Cities region, Brookings found that low-income residents can access approximately 39 percent of the region's jobs via transit. Their Metropolitan Council is using its Sustainable Communities Regional Planning grant to integrate a commuter rail, two light rail lines, and a bus rapid transit system to connect residents to newly created and currently existing job centers around each transit corridor. To help ensure success, they are engaging communities along each corridor, conducting market studies, and developing a corridor-focused Economic/Workforce Development plan.

These efforts – focused on connecting workers to employment opportunities, developing jobs and ensuring affordable housing near transit – can all contribute to healthier regions and better economic outcomes for low-income workers and communities of color currently isolated from job access.

National policy solutions are needed to better connect workers to jobs.

Nearly 20 percent of African-American households, 14 percent of Latino households, and 13 percent of Asian households live without a car. These households depend upon a strong public transportation network to access jobs in the metropolitan area.

To improve transit access to jobs, we recommend:

- **Promoting the development of transportation plans that increase access to jobs.**
- **Reforming existing transportation funding programs to prioritize public transportation**



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projects in areas that preserve and create affordable housing, and that connect low-income people to job centers and community amenities (e.g., New Starts, federal transportation loan programs, etc.).

Preserving and expand existing programs that fund public transportation, including expanded use of federal funds for operating transit systems.

Our nation needs a new transportation vision supported by smart policies and strategic investments that connect people to opportunity. The federal surface transportation bill, currently being debated in Congress, and the federal Sustainable Communities Planning grants mark our moments for reform.

According to a recent poll, 80 percent of Americans believe the country would benefit from an expanded and improved public transportation system. Let's work to ensure that the transportation bill is not a missed opportunity. We have the information and ideas we need to make smart, targeted investments that connect all Americans to opportunity. Now is the time for change.

For more information on how to connect low-income communities to jobs, please visit www.PolicyLink.org

To interview a PolicyLink transportation expert, please contact Janet Dickerson at janet@policylink.org or (212) 502-6494.

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