**COMMUTING TO WORK WITH PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION**

***DATA / METHODOLOGY:***

Data on commuting and census tract demographics for the ABC News / OTV analysis was collected from the 2022 U.S. Census American Community Survey, Demographic Profile tables DP03, DP04 and DP05. We also used census geographic classifications to assign geographic regions and urban / rural designations to each U.S. census tract. We calculated descriptive categories for some fields (income, race, no-vehicle households, etc.) by using “natural breaks” in ranges based on percentages in those fields.

***ANALYSIS / FINDINGS:***

In 2022, only 3.9% of America’s workers said they use public transportation (bus, streetcar / trolley, rail or another mass transit system) to get to work, while nearly 72% commuted to work alone each day in a car, truck or van – contributing to ongoing issues of traffic congestion, road rage incidents, and air pollution.

Still, that small portion of public transit commuters amounts to more than 5.9 million workers across the U.S. who depend on some form of taxpayer-supported vehicle to get to a jobsite each day.

Census data indicate those workers who use public transit have a much longer commute time, depending on where they live.

Several recent studies have shown that public transportation systems have long been a civil rights issue in America.

In the late 1950s, the National Highway System – created to move White suburban commuters into cities -- tore through predominantly Black and brown neighborhoods, leaving fewer public bus routes in and out of those neighborhoods.

And until the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, public transportation systems were still segregated in many cities, restricting travel in many communities or color.

[A 2020 study by Rice University’s Kinder Institute for Urban Research](https://kinder.rice.edu/urbanedge/racism-has-shaped-public-transit-and-its-riddled-inequities) says this of public transportation in America: “From funding, planning and infrastructure, to design and policing, many transit agencies essentially have built two systems with different standards for “choice” and “dependent” riders (that is to say Black and white).”

But those factors have never limited the need for public transportation in poorer, predominantly minority urban neighborhoods.

[This 2020 report prepared by the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation](https://www.cbcfinc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/NewRoutestoEquity-Final5.pdf) says up to 30% of lower-income Black household income is spent on transportation, and up to one-third of lower-income Black households have no vehicle – meaning a vast majority of money spent on transportation is for public transportation.

The report also notes that the portion of Black public transportation users is twice as high as over U.S. Black population, and at least 10% of Black workers rely on public transportation to get to their jobs – creating issues for those who work nights, weekends and non-standard hours, when bus routes are limited.

The report notes that those Black workers who use public transportation have the [longest average commute times (52 minutes)](https://nationalequityatlas.org/indicators/Commute_time?tranmode01=2) of any specific race or ethnic group.

Long commutes are linked to worse physical and mental health, including higher rates of obesity, stress, and depression. Employers also suffer from high turnover and employee dissatisfaction, and the public is affected by more air pollution, congestion, and climate change, according to the report.

Our census analysis shows that In OTV metro areas with strong rail transit systems – New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, the San Francisco Bay Area – the portion of working commuters who use public transportation is in double digits.

In census tract neighborhoods across the five-county New York City metro area, about 46% of all workers, (nearly 1.9 million commuters) said they use public transportation to get to work. Another 8.7% of New York commuters said they walked to work, a rate three times higher than the national average.

In Philadelphia County (PA), 21% of commuters said they used public transportation, as did 15% in Chicago, and 11% in Bay Area counties of Alameda and San Francisco. *(SEE TABLE BELOW)*



Many of those workers live in neighborhoods that are poorer and majority non-White.

Nationwide, data show about 8% of the workers living in America’s poorest neighborhoods -- where median household income in less than $35,000 – depend on public transit for the work commute.

That rate is twice as high as the national average, and nearly twice as high as the 4.5% rate of workers who live in America’s wealthiest neighborhoods, with median household income of more than $100,000.

In majority non-White neighborhoods, about 7.4% of workers say they depend on public transportation for the daily work commute – a rate 12 times higher than in neighborhoods that are less than 10% non-White.

The same patterns exist in some OTV metro areas.

In New York, for example, about half the workers in majority-non-White neighborhoods depend on public transportation, compared to about 25% in mostly White neighborhoods. *(SEE TABLE BELOW)*



In the poorest NY neighborhoods, 59.5% of workers said they took public transit to work, compared to about 37.7% in the wealthiest.

But the census data also show a continued disturbing pattern – in neighborhoods where workers are most dependent upon public transportation to get to work, workers are reporting the longest average commute times to work.

Can public transportation continue to be a viable commuting option to workers who depend on it the most?

Nationwide, in census tract neighborhoods where more than half the workers use public transportation, it takes nearly twice as long **(1.7x)**, on average, to get to a jobsite than in neighborhoods where nearly every worker commutes by car.

The data show that workers in neighborhoods who use public transportation the most, on average, have a 43-minute commute to their jobsites, compared to a 25-minute commute for those in neighborhoods where 2% or fewer employees take a bus or use a rail system to get to their jobs.

Nationwide, it takes workers about 26 ½ minutes to commute to work, by any means of transportation or walking.

The data show similar disparities in commute times among workers most and least dependent on public transportation to get to the jobsite:

**AVERAGE COMMUTE TIME TO WORK (OTV COUNTIES)**

**BAY AREA** (379 census tract neighborhoods in Alameda and San Francisco counties):

Overall average commute time: 32 ½ minutes

* Neighborhoods where 2% or less workers take public transportation to work – 29 ½ minutes
* Neighborhoods where 25.1% – 50% of workers take public transportation to work – 33 ½ minutes

**CHICAGO** (1,332 census tract neighborhoods in Cook County):

Overall average commute time: 33 minutes

* Neighborhoods where 2% or less workers take public transportation to work – 28 ½ minutes
* Neighborhoods where more than 50% of workers take public transportation to work – 41 minutes

**FRESNO** (225 census tract neighborhoods in Fresno County):

Overall average commute time: 23 ½ minutes

* Neighborhoods where 2% or less workers take public transportation to work – 23 ½ minutes
* Neighborhoods where 10.1% - 25% of workers take public transportation to work – **21 ½** minutes

**HOUSTON** (1,115 census tract neighborhoods in Harris County):

Overall average commute time: 28 minutes

* Neighborhoods where 2% or less workers take public transportation to work – 28 ½ minutes
* Neighborhoods where 25.1% – 50% of workers take public transportation to work – 36 ½ minutes

**LOS ANGELES** (2,498 census tract neighborhoods in Los Angeles County):

Overall average commute time: 31 minutes

* Neighborhoods where 2% or less workers take public transportation to work – 30 ½ minutes
* Neighborhoods where more than 50% of workers take public transportation to work – 40 ½ minutes

**NEW YORK** (2,327 census tract neighborhoods in Bronx, Kings, New York, Queens, Richmond counties):

Overall average commute time: 42 minutes

* Neighborhoods where 2% or less workers take public transportation to work – 24 minutes
* Neighborhoods where more than 50% of workers take public transportation to work – 43 minutes

**PHILADELPHIA** (408 census tract neighborhoods in Philadelphia County):

Overall average commute time: 33 minutes

* Neighborhoods where 2% or less workers take public transportation to work – 33 ½ minutes
* Neighborhoods where more than 50% of workers take public transportation to work – 40 ½ minutes

**RALEIGH** (230 census tract neighborhoods in Wake County):

Overall average commute time: 25 minutes

* Neighborhoods where 2% or less workers take public transportation to work – 25 minutes
* Neighborhoods where more than 10.1% - 25% of workers take public transportation to work – 25 minutes

The data reinforce that part of the reason for a high rate of workers using public transportation in America’s poorest and majority non-White neighborhoods is the lack of vehicle ownership.

Across America, in areas where more than half the workers use public transportation to commute, about 61.7% of households have no vehicle, compared to only 5% in neighborhoods where 2% or fewer workers depend on public transit, the data show.

In the poorest neighborhoods where more than half the workers use public transit, 75.7% of households have no vehicle. In majority non-White neighborhoods where more than half the workers use public transit, 61.7% of households have no vehicle.

*--Mark Nichols*