



The State of Latino Transportation

Where you live is linked to how healthy you are.

Sadly, U.S. Latino communities are marked by transportation inequities, including unsafe streets, unstable walking and biking environments, and public transit that can be hard to access, unaffordable, and unreliable.

This limits Latinos' access to health-promoting assets—affordable housing, green spaces and physical activity, healthy food, medical care, good schools—and makes it harder for Latino families to lead healthy lives.

But there's good news. Policymakers and community leaders can promote public participation in adopting policies to invest in or improve public transit and transit-oriented development. This can increase opportunities for health equity among Latinos.

This Fact Sheet is part of the *Salud America!* "The State of Latino Housing, Transportation, and Green Space: A Research Review." Read the full Review with citations: salud.to/healthequity.

The Evidence: Latinos Face Transportation Inequities

Where you live, and your access to equitable transportation, impacts your health.

- People who live in walkable, bikable, transit-oriented communities are more physically active, have less weight gain, have lower rates of traffic injuries and fatalities, have higher rates of employment, and are less exposed to air pollution, studies show.

Latino often lack access to equitable transportation.

- As low-wage workers are being "priced out" from living in city centers, U.S. Latinos are living farther from transportation hubs, amenities, jobs, and green spaces.
- Low-wage jobs often employing low-income Latinos—landscaping, cleaning, and child care—are frequently located in suburbs where Latinos do not commonly reside; this "spatial mismatch" makes it hard for public transit to provide sufficient service to pair employees and employers.
- Latinos are more likely than any other group to live in a multigenerational household with young and/or aging family members who can't drive themselves to school, work, healthcare, etc.

Latinos are less likely to have a personal vehicle, which causes inequities.

- More U.S. Latinos (12%) than White households (6.5%) do not have access to a car.
- In the Bay Area of California, 15% of low-income Latinos had access to a car every day of the week, and 16% had access 1-6 days of the week. The remaining 69% had no access.

- Many reported the cost of car ownership and repairs resulted in foregoing the purchase of other necessities, including food and healthcare.

Latinos are more likely than their peers to depend on public transit or other drivers to get to jobs, doctor appointments, etc., all while facing unreliable rides and longer commutes.

- Among urban residents, 27% of Latinos use public transit daily or weekly, compared to 14% of non-Latino Whites. Foreign-born urban residents are more likely to regularly use public transportation than are native-born urban dwellers (38% vs 18%).
- Latinos without cars often reported another person's car as their primary mode of transport.
- In Springfield, Mass., 25% of Latinos report another person's car as their primary means of transit, often bargaining goods, services, or money for rides from neighbors, relatives, and friends, according to a survey. Most participants reported being late to work and appointments because of these unstable arrangements, and agreed with the statement, "if public transportation was better, I would drive and/or be driven less."
- When Latinos had the option to drive or get a ride, they take it over public transit due to limited access to jobs or unpleasant or unsafe experiences on public transit, according to two studies.
- Latinos spend 26.9 minutes on average to commute to work, a longer time than their White peers (25.1 minutes), according to national data.

Latinos face cost and reliability challenges using public transit, which impacts health.

- For a trip that takes 20 minutes by car, some people reported leaving up to two hours early to be sure they arrived to work on time, due to unreliability of mass transit, according to a study.
- Others reported that many transit routes:
 - were suspended without notice;
 - did not get them where they needed to go (to the daycare to pick up their kids, to suburban office parks or industrial complexes for their jobs, etc.);
 - did not run at the needed times (after hours for community college night classes, etc.);
 - ran only once per hour or less; and
 - endangered their safety (in the context of crime reduction near public transit and pedestrian and bicyclist injury, etc.).
- For the lowest-income transit riders, balancing a household budget with transit costs can add significant stress and reduce spending on food, education, and healthcare.

Efforts to improve transportation inequities face many barriers.

- Environmental, economic, and social equity goals often compete for attention from policymakers in transportation-planning decision making.
- The current environment of tight city budgets limits agencies' ability to expand services and enhance connections between jobs and households.
- Often, transportation planning decisions at all levels place a stronger focus on reducing traffic congestion than improving equity.
- Several studies indicate Latinos desire public investment in safe sidewalks to normalize walking, and greenways as safe routes to school and safe routes to public transportation, which contribute to social cohesion in neighborhoods.
- Fear of displacement, gentrification, and loss of culture is real and has often delayed sustainable transport projects in Latino communities.

The Evidence: Effective Ways to Boost Transportation Equity

Cities and transportation authorities are using these methods to make public transportation more accessible, affordable, and reliable to improve Latino quality of life.

- Establish frequent public transit routes with after-hours service where the highest proportions of low-income individuals reside.
 - Minneapolis City Council passed a capital spending resolution for street maintenance and safety improvements with a mandate to advance equity; 40% of projects funded through 2022 are in areas of concentrated poverty, which account for 23% of city streets.
- Perform community surveys and spatial analyses to establish public transport routes to shorten commutes between neighborhoods and jobs for low-income Latinos.
 - In San Francisco, to prevent and mitigate displacement in the Bay Area, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission commissioned researchers at UC Berkeley to develop the “Regional Early Warning System for Displacement.”
- Assess transport affordability for low-income groups and establish reasonable prices as a percent of monthly income. Establish transit fare payment options that spread periodic lump-sum costs over time, and conversion of daily payments into monthly passes.
 - In the Alameda-Contra Costa transit district in California, cash fares automatically convert into day passes when using a regional Clipper fare card. Day passes then automatically convert into monthly passes, which saves users money in the long run and, for low-income riders, eliminates the need to pay for a monthly pass up front.
- Increase public awareness of public and nonprofit transportation cost-assistance programs (and spread information in English and Spanish in grocery stores, schools, and ads).
 - Planning for Minnesota’s Gold Line Bus Rapid Transit lanes include materials in Spanish.
- Support the informal transportation networks that exist in low-income communities, such as carpooling organized by employers.
 - For workers at Virginia Hospital Center in Arlington, heat map technology called Modeify plans optimal commutes in hopes of saving people time and money—while increasing use of multimodal transportation options that are good for health and the environment.
- Consider public input on transportation improvement initiatives.
 - During the 2018 midterm election, U.S. voters passed 80% of public transportation ballot measures. For example, Broward County, Florida, voters approved a 1-cent sales tax increase for 30 years to pay for electric buses, light rail, bike lanes, sidewalks, etc.

Latino community engagement can spur transportation improvements.

- Forms of engagement that have proven successful in Latino communities include: use of “cultural brokers” that connect grassroots advocates and governance groups to ensure community needs are met; ongoing meetings at a regular time and place; distributing informational flyers; door-to-door engagement; making presentations at churches, small businesses or other community-based institutions; training on specific issues of interest; and social media engagement.
- In the Figueroa district of Los Angeles, Nancy Ibrahim, who worked as a “cultural broker” for local residents, said the 8-lane Figueroa Street corridor was zoned and developed for “affluent, transient students” to drive through in their cars, not for the families who live nearby and get around “by public transportation, by bicycle and by foot.” Ibrahim helped push a plan through city council to dedicate three of Figueroa’s eight traffic lanes for protected bike lanes, bump-out bus platforms, and a dedicated bus lane, the idea of which stemmed from a community open house in which residents asked the city to dramatically improve local transit, biking, and walking accessibility. Two powerful local Latino business people joined over 60 locals, mobilized by the Los Angeles County Bicycle Coalition, to testify at city council to support the plan. As Ibrahim said: “It is so important that community residents have a say ... the new Figueroa is putting in a new level of accessibility and connectivity to working folks, including working poor folks, who contribute profoundly to what’s best about this neighborhood.”
- The Ticket to Opportunity initiative, organized by IndyCAN, a multiracial, nonpartisan organization in central Indiana, sought to mitigate the effects of inadequate transit as a barrier to employment opportunities. The campaign aimed to pass a regional transit expansion referendum to triple bus service in Indianapolis, fuel economic development, and increase job access threefold for low-income communities. Importantly, Ticket to Opportunity created dialogue with 80,000

marginalized voters of color and partnered them with faith-based organizations, businesses, government, and community leaders to build sustained capacity for achieving transit equity.

Latinos benefit from transport-oriented development in their neighborhoods that increases affordable housing near public transport.

- Transit-oriented development is a model for neighborhood revitalization that is “walkable, dense, compact, mixed-use development in close proximity to high-quality transit” with these goals:
 - Increase “location efficiency” so people can walk, bike, and then take public transit;
 - Boost transit ridership and minimize traffic;
 - Provide a rich mix of housing, shopping, and transportation choices;
 - Generate revenue for the public and private sectors and provide value for both new and existing residents; and
 - Create a sense of place.
- Making neighborhoods connected with complete sidewalks for transportation and social interaction, and limiting vacant space, are important neighborhood characteristics to Latinos.

Policy and Practice Implications

Ensure public transport routes in all communities are accessible, sufficient, reliable, provide transport outside of regular work hours, and access locations where Latinos work, such as suburban office parks and industrial centers:

- Increase the number of transit routes and frequency of routes where the highest proportions of low-income individuals reside.
- Invest in late-night transit service.
- Conduct community surveys and spatial analyses to establish public transport routes to shorten commutes between neighborhoods and jobs for low-income Latinos.
- Determine true transport affordability for low-income Latinos by region and establish reasonable prices as a percent of monthly income.
- Provide payment options that spread periodic lump-sum costs over time.
- Increase public awareness of transportation cost assistance offered by both public agencies and nonprofit organizations.
- Provide better support for the informal transportation networks that exist in Latino communities.

To address the transportation needs of Latino families:

- Construct affordable housing close to public transportation, ideally through transport-oriented development projects that limit displacement in Latino neighborhoods.
- Strive to provide complete streets with walkable sidewalks, full shoulders, protected bike lanes, transit access, and interconnected networks to be used for transport and for social cohesion.
- Increase access to non-street dependent forms of transport, such as greenways and trails. These could be used as safe routes to school and as safe routes to work and/or public transport.
- When developing sustainable transportation and transit-oriented development, solicit community feedback to gain resident support to limit fear of displacement and gentrification.
 - Employ use of a “cultural broker,” a local resident with access to community members, grassroots groups, and official decision-makers, and who can mediate agreements and ensure community needs are met and development occurs within neighborhood context.
 - Bring residents together with ongoing, regular meetings at churches, community centers, or prominent local businesses.
 - Distribute flyers and hold trainings to educate the community on specific issues of interest such as transportation options, tenant rights, affordable housing in the area, etc.