

The State of Transit Equity: Metro Chicago

Public transportation can offer a “ladder of opportunity,” providing affordable and convenient connections to jobs, goods and services, medical care, and other essentials of daily life. But pervasive racism and discrimination in land use, transportation, and transit planning have resulted in wide gaps in transit access across race, income, and other characteristics, worsening social inequity.

The Chicago region is no exception. TransitCenter’s Equity Dashboard analyzes transit and population data for the region since February 2020. Due to segregation in both land use and transportation:

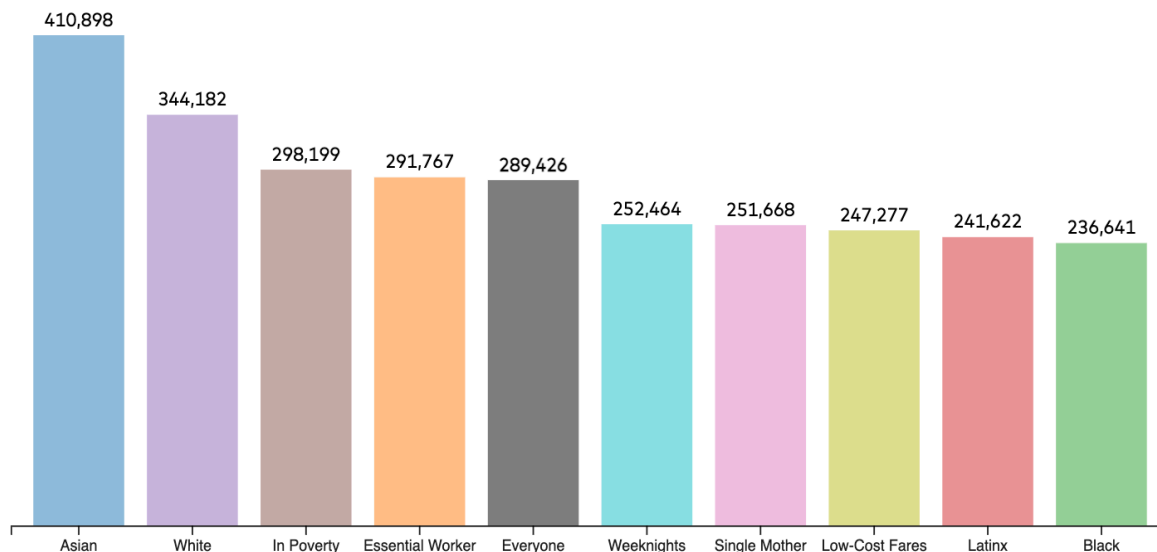
- Transit provides less access to opportunities for Black and Latinx residents than to white residents, and is scarce for many.
- Transportation and development patterns create longer transit trips to healthcare and education.
- Expensive fares put opportunity out of reach for some riders.

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The public transit network in the Chicago region provides different amounts of access to people of different races. **The average Black resident can access 236,641 potential jobs in 45 minutes using transit, and the average Latinx resident can access 241,622 jobs, compared to 344,182 for the average white resident.** In 2019, 19% of Black residents took transit to work, compared to 11% of white residents—and during the COVID-19 pandemic, BIPOC workers were far more likely than white workers to continue to travel to and from work.

There is also a need to significantly improve access for most riders. In the Chicago region, the average resident can reach 2,091,175 jobs in 45 minutes using a car -- more than 7 times the average level of job access on transit. While transit does not have to provide as much access as a private vehicle to meet people’s needs, it should be reasonably competitive. Transit falls short of providing this level of access for most riders, including most BIPOC residents and residents living in poverty.

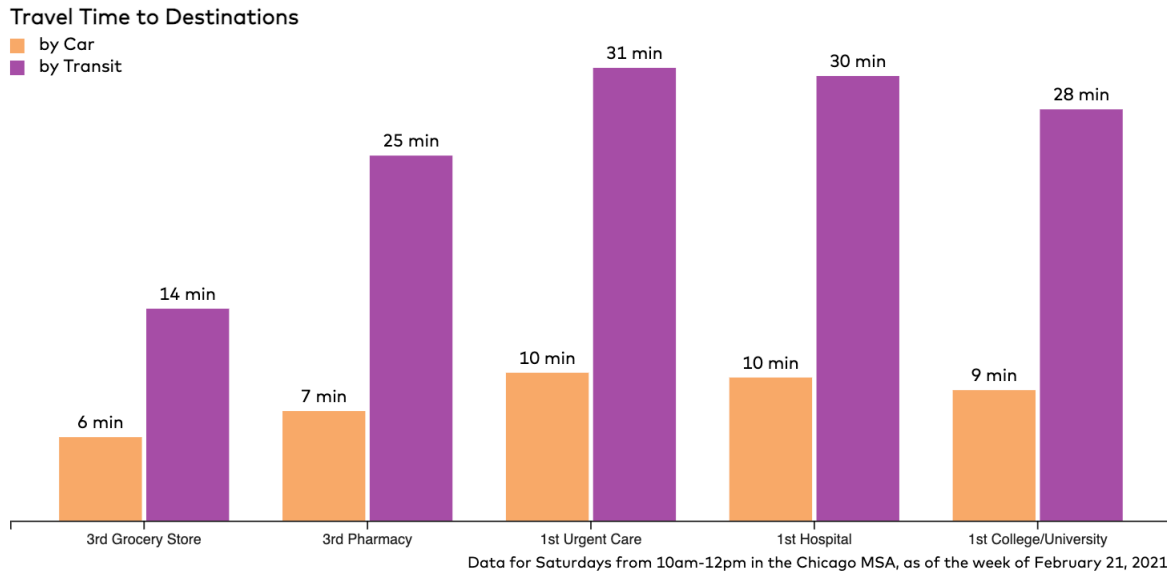
Jobs Accessible in 45 min by Transit



Data for travel in the Urban Core of Chicago on weekdays from 7am-9am (except if noted weeknights 10pm-12am) as of the week of February 21, 2021.

Transportation and development patterns create longer transit trips to healthcare and education

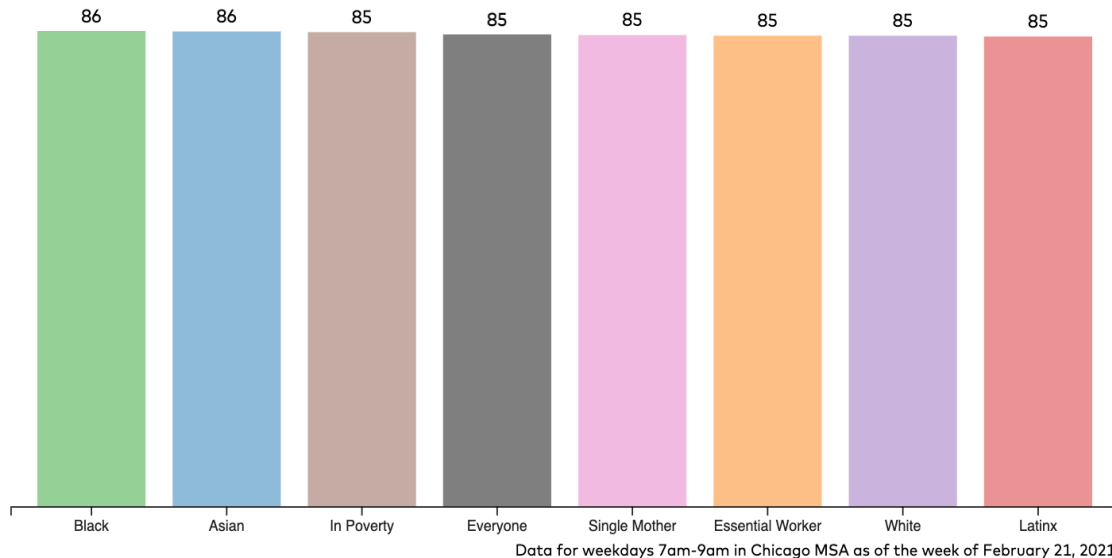
Equitable transit provides access to all of life’s necessities. But for many poor residents, the current transit system falls short. **On a weekend morning, it takes three times longer to reach the closest hospital using transit than using a car**, and more than three times longer to reach the closest college or university. (In the chart below, we measure time to the third-closest grocery store and pharmacy to show how effectively transit connects people to a variety of options.)



Expensive fares put opportunity out of reach for some riders

Chicago’s transit network includes modes with premium fares, like the Metra commuter rail. These modes are the fastest for some trips, but are prohibitively expensive for some riders (especially when cost to transfer to other modes is factored in). For example, the average Latinx resident in the Chicago region can access 139,382 jobs in 45 minutes using transit, but **only 85% as many jobs using transit that costs less than \$4 for a one-way trip.**

Jobs accessible by low-cost transit trips as percent of all accessible jobs



Leaders in the Chicago area can address these disparities through more equitable transit, land use, and planning

Addressing disparities in transit requires the use of an equity lens in planning, service improvements that increase access for marginalized people, and development policies that allow more people of all races and incomes to live near good transit.

Groups working in the Chicago region have called for several improvements which could lead to more equitable transit access, including:

- **Street design changes to speed up CTA bus service across Chicago**
- **Making Metra commuter rail more affordable, with more service throughout the day**
- **Developing areas around CTA rail stations as centers for community activities and affordable housing**

Transit leaders should also develop an equity strategy with clearly defined principles and goals, conduct public engagement that garners representative input, and create internal working groups and external advisory groups focused on advancing equity throughout the transit agency.

Want to learn more?

TransitCenter's Equity Dashboard measures how well transit networks in seven U.S. cities connect people who've been marginalized within those metro areas to the jobs, services, and amenities they need to thrive. The Dashboard contains additional resources, including interactive maps of access to opportunity, analysis of how access has changed starting in February 2020, and downloadable data. View it at dashboard.transitcenter.org.

