

# The State of Transit Equity: Metro Washington, DC

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 Washington, DC, 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:

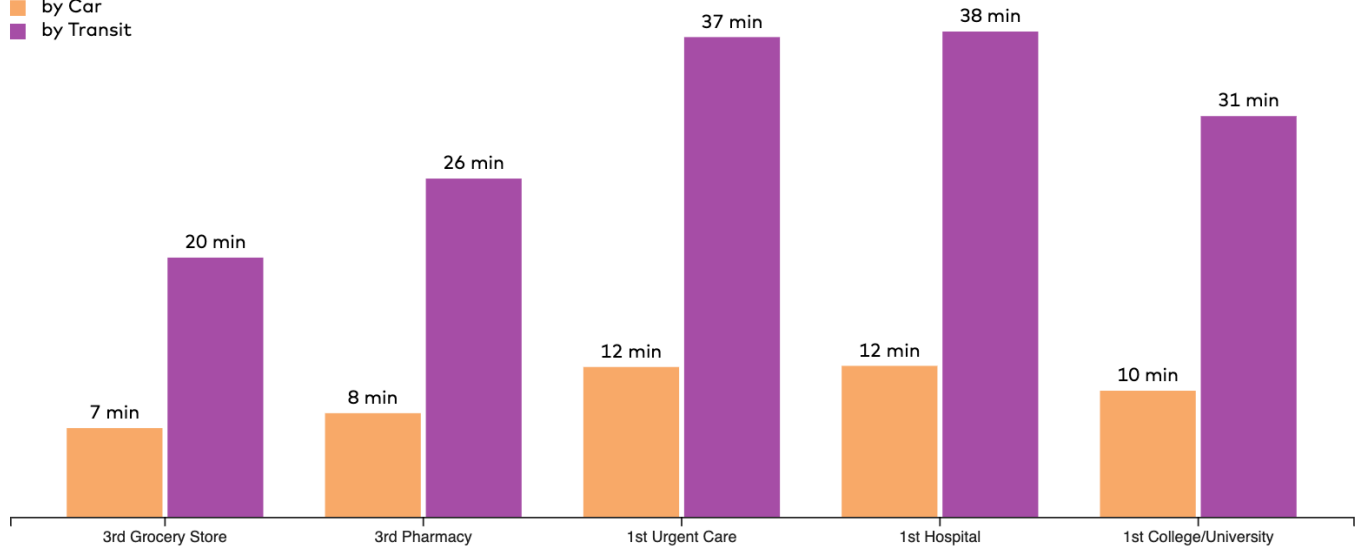
- **Transportation and development patterns create longer transit trips to healthcare, food, and education.**
- **Most residents have poor transit access to hospitals.**
- **Transit provides less access to opportunities for BIPOC residents than to white residents, and is scarce for many.**

## Transportation and development patterns create longer transit trips to healthcare, food, 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 more than three times longer to reach the closest hospital using transit than using a car, more than three times longer to reach the closest college or university, and nearly three times longer to reach the third-nearest grocery store or pharmacy to show how effectively transit connects people to a variety of options.)

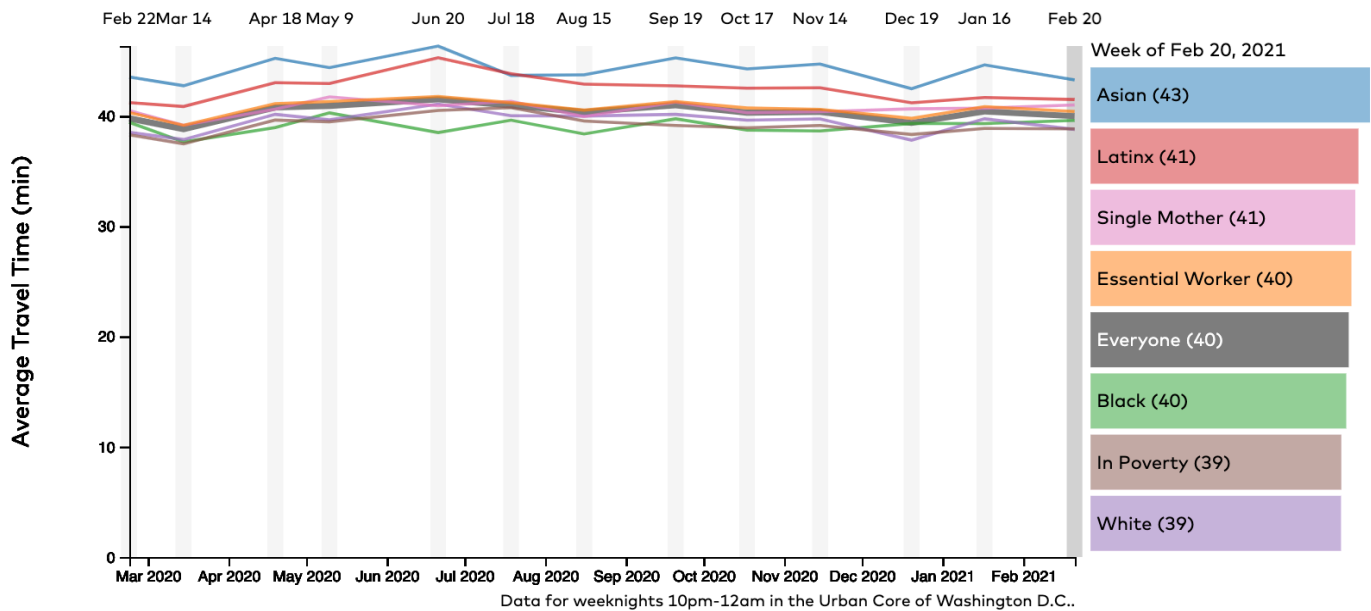
Travel Time to Destinations

by Car  
by Transit



## Most residents have poor transit access to hospitals

On a weekday evening, it takes 40 minutes for the average resident of the Washington D.C., region to take transit to the nearest hospital, and even longer for the average Asian and Latinx resident. This is a longer average travel time than in any of the other six regions we analyzed. Poor access to healthcare is associated with worse health outcomes; it also means long transit commutes for essential healthcare workers working second- and third-shift roles.

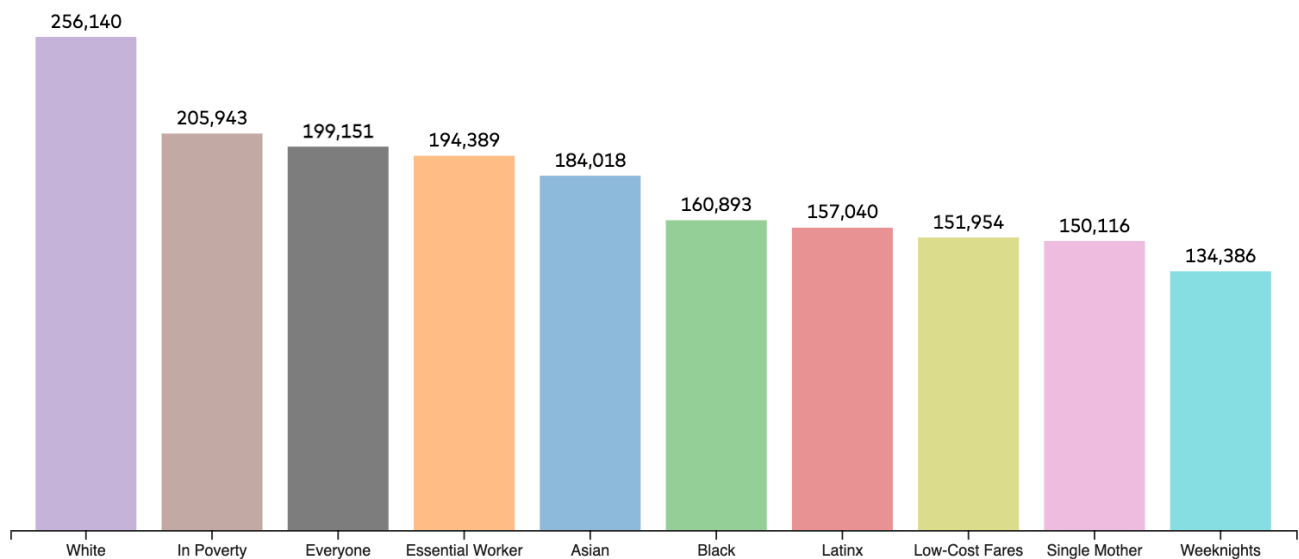


## Transit provides less access to opportunities for BIPOC residents than for white residents, and is scarce for many

The public transit network in the Washington region provides different amounts of access to people of different races. The average Black resident can access 160,893 potential jobs in 45 minutes using transit, the average Latinx resident can access 157,040 jobs, and the average Asian resident 184,018 jobs -- compared to 256,140 for the average white resident. In 2019, 18% of Black residents took transit to work, compared to 12% 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 a need to significantly improve access for most riders. In the Washington region, the average resident can reach 1,931,451 jobs in 45 minutes using a car -- nearly 10 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 Washington D.C. on weekdays from 7am-9am (except if noted weeknights 10pm-12am) as of the week of February 21, 2021.

## Leaders in the Washington, DC 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 Washington region have called for several improvements that could lead to more equitable transit access, including:

- **Redesigning bus networks in Washington, Northern Virginia, and Maryland to expand access to jobs.**
- **Operating transit more frequently throughout the day, in order to better meet the needs of essential workers.**
- **Dedicated transitways to make bus and streetcar service faster and more reliable, both within Washington and throughout the region.**

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](https://dashboard.transitcenter.org).