

The State of Transit Equity: Metro New York

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 New York City/Northern New Jersey 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:

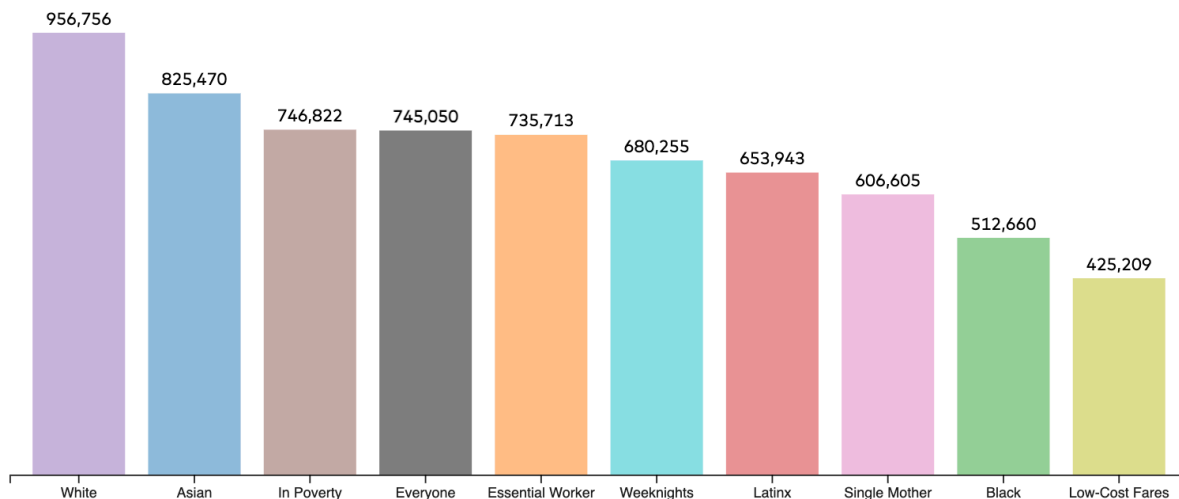
- Transit provides less access to opportunities for BIPOC residents than for white residents, and is scarce for many.
- Expensive fares put opportunity out of reach for some riders.
- Transportation and development patterns create longer transit trips to healthcare.

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

Public transit in the New York region provides far more access than in any other region in the U.S. But it provides different amounts of access to people of different races. **The average Black resident can access 512,660 potential jobs in 45 minutes using transit, the average Latinx resident can access 653,943 jobs, and the average Asian resident 825,470 jobs -- compared to 956,756 for the average white resident.** In 2019, 44% of Black residents, 39% of Asian residents, and 36% of Latinx residents took transit to work — compared to 24% 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 many riders. **In the New York region, the average resident can reach 3,836,451 jobs in 45 minutes using a car -- more than 5 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 many riders, including most BIPOC residents and residents living in poverty.

Jobs Accessible in 45 min by Transit

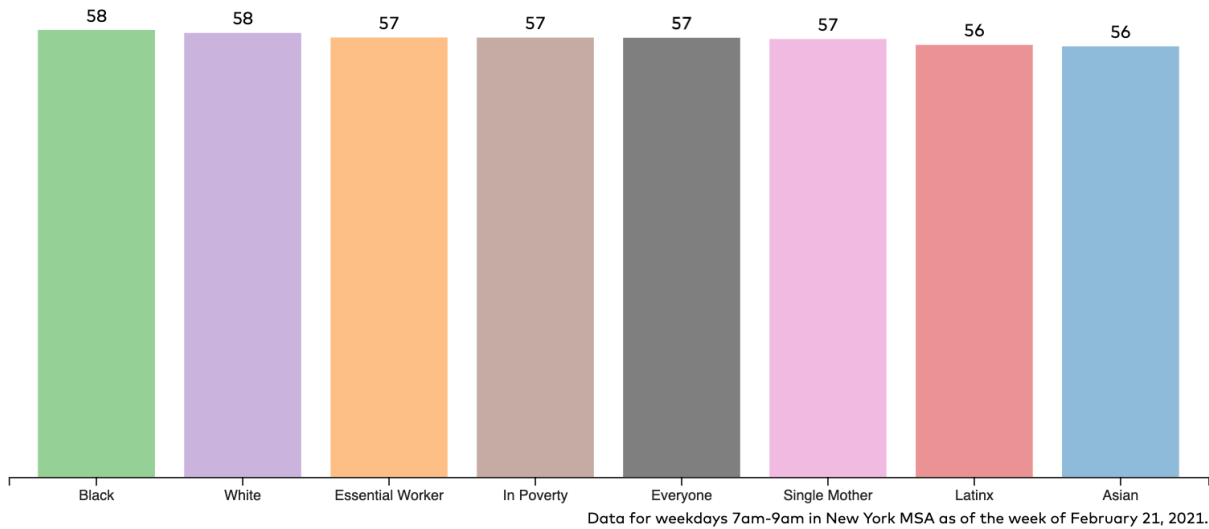


Data for travel in the Urban Core of New York on weekdays from 7am-9am (except if noted weeknights 10pm-12am) as of the week of February 21, 2021.

Expensive fares put opportunity out of reach for some riders

The region's transit network includes several modes with premium fares, like Metro-North, Long Island Rail Road, and NJ Transit 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 Black resident in the New York region can access 434,653 potential jobs in 45 minutes using transit, but **only 58% as many jobs using transit** that costs less than \$5 for a one-way trip.

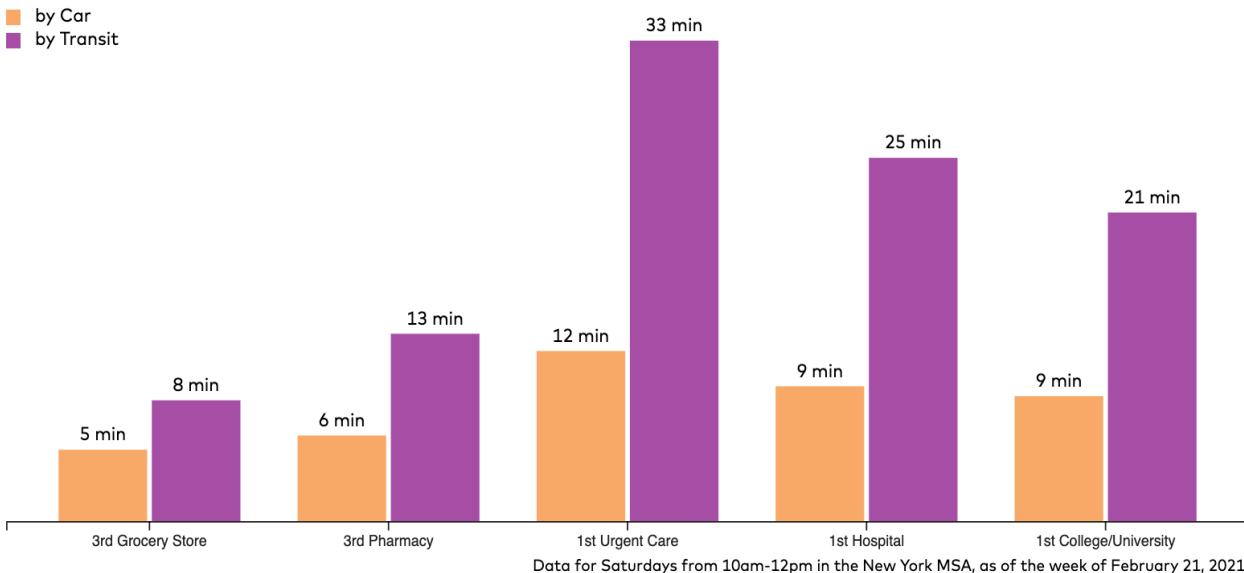
Jobs accessible by low-cost transit trips as percent of all accessible jobs



Transportation and development patterns create longer transit trips to healthcare

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 nearly three times as long to reach the closest hospital using transit compared to a car. (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.)

Travel Time to Destinations



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

- **Lowering fares, running more frequent service, and adding additional stops to regional commuter rail networks so they are better oriented toward poor riders.**
- **Redesigning bus networks in New York City, Westchester County, and Northern New Jersey to expand access to jobs.**
- **Adding busways and bus-only lanes to speed up transit in New York City, Newark, and other congested areas.**

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.

