

The State of Transit Equity: Metro Philadelphia

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.

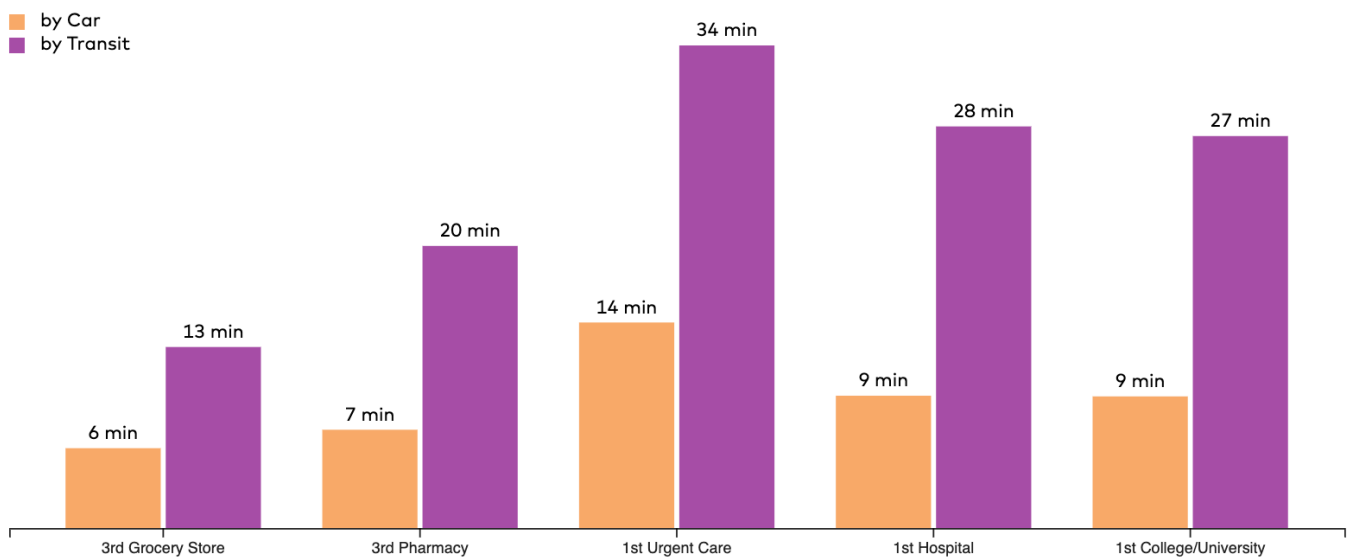
The Philadelphia region is no exception. TransitCenter’s Equity Dashboard analyzes transit and population data for the region since February 2020. Due to segregation in both land use and transportation:

- Transportation and development patterns create longer transit trips to healthcare and education.
- Expensive fares put opportunity out of reach for some riders.
- BIPOC residents are more likely to commute on transit, but job access via transit is far worse than job access via car.

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 more than three times longer to reach the closest hospital using transit than using a car**, and 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.)

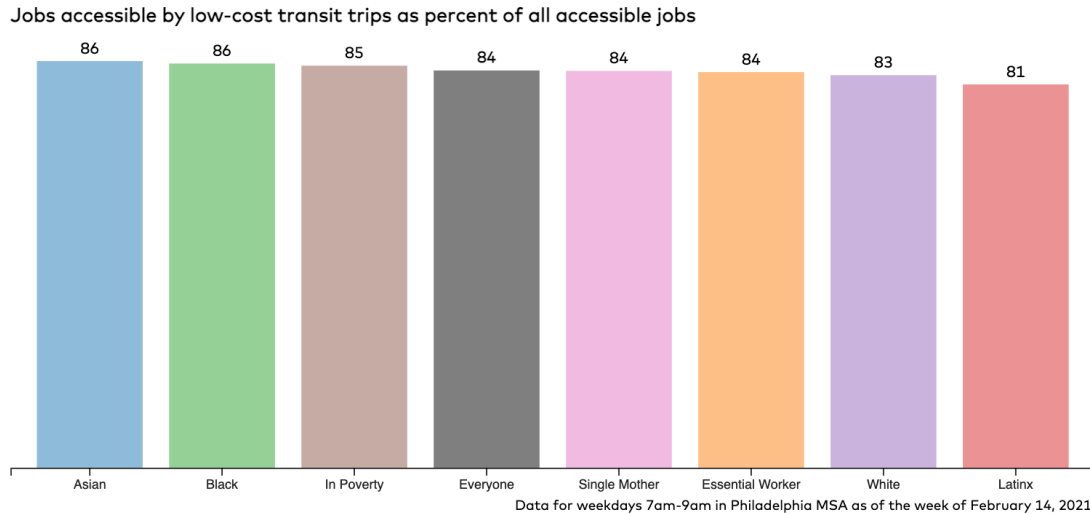
Travel Time to Destinations



Data for Saturdays from 10am-12pm in the Philadelphia MSA, as of the week of February 14, 2021.

Expensive fares put opportunity out of reach for some riders

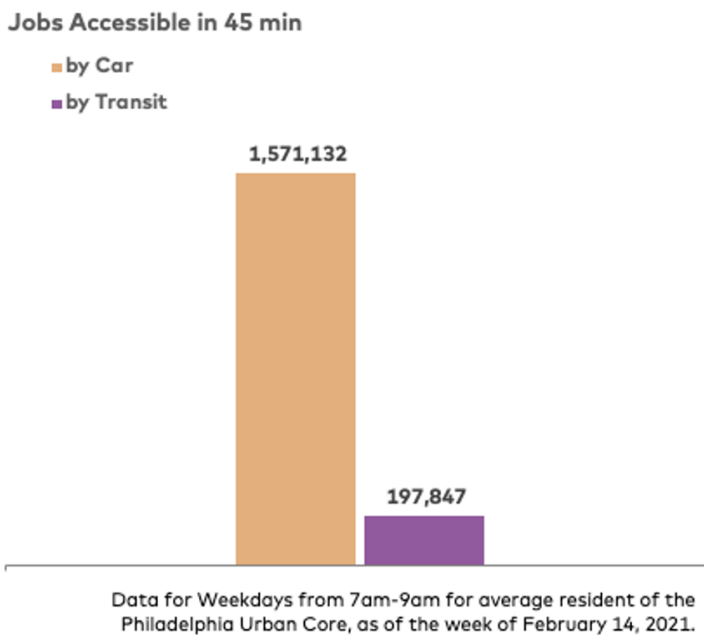
Philadelphia's transit network includes several modes with premium fares, like SEPTA and NJ Transit commuter rail. These modes are the fastest for some trips, but are prohibitively expensive for some riders (especially when cost to transfer to other modes is factored in). For example, the average Latinx resident of the Greater Philadelphia region can access 145,979 potential jobs in 45 minutes using transit, but only 81% as many jobs using transit that costs less than \$4 for a one-way trip.



BIPOC residents are more likely to commute on transit, but job access via transit is far worse than job access via car

In 2019, 21% of Black residents took transit to work, as did 10% of Asian and Latinx residents -- compared to only 6% of white residents. 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 Philadelphia region, the average resident can reach 1,571,132 jobs in 45 minutes using a car -- nearly 8 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 the average rider, including most BIPOC residents and residents living in poverty.



Leaders in the Philadelphia area can address these 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 Philadelphia region have called for several improvements which could lead to more equitable transit access, including:

- **Street design changes to speed up SEPTA bus service, and modernizing SEPTA's trolley network to achieve higher speeds and full ADA compliance.**
- **Redesigning SEPTA's bus network to expand access to jobs.**
- **Making SEPTA regional rail more affordable and running more service throughout the day.**

Transit leaders should also develop an equity strategy with clearly defined principles and goals, use public engagement that garner 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.

