

Chicago



From Harvey to Belmont Cragin to the Gold Coast, all Chicagoans deserve affordable, reliable access to the places they need to go.

Chicagoland’s expansive public transit system—along with Metra Rail, Pace Bus, and the Regional Transportation Authority—has the potential to provide this access.

Today, most Chicagoans can ride public transit to reach hundreds of thousands of destinations.

35
minute commute

20
minute trip from the supermarket

40
minute trip home



But access to opportunities by public transit is rife with inequities across race and place. White Chicagoans can reach 825,000 jobs in an hour—compared to about 690,000 for people of color.

Access to opportunities is a result of residential patterns, development, and transportation. Even if they aren't responsible for residential segregation or uneven economic development...

...Chicago transit agencies can ameliorate inequities in access by boosting connections from the South and West sides to job centers.

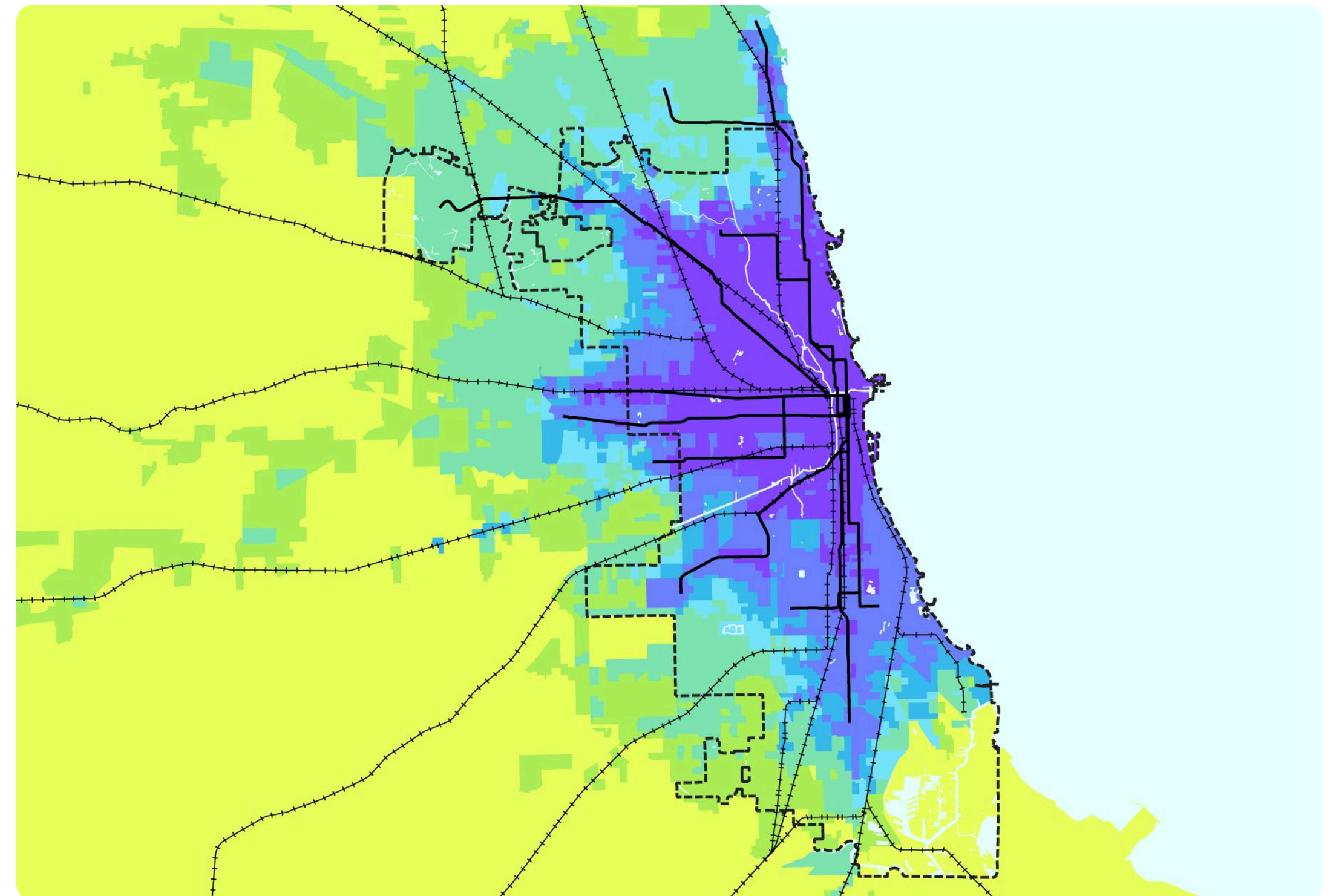


Jobs accessible in 60 minutes by public transit for Chicagoland residents

★ Map Insight

People living north of the Loop, who tend to be white, can reach more jobs than people living to the south or west, who are mostly people of color. This pattern extends into the suburbs.

- Map Key**
- 1M or more jobs
 - 750K to 1M
 - 500K to 750K
 - 250K to 500K
 - 100K to 250K
 - 50 to 100K
 - 1 to 50K jobs
 - Chicago border



Transit agencies control when service runs and how much a ride costs, which also affect access.

In Chicagoland, people who can only spend a few dollars on fares have less access overall by transit, and they likely cannot afford to drive or call an Uber either.

Rush-hour transit riders have higher job access than late-evening or weekend riders. However, many 9-5 workers commute less often now, while most second—and third-shift workers still work in person.

Recently, Metra lowered fares for many trips, launched a reduced fare pilot (with RTA and Cook County), and added trips throughout the week—making its service more accessible and equitable.

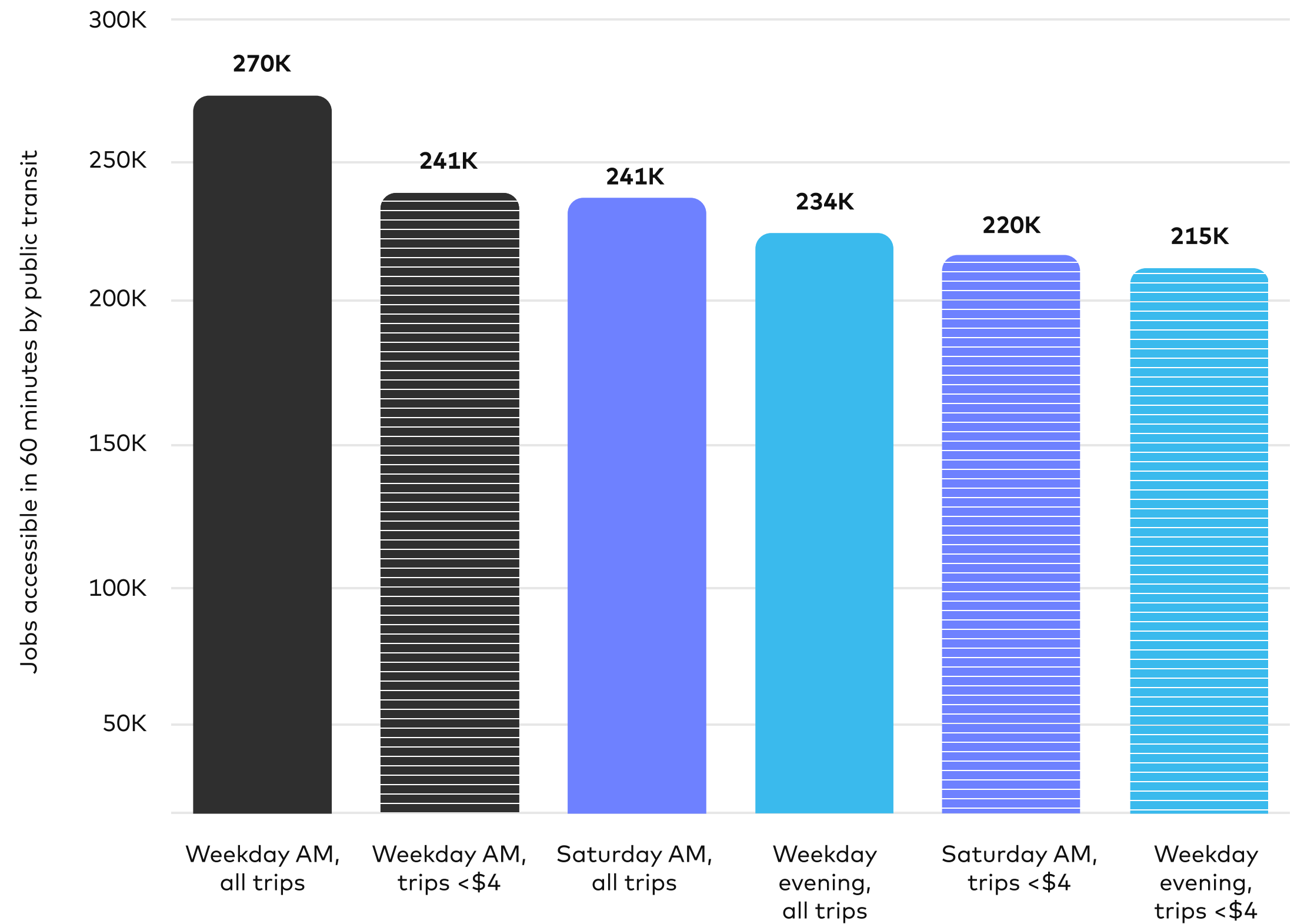
Expanding fare reduction policies and round-the-clock frequency on Metra, Pace, and CTA would shrink disparities in access. Realistically, transit agencies need more operations funding to implement such improvements on a large scale.



Jobs accessible in 60 minutes by public transit for Chicagoland residents

★ Chart Insight

Rush hour transit riders who can pay any fare can reach 25% more potential jobs than if they traveled in the late evening on a budget of \$4 (Most Metra rail and express Pace bus trips cost over \$4).



Chicago’s public transit agencies face twin operational crises aggravated by COVID-19—a labor shortage and an operational budget deficit. These impact how much service they can run and ultimately, Chicagoans’ access by public transit.

In March 2024, the average Chicagoland resident could access about 270,000 jobs by a 60-minute transit trip—10% less than in February 2020.

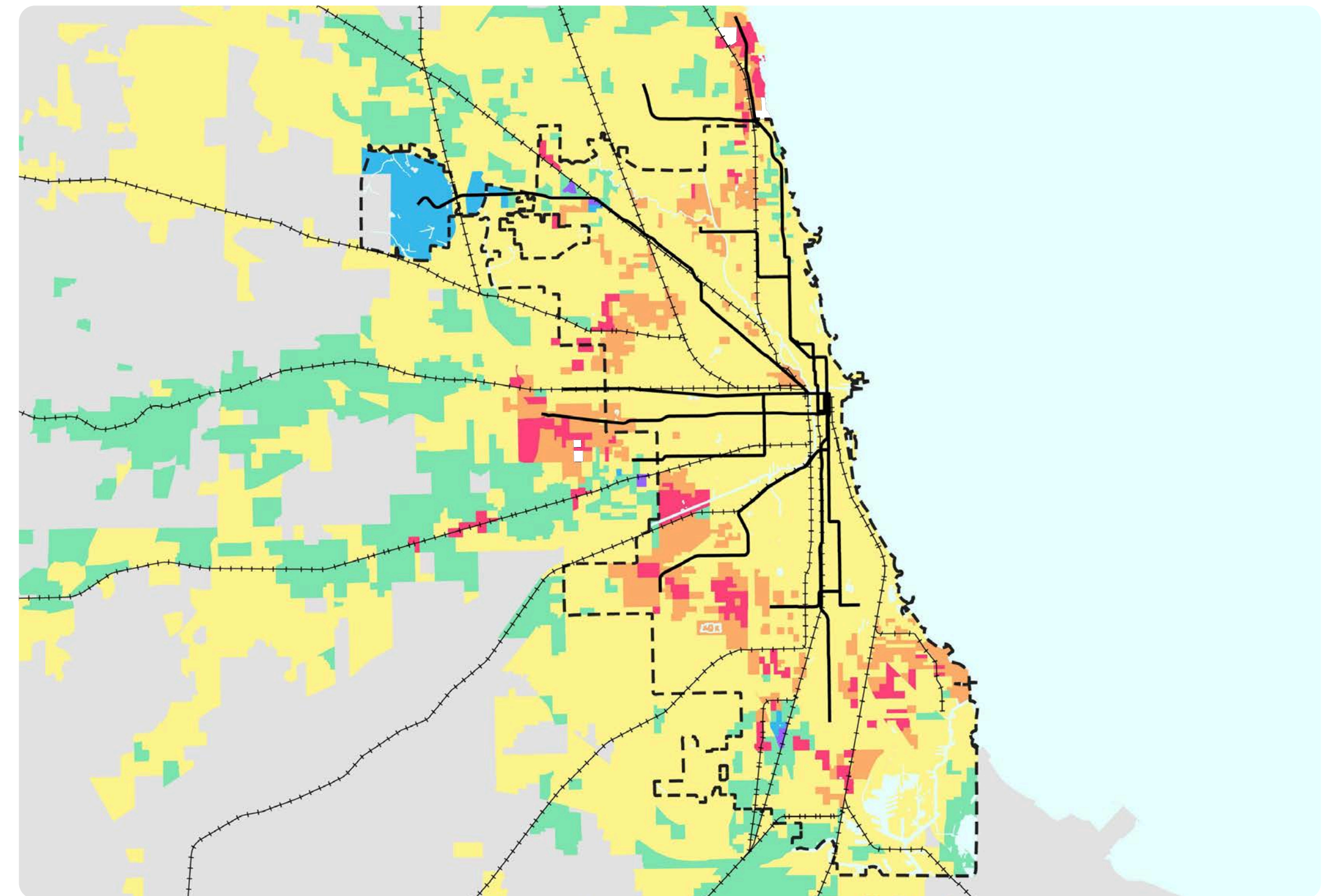
95% of Chicago residents now have access to fewer jobs by public transit than in February 2020.

Change in jobs accessible in 60 minutes by public transit for Chicagoland residents, Feb. 2020-March 2024

★ Map Insight

The loss of access is dramatic in some neighborhoods. Many on Chicago’s Southwest Side have lost access to more than 250,000 potential jobs.

- Map Key**
- +250K jobs or more
 - +100K to +250K
 - +1 to +100K
 - No change
 - -1 to -100K
 - -100K to -250K
 - -250K jobs or fewer
 - Chicago border



The CTA has struggled to provide service reliably since COVID-19. 95% of Chicago residents now have access to fewer jobs by public transit than in February 2020.



Since March 2020, the CTA has toggled between unexpectedly canceling scheduled service and formally scheduling less service.

Riders faced a double whammy: less reliable access to fewer destinations.

The CTA's persistent trouble has raised questions about its leadership, heightened safety concerns, and depressed public confidence in public transit.

The CTA needs to rebuild its workforce to reliably provide pre-COVID levels of service. It should also be honest about challenges and how it's addressing them to restore rider confidence.



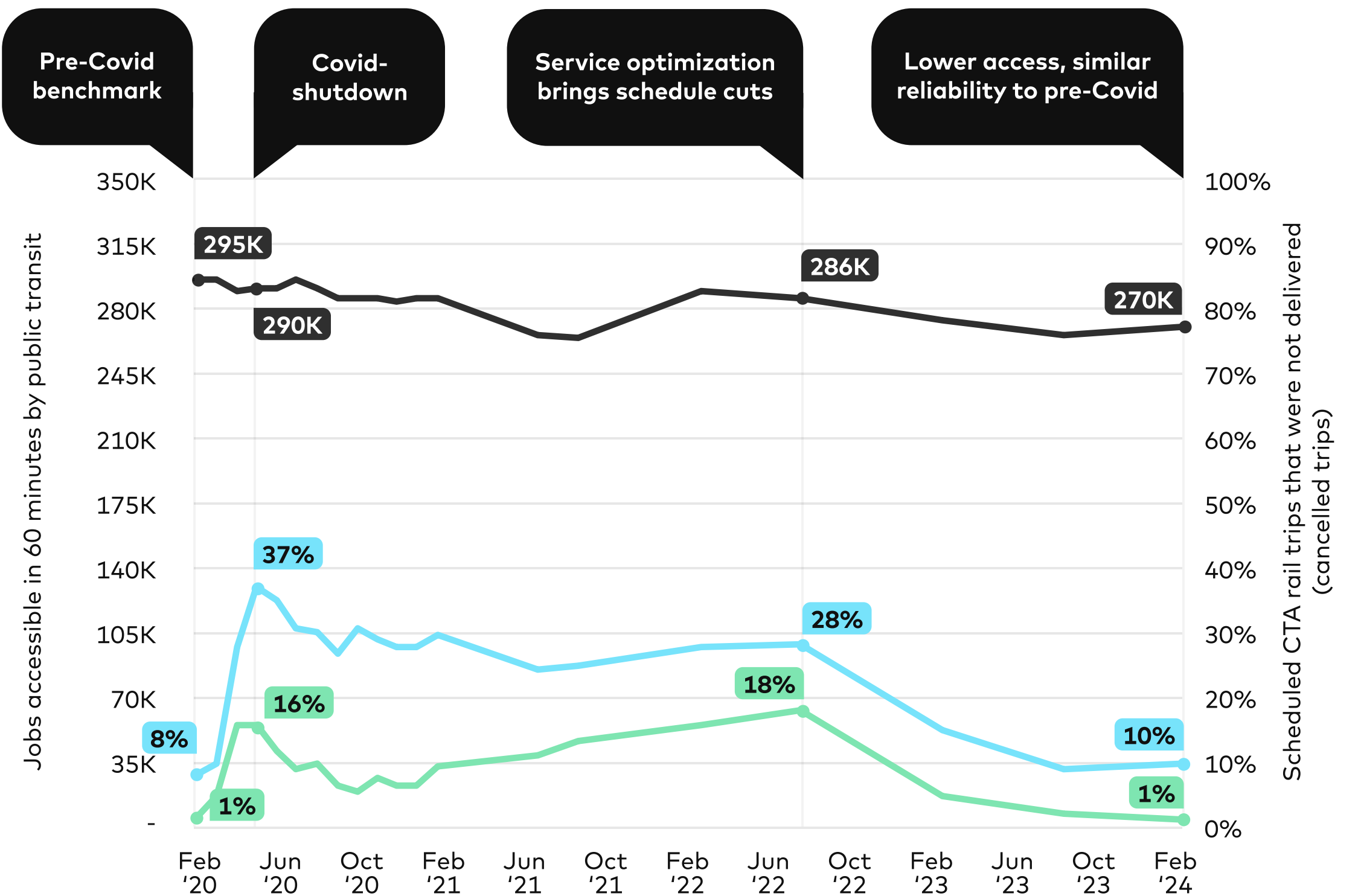
Jobs accessible in 60 minutes by public transit for Chicagoland residents vs. CTA trip cancellations

★ Chart Insight

The dashboard data show that access to opportunity and trip cancellations trend together. The CTA scheduled more service than it could reliably deliver with its shrunken workforce, forcing cancellations when no operators were available.

Chart Key

- Jobs access in 60 minutes
- Canceled CTA rail trips
- Canceled CTA bus trips



Access data from TransitCenter based on transit schedules for weekday mornings; Trip cancellation data from CTA

"Before the pandemic we trusted the buses. Schedules were very [accurate] but now [we] would not trust it for appointments. We got a car due to my husband's job."

Anonymous
Chicago public transit rider



"Seniors shouldn't have to make two transfers and ride three buses that are consistently unreliable to get their prescriptions."

Robert
Chicago public transit rider



Public transit in Chicago is limited and vulnerable to crisis because state and local officials have repeatedly chosen to invest money and devote street space to highways and parking, not public transit.

These decisions have made driving magnitudes faster than public transit, even though it's more expensive, dangerous, and polluting.

In Chicago, convenient, affordable access shouldn't hinge on your ability to drive a car or where you live.

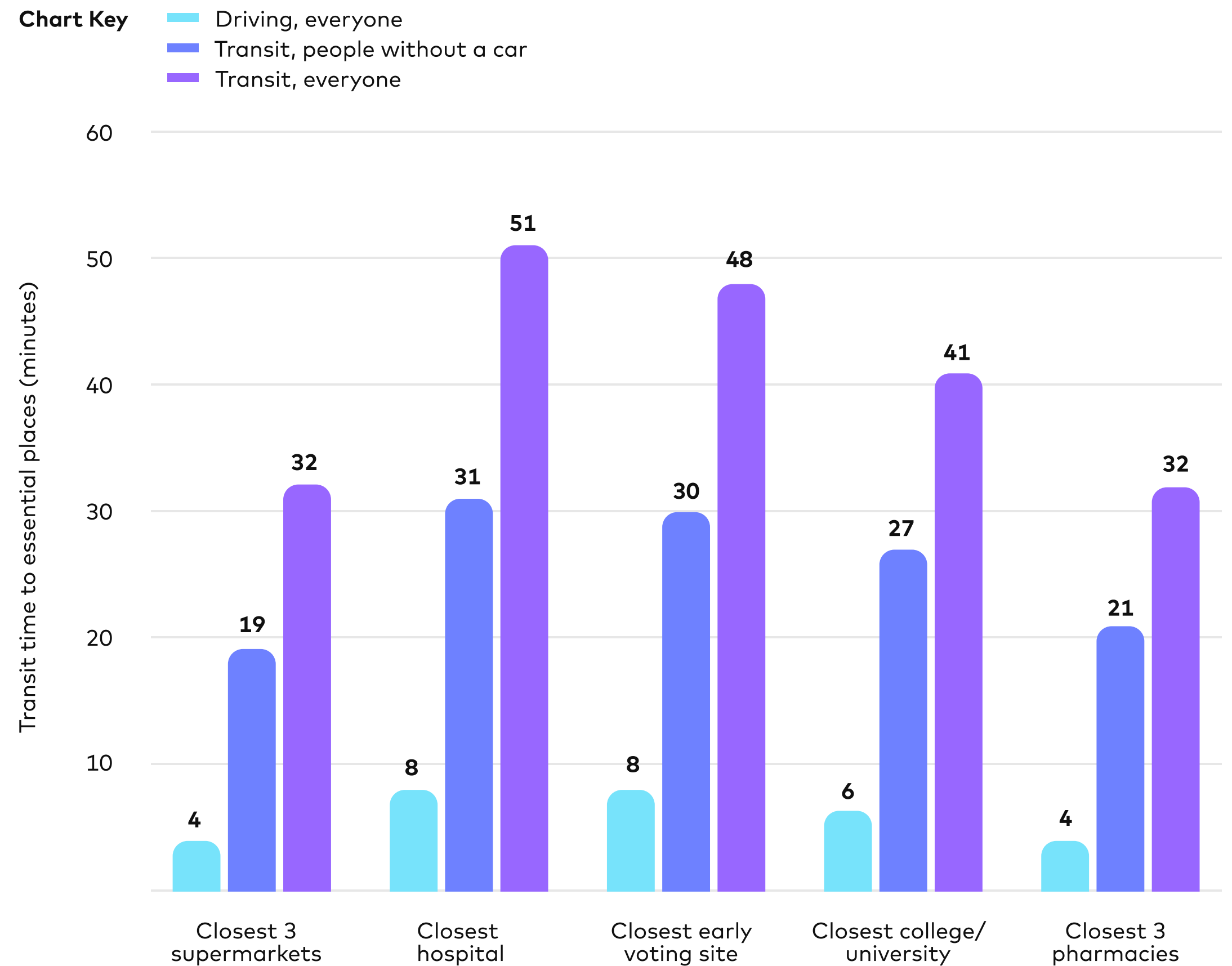
To make this a reality, public transit leaders must address operational challenges. Government officials in Illinois must invest in public transit by securing new revenue, shifting funding away from highways, and prioritizing transit on city streets.



Transit vs. driving time to essential places for Chicagoland residents

★ Chart Insight

For people who don't own a car, typically rely on public transit, and live near it, public transit is 3-5 times longer to reach essential places than driving. Regionwide, key destinations take 6-8 times longer to reach by transit than driving.



Access data from TransitCenter based on transit schedules for weekday mornings for March 2024

About this analysis

The access to opportunity data used in this analysis comes from TransitCenter's Transportation Equity Dashboard (TED). Data are based on changes to transit agency schedules and fare policy, where people live (data from 2017-2021 American Community Survey), where jobs are (data from 2021 LEHD), and where other essential places are (based on open-source geospatial data).

Because the TED access to opportunity data is based on transit schedules, it does not factor in reliability issues or on-time performance. Time periods are: weekday mornings from 7-9am; weekday evenings from 9-11pm; and Saturday mornings from 10-12am. The "region" described in this analysis is the Census-defined urbanized area.

Visit

To explore more access to opportunity data, visit the Transportation Equity Dashboard at www.dashboard.transitcenter.org. For more information on the methods used to generate the access to opportunity data, visit the TED About page.

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TransitCenter

TransitCenter is a foundation that works to secure a more just and sustainable future with abundant public transportation options. We recognize that our current transportation system is contributing to climate change, that transit systems poorly serve many of their riders, and that access to opportunity in the U.S. is deeply inequitable because of unjust, historical barriers based on race, gender, culture, and identity.

We believe that targeted research and effective grassroots advocacy can persuade leaders to make better choices that center both climate and justice outcomes in transportation. We make grants, conduct research, and coordinate a national network of local advocates to build a successful movement pushing for bold shifts in transportation funding and strategy.

For more information, please visit www.TransitCenter.org.

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