

San Francisco Bay Area



From Oakland to East Palo Alto, San Jose to the Mission District, all Bay area residents deserve fast, reliable access to opportunities across the region—which public transportation can provide.

Several dozen transit agencies operate bus, subway, light rail, trolley car, ferries, and commuter train service across several counties.

But more transit agencies aren't necessarily better for riders. Lacking a unified planning approach, the Bay Area's regional network has service gaps, high travel costs, and uncoordinated schedules.

Without sufficient government funding, Bay Area transit agencies are stretched thin to provide quality service in a region that continues to sprawl outward because of high housing costs.



40
minute trip home

20
minute trip from the supermarket

35
minute commute

Access to opportunities by public transit is a result of residential patterns, development, and transit policy and planning.

Transit access to jobs is highest in San Francisco and Oakland, where there are major job centers, the BART train, large bus networks, and transit connections to each other.

Job access by transit in San Jose is moderate. In most Bay Area suburbs, access by transit is very low except along train lines.

Within the City of San Francisco, people from different socioeconomic groups have virtually equal access to opportunities by public transit. SFMTA's equitable service planning approach has successfully designed schedules and routes so that everyone who relies on it has good access by transit.

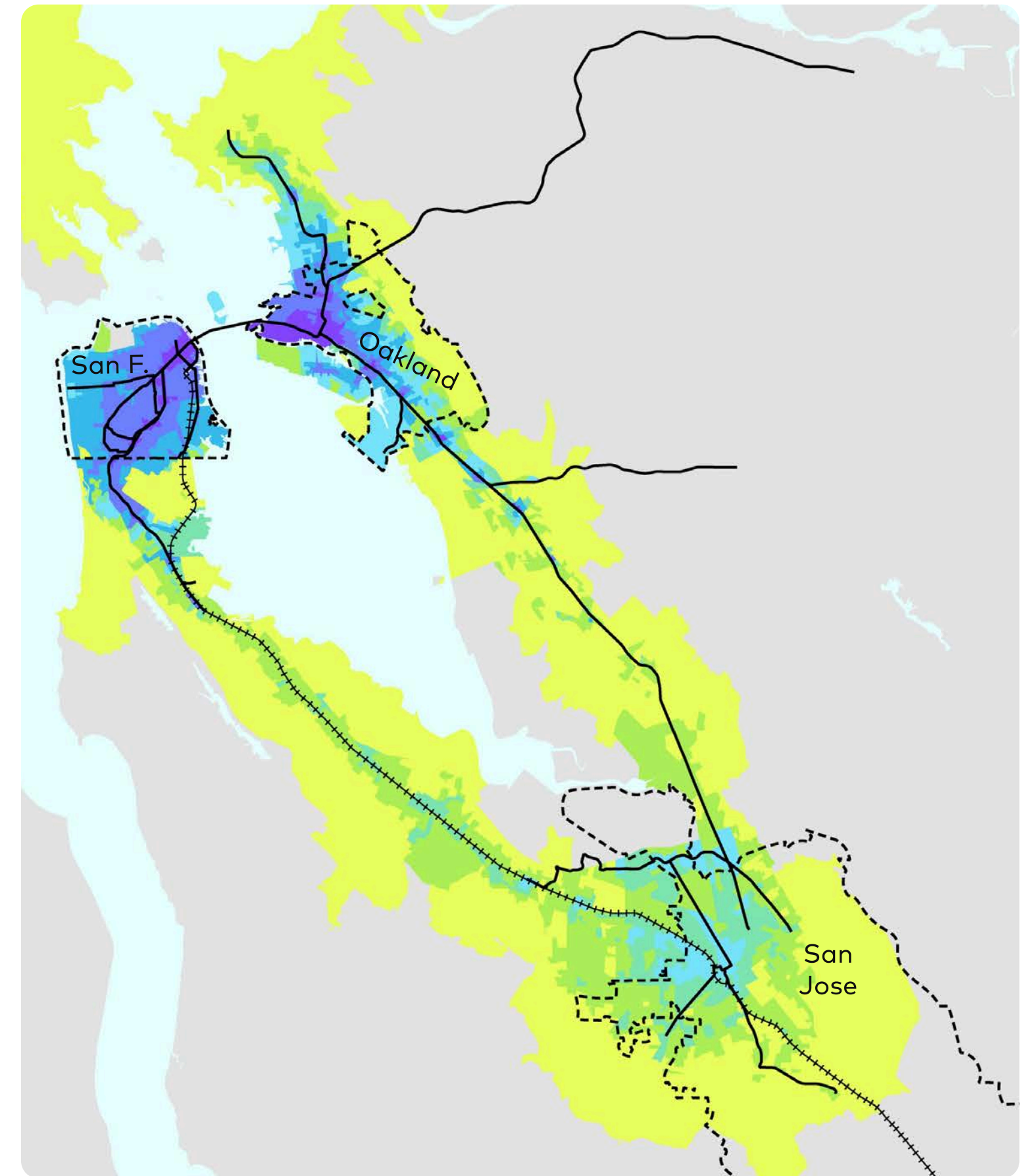


Jobs accessible in 60 minutes by public transit for Bay Area residents

★ Map Insight

Most San Francisco and Oakland residents can reach at least 500,000 jobs by an hour-long public transit commute on weekday mornings. Regionally, the average resident can reach about 290,000 jobs.

- Map Key**
- 900K jobs or more
 - 700K-900K
 - 500K-700K
 - 300K-500K
 - 200K-300K
 - 100K-200K
 - 1-100K jobs
 - No transit access data
 - City border



Regardless of where they live, people with greater economic means and more flexibility for travel have better access by transit in the Bay Area.

Rush-hour transit riders have access to about 25% more jobs than late-evening or weekend riders. However, 9-5 workers commute less than second- and third-shift workers, who mostly still work in person.

People who can pay any transit fare can reach about 40% more jobs by public transit than those with a \$5 fare budget. Most BART trips, Caltrain trips, and trips with interagency transfers cost more than \$5.

Limited transit access for people on a budget is exacerbated by the fact that other options, like driving, calling an Uber, or paying rent in walkable downtowns, are more expensive than public transit.



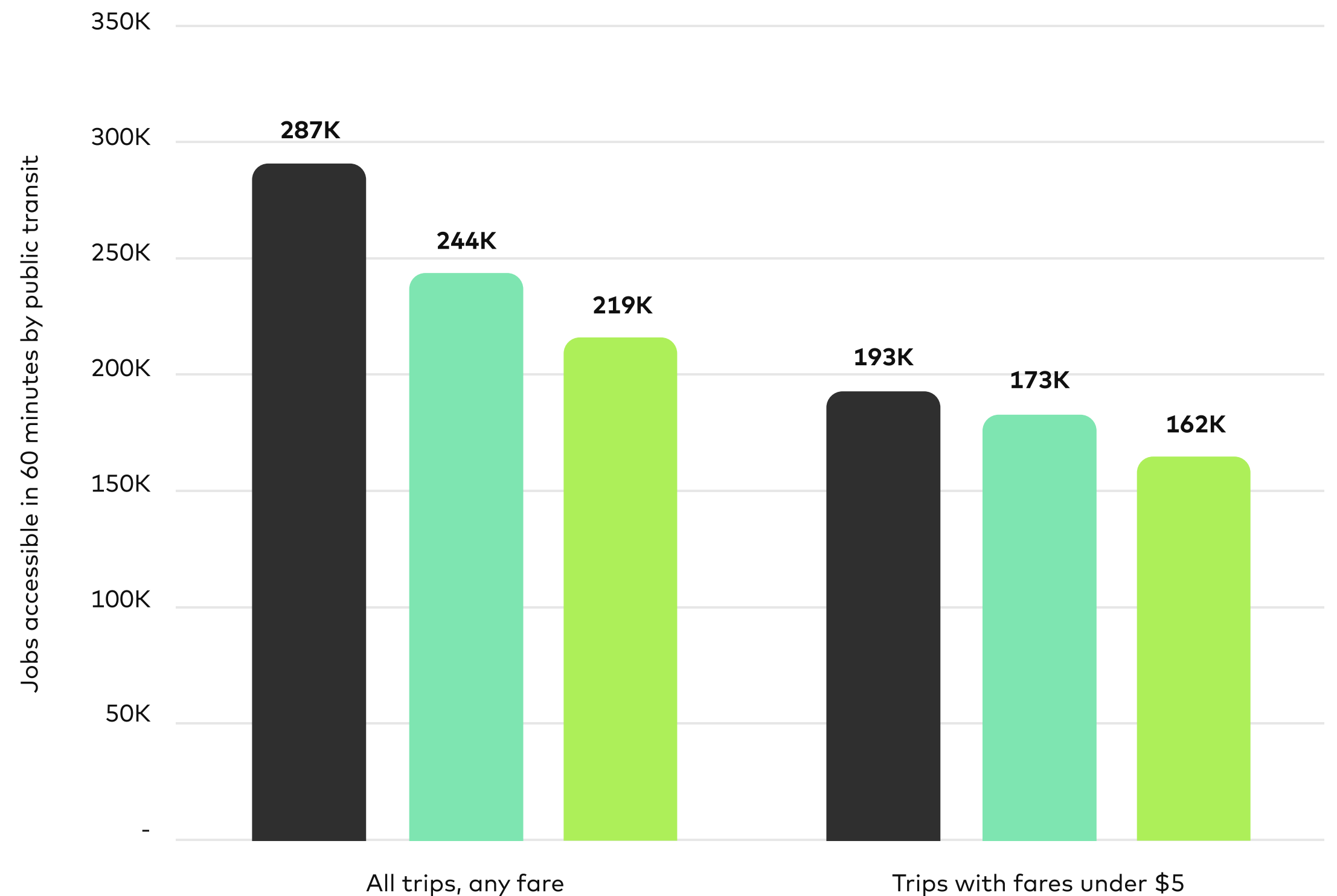
Jobs accessible in 60 minutes by public transit for Bay Area residents

★ Chart Insight

Someone commuting on a weekday evening with a fare budget of \$5 can only access 55% of the jobs accessible to someone commuting on a weekday morning without a budget.

Chart Key

- Weekday AM
- Saturday morning
- Weekday evening



Most San Francisco residents have affordable access by transit all day. SFMTA schedules are frequent, day and evening. Dedicated busways speed up bus trips. BART’s distance-based fares can exceed \$10 but are under \$4 within the city.

SFMTA’s dense, frequent bus network is a good model. BART recently added trips to off-peak schedules in response to less peaky ridership. Clipper Start reduces fares to riders with low incomes (but has limited uptake).

But low-cost, off-peak access is limited outside of San Francisco. Here, many trips require an interagency transfer. This adds fares and wait times—particularly during low-frequency times—because Bay Area transit agencies haven’t historically coordinated fare policies and schedules.

Thanks to regional efforts, riders will soon benefit from a free transfer pilot and better-coordinated schedules.

Operations funding for transit in the Bay Area is limited. Without additional operations funding to lower fares or run more service, Bay Area transit agencies won’t be able to ameliorate this problem.



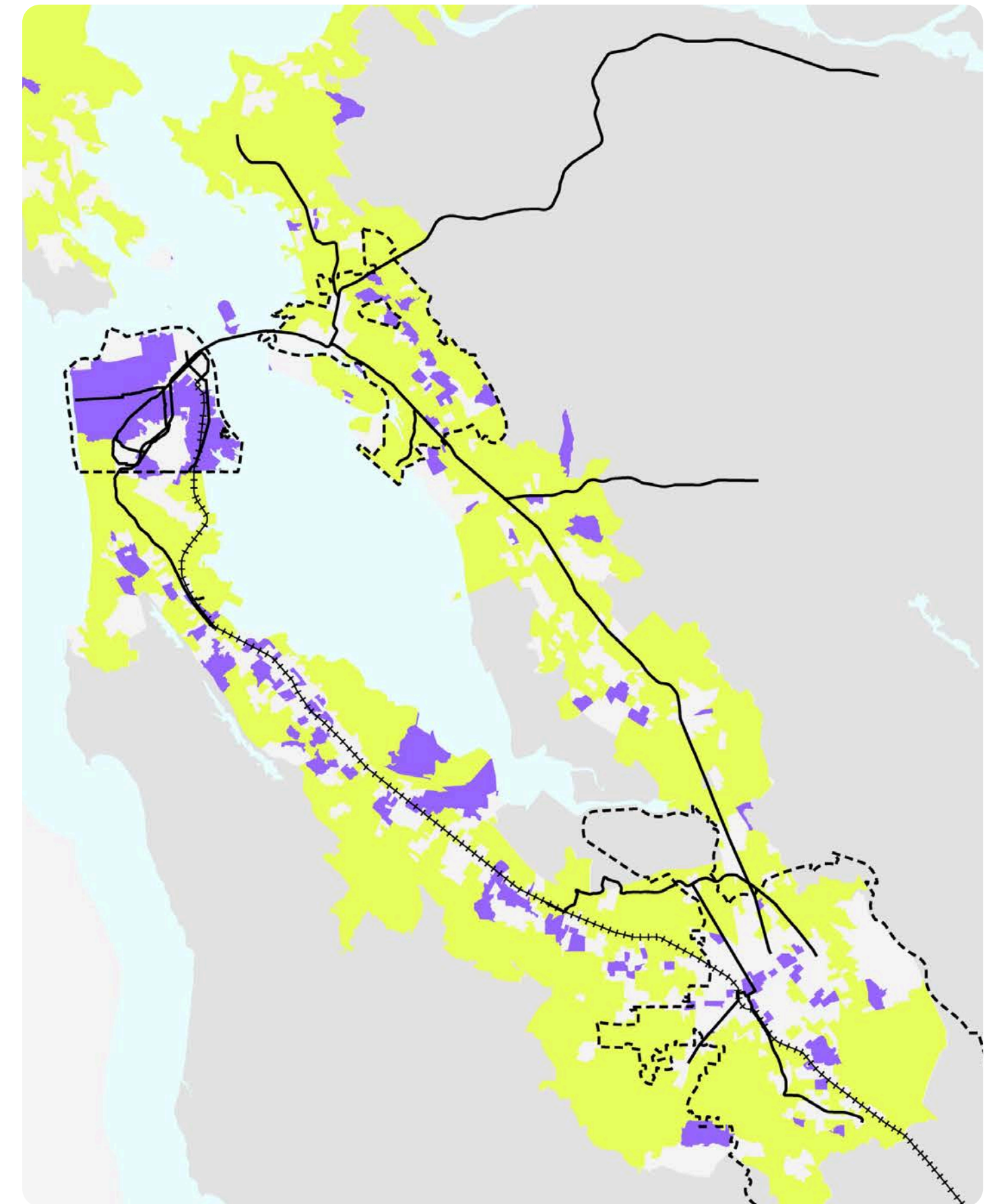
How low-cost, off-peak public transit access to jobs compares to weekday morning access for Bay Area residents

★ Map Insight

Most San Franciscans can reach at least 75% of all transit-accessible jobs if traveling off-peak for \$5 or less. Most Peninsula, East, and South Bay Area residents can reach less than half of all transit-accessible jobs if traveling off-peak for \$5 or less.

Map Key

- Less than 50%: Weekday evening access for \$5 vs. weekday AM access, no fare budget
- More than 75%: Weekday evening access for \$5 vs. weekday AM access, no fare budget
- No transit access data
- City border





Transit [connects] residents with the entire city of San Francisco. I love that public transit can get you to any part of our city. Even though it has its problems and frustrations, I'm proud to live in a city that values an investment like mass public transportation.

Anonymous

San Francisco public transit rider



Rising housing prices in the Bay Area have forced people to move in search of affordable homes. Many of the places where residents are moving—like Richmond and Pinole—don't have easy public transit access to essential places.

Only one-quarter of fast-growing Bay Area neighborhoods have access to one hospital and three grocery stores (in other words, a variety) in 30 minutes by public transit.

Displacement of transit riders to suburban or exurban communities strains operations for Bay Area transit agencies. Dispersed riders need service where they now live, where the network is typically less frequent, less dense, and access by transit is worse.

Meanwhile, COVID-19 shrank fare revenue (previously a major funding source for Bay Area transit), caused a labor shortfall, raised operations costs, and increased the number of people seeking shelter on buses and trains.

Transit agencies face pressure to provide more with less.

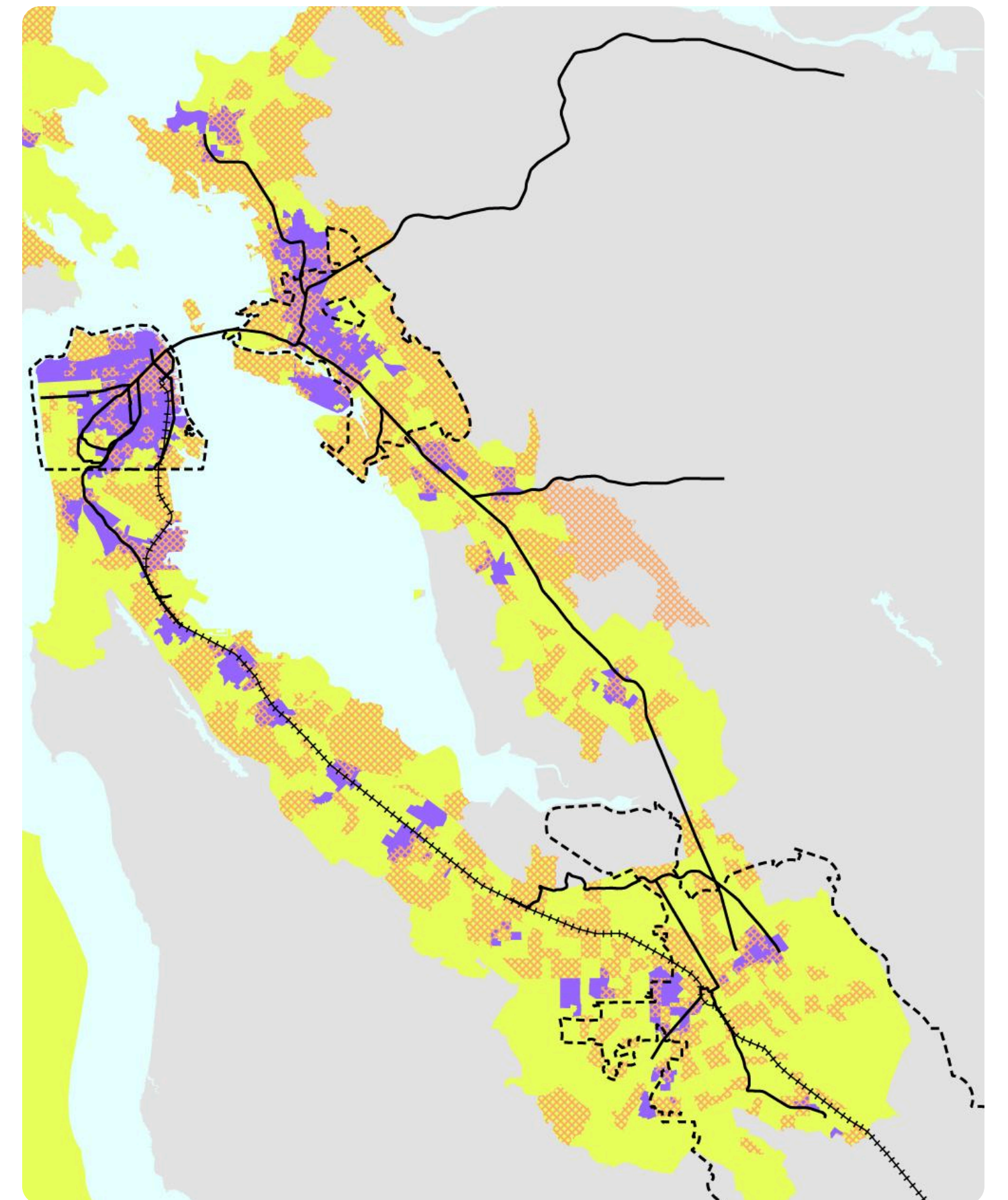
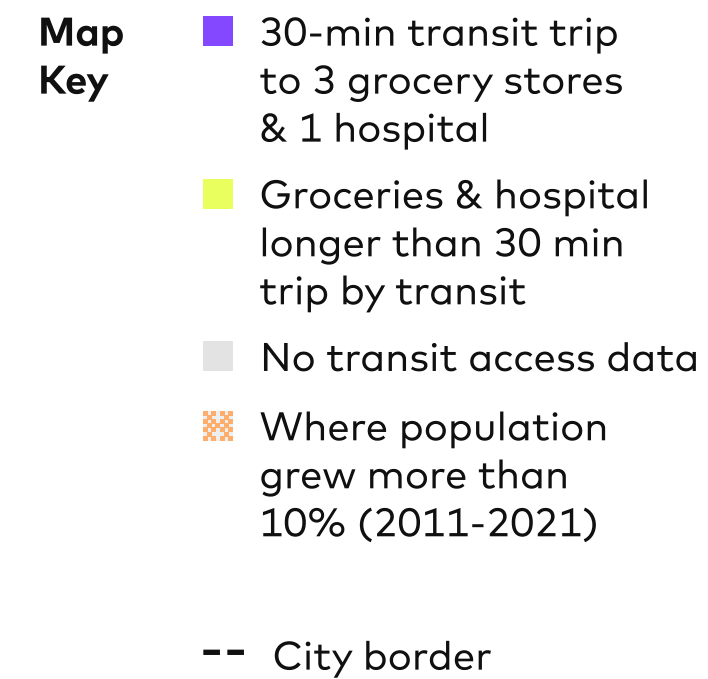
A one-time payment from the state of California allowed transit agencies to make ends meet for the time being, but it doesn't give them room to expand their service offerings.



30-minute public transit access to essential places vs. population growth in the Bay Area

★ Map Insight

Only one-quarter of residents in these growing Bay Area neighborhoods can reach one hospital and three grocery stores (in other words, a variety) in 30 minutes by public transit.



Among fast-growing Bay Area neighborhoods, only residents of one-quarter can reach one hospital and three grocery stores (in other words, a variety) in 30 minutes by public transit.



In much of the Bay Area, taking transit to essential places is possible but impractical, because it takes much longer than driving.

State and local officials—past and present—are responsible for this transportation inequity. They've chosen to devote minimal resources to public transit but spared no expense for expanding and maintaining roads for cars.

But driving is more expensive, dangerous, and polluting than public transit. Public transit also supports dense, affordable housing, which the region desperately needs.

Convenient, affordable access around the Bay Area shouldn't hinge on your ability to drive a car or where you live.

Bay Area and California government officials must invest in public transit by securing new operations funding for transit and shifting resources from roads and highway expansion to transit capital and operations.

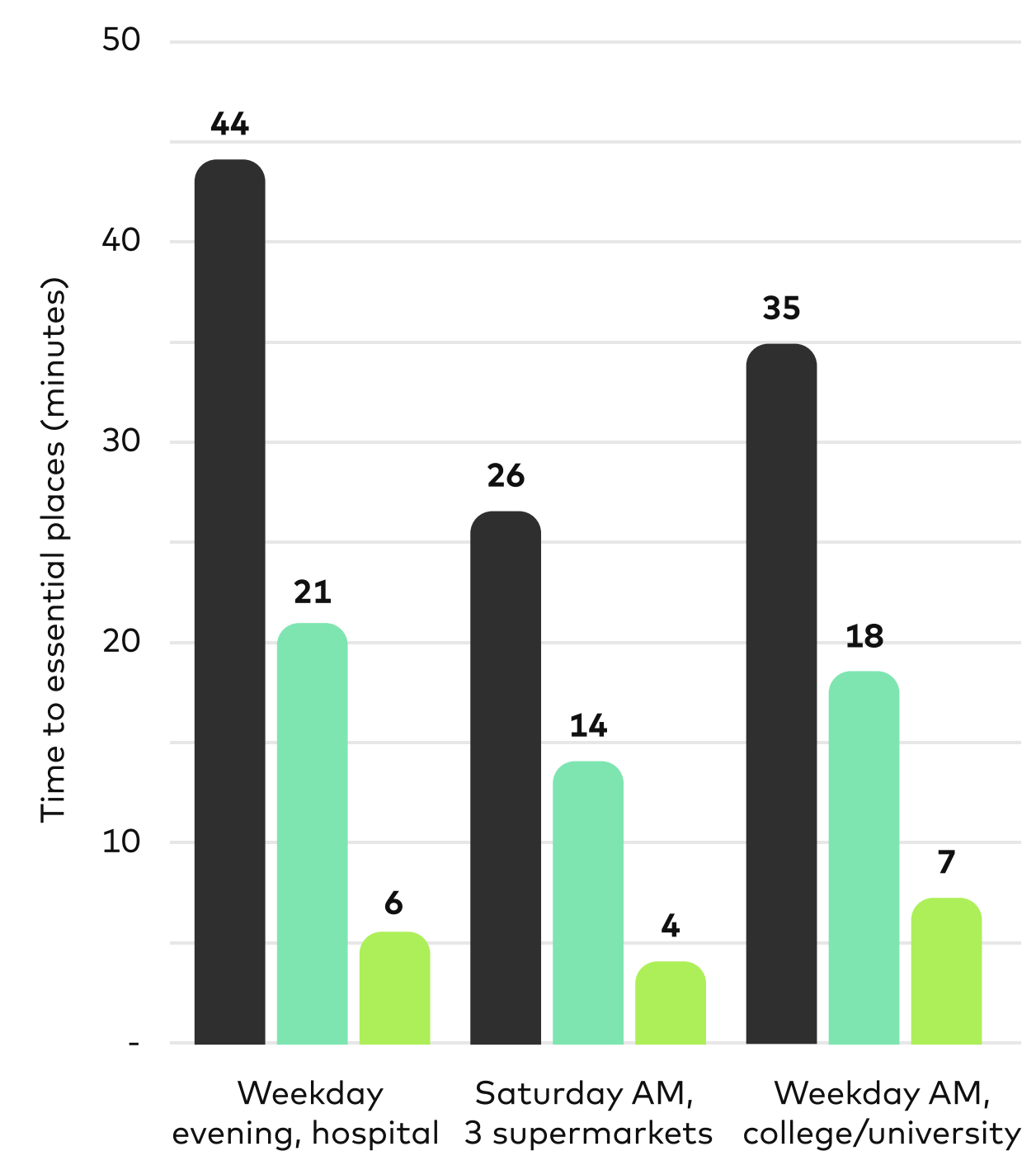


★ Chart Insight

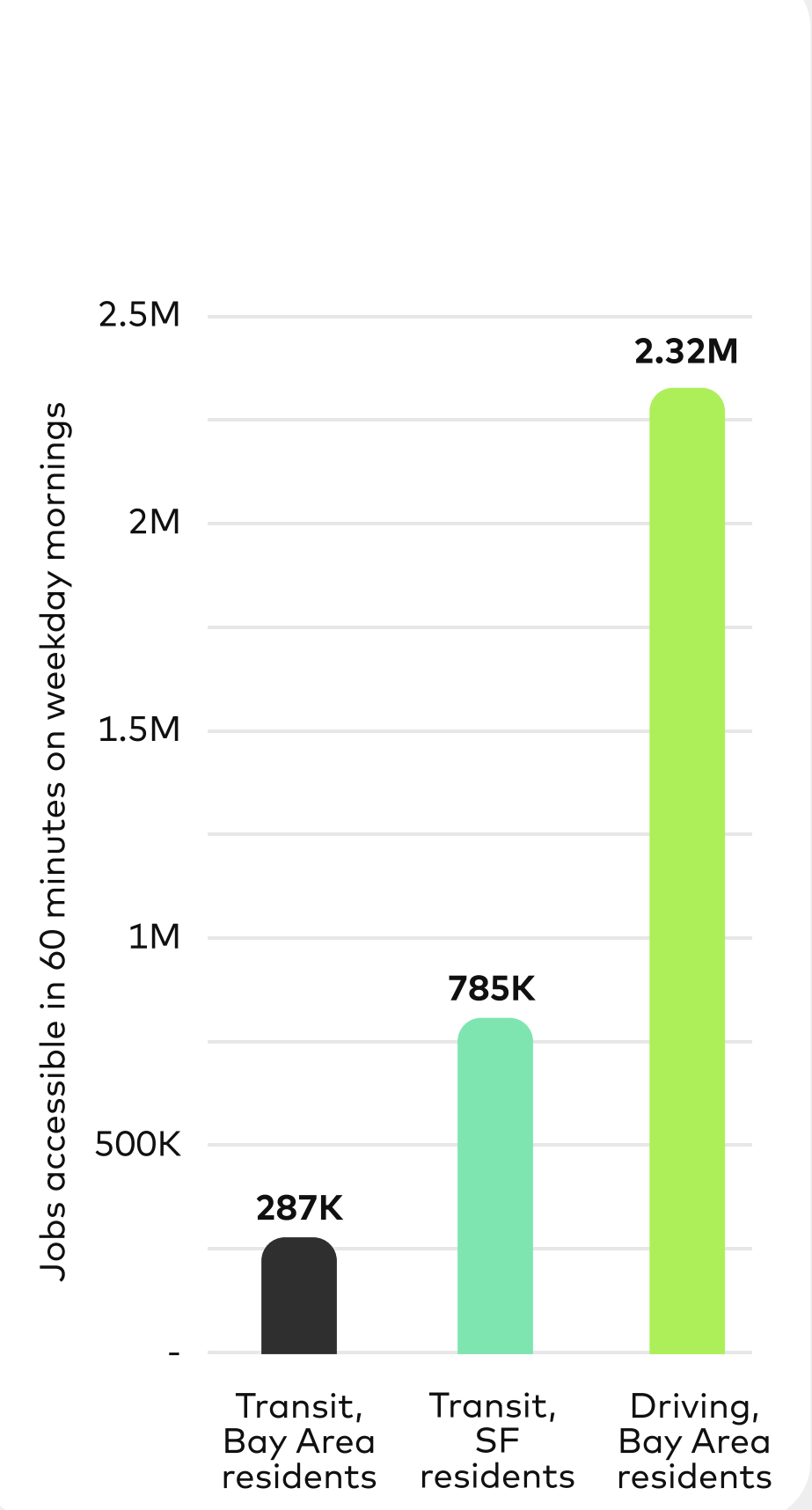
Access to essential places is about seven times worse for Bay Area residents who take transit than those who drive. In San Francisco, where public transit service is more abundant, access to places by public transit is roughly half as competitive as driving.

Transit vs. driving time to essential places for Bay Area residents

Chart Key
■ Transit, Bay Area residents
■ Transit, SF residents
■ Driving, Bay Area residents



Jobs accessible in 60 minutes on weekday mornings for Bay Area residents



Access data from TransitCenter based on transit schedules 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 for San Francisco-Oakland and parts of Santa Clara County. Parts of Alameda and Contra Costa County that are served by BART are not included in this analysis.

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.

TransitCenter

1 Whitehall Street, 17th Floor
New York, NY 10004

🌐 www.TransitCenter.org

✉ @transitcenter

📘 Facebook.com/transitctr

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.

Acknowledgments

This report was written by Mary Buchanan with contributions from Hayley Richardson, Chris Van Eyken, Kapish Singla, and Eric Lundy. The author wishes to thank Genesis, San Francisco Transit Riders, Seamless Bay Area, and TransForm for their report storyboarding and review, riders who shared their transit stories, and Klumpentown Consulting, which built TransitCenter's Transportation Equity Dashboard. Any errors are TransitCenter's alone.

Publication Date: June 2024

Photo credits

Cover—Muni Jon Porter; Photoholic

Slide 1—Jim Maurer

Slide 5—Daniel Abadia; Mohammed Harshil

Slide 7—Enric Cruz Lopez

Design

L&L Design (landl.us)

