How Affordable is Transportation?

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The affordable car idea

Image source: National Public Radio, People’s Car Series.
The affordable public transportation idea

- The Urban Mass Transportation Act of 1964
- Early UMTA projects focused on the “ghetto transportation” and “poverty transportation” problems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Early UMTA project</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>St. Louis, MO</td>
<td>Bus service to industrial complex 20 miles NW of inner city</td>
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<tr>
<td>Long Island, NY</td>
<td>Multiple bus routes from low-income communities to job concentrations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Washington, DC</td>
<td>Bus routes to shopping center employment and adjacent counties</td>
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<tr>
<td>Boston, MA</td>
<td>Bus routes to industrial complexes, day shifts only</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cleveland, OH</td>
<td>Bus service from low-income neighborhoods to steel plant</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gary, IN</td>
<td>Bus routes from low-income neighborhoods to major steel plants</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kansas City, MO</td>
<td>Bus service to large employer locations, serving three shifts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Detroit, MI</td>
<td>Two bus routes from inner-city neighborhoods to suburban job locations</td>
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</tbody>
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Existing Definitions of Transportation Affordability

- People’s financial ability to pay for transportation-related services and goods.

- Two types of measurement:
  - % of household disposable income spent on transportation
  - % of household total expenditures spent on transportation

- Inconsistent use of benchmarks
  - 20%; 10%
  - Average % in the lowest three income deciles
A recent innovation is the “H+T” index.

H+T has limited ability to improve the measurement of transportation affordability

Its purpose is mainly to
  • illustrate the interconnectivity between the cost of housing and the cost of transportation (both costs are location-sensitive)
  • educate policy makers and the public on the benefits of smart growth and transit-supportive land uses.
Major Limitations

- Blunt and ambiguous benchmarks—unsuitable for an increasingly diversified society
- Focus on ability to travel but little emphasis on ability to fulfill daily needs
- Focus on financial ability, yet overlooks potential substitution between time and money
An alternative direction

- Recognize heterogeneity in transportation needs, time availabilities, and resource availabilities.

- Not only population-sensitive but also location sensitive.
Household Socio-Demographics

- Time & income resources

- Quantity of transportation needs
  - Complicated travel needs associated with low-income minorities

- Price of transportation
  - Forced car ownership
The Built Environment

- Price of transportation
  - More expensive transportation services needed?

- Quantity of transportation needs
  - Urban sprawl means longer trips to access destinations
The Policy Environment

• Price of transportation
  – Transit fare policy
  – Parking
  – Carpool programs

• Quantity of transportation needs
  – Auto-oriented development vs. transit oriented development

• Time and income resources
  – Car ownership programs
Two Dilemmas

• The socio-economically disadvantaged has the fewest resources.
  – Yet, their transportation needs are better served by the more expensive mode of transportation, i.e., automobiles.
  – And yet, public policy has focused on transit solutions in addressing their transportation needs.

• Automobiles can reduce transportation hardship.
  – Yet, the existing auto-oriented urban landscape in the US requires more travel to access destinations, which leads to higher transportation costs.
Multi-modal transportation solutions are a MUST.

Reducing societal auto dependence and subsidizing car access among disadvantaged populations are equally important to enhance transportation affordability.

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