



To Move Is to Thrive

Public Transit and Economic
Opportunity for People of Color

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About Demos

Dēmos is a public policy organization working for an America where we all have an equal say in our democracy and an equal chance in our economy.

Our name means “the people.” It is the root word of democracy, and it reminds us that in America, the true source of our greatness is the diversity of our people. Our nation’s highest challenge is to create a democracy that truly empowers people of all backgrounds, so that we all have a say in setting the policies that shape opportunity and provide for our common future. To help America meet that challenge, Dēmos is working to reduce both political and economic inequality, deploying original research, advocacy, litigation, and strategic communications to create the America the people deserve.

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Introduction

“If people can’t move . . . then economic opportunity and quality of life deteriorate. To move is to thrive. To be stuck is to lack opportunity.”

ROSABETH MOSS KANTER

MOVE: HOW TO REBUILD AND REINVENT AMERICA’S INFRASTRUCTURE

There is broad agreement that the U.S. needs greater investments in the nation’s infrastructure if we wish to continue to have a strong economy. As we plan for future infrastructure investments, it is important to include public transit in our thinking. The American population continues to concentrate in metropolitan areas,¹ and this concentration leads to increasing traffic congestion. Public transit investments have the potential to reduce road traffic congestion, save consumers money, increase productivity, decrease carbon pollution, and spur economic development.

To meet this promise, our future public transit investments must be more equitable in terms of race, ethnicity, and class than they have been historically. People of color own vehicles at lower rates than white people, and therefore are more reliant on public transit. If we want everyone to participate fully in the American economy, we have to make sure that everyone, regardless of race, ethnicity or class, has an efficient and affordable way to get to work, school, health care, and recreation.

The low unemployment rate that we see today hides the fact that many potential workers are not in the labor force and are not being counted as unemployed. The business reporter Mitchell Hartman observes that currently, “there are more working-age people sitting on the sidelines, not actively looking for a job, than there were before the Great Recession.”² This problem of “missing workers” is more severe for people of color who have lower prime-age (i.e., 25 to 54 years old) employment rates than white people. We need millions more jobs to truly live up to our potential to put Americans of all races to work. One of the best ways to begin to address this hidden jobs crisis is with large investments in public transit.

This report presents findings on the use of public transit by people of color and on the potential jobs benefits that people of color can gain from investments in public transit. Its key findings on the use of public transit are:

- Racial, ethnic, and class inequities in the access to and funding of public transit continue today.
- Latino and Asian-American workers are twice as likely as white workers not to have a vehicle at home. African American workers are 3 times as likely. These disparities are heightened in certain metropolitan areas; Latino and black workers lack a private vehicle at as much as 6 times the rate of white workers in some areas.
- Asian-American and African-American workers commute by public transit at nearly 4 times the rate of white workers. Latino workers commute by public transit at nearly 3 times the white rate. While some metropolitan areas have even starker disparities, only 1—urban Honolulu—has similar rates of black and white workers commuting by public transit. However, because the majority of workers are white, white workers still comprise nearly two-fifths of all public transit commuters.
- Workers of color are overrepresented among public transit commuters with “long commutes”—one-way commutes of 60 minutes or longer.

The key findings on the jobs benefits from investment in public transit are:

- America’s employment rates are still low relative to 2000, and there is a strong racial hierarchy in employment rates.
- The majority of the jobs created from infrastructure investments can be non-construction jobs.
- All racial and ethnic groups gain jobs from large infrastructure investments and, generally, the larger the investment, the more jobs for each group.
- Investments in public transit show good returns in terms of the shares of the total jobs going to workers of color.

Stories of Transit Inequities

In America today, there are too many stories of transit inequities. For example, take the case of the African-American teenager Martin Johnson. Johnson is hoping that attending a high-quality school will lift him out of poverty.

Every day, twice a day, Martin rides two buses and a subway, walking at each end of his trip, to attend a school preparing him for an even better high school. It takes him nearly an hour and a half to travel six miles—if the buses are on time. It would be faster to walk if not for his heavy backpack and some dangerous highways on the way.³

It should not be so difficult for the residents of Johnson's neighborhood to travel 6 miles. But at least those residents have an alternative to running across a dangerous highway. Not all Americans do.

In 1995, the 17-year-old African-American Cynthia Wiggins was struck and killed by a dump truck as she attempted to cross a 7-lane highway to get to her job at the Walden Galleria Mall in Buffalo, New York. The mall allowed buses from suburbs to stop on its property, but it did not allow city buses which ran through black neighborhoods to do the same.⁴

Two decades later, activists in Dayton, Ohio found themselves struggling to overcome the same obstacles Wiggins faced. Their city buses, which serve a majority black population, were not allowed to stop at the Mall at Fairfield Commons. After taking the bus to the closest bus stop, workers would have to walk a mile, including crossing a busy highway, to get to their jobs.⁵ The Buffalo and Dayton stories differ in date and place, but the struggle is the same.

In Denver, Colorado, there is what one observer describes as “a model for infrastructure inequality.” The white, middle-class communities south of downtown not only have access to a wider and toll-free stretch of the major highway, they also have the option of taking the light rail to downtown. The poorer and more Latino communities north of downtown don't have a light rail option, forcing them to rely on a narrower stretch of the highway with tolls.⁶

We Need More Race and Class Equity in Transit Investments

In Rosabeth Moss Kanter's multi-city study of America's infrastructure problems, she met many people who faced serious difficulties moving about their cities via public transit. Many of them simply could not afford to purchase a car. Kanter observed that many low-income commuters and students "are not as fortunate as Martin Johnson,"⁷ who has an hour and a half commute to school (see "Stories of Transit Inequities" for more on Johnson and others). Kanter met individuals who have "at least two and as many as four connections, plus time on foot"⁸ to get to work or school. Some of them "walk five miles to get downtown from their homes, because it's more direct and faster than multiple subway or bus transfers."⁹

The journalist Corinne Ramey in her examination of racial discrimination transportation cases found,

Complaints tend to fall into general categories: funding transit used by wealthier whites, like light rails and trolleys, over buses, whose ridership tends to consist of people with lower incomes and minorities; funding roads without devoting money to types of transit used by those without cars; and transit that helps wealthier populations while having negative health or environmental effects on poor communities.¹⁰

In too many instances, race, ethnicity, and class still play a role in who gets access to what public transit infrastructure.

If we want all Americans to participate fully in society, we need to greatly improve our public transportation infrastructure and make sure that access is equitable. Without easy and efficient access to work, school, and health care, the most disadvantaged people are more likely to be trapped in disadvantage. Upward mobility requires access to opportunities.

Public Transit Use for Travel to Work Among People of Color

Growing numbers of Americans rely on public transit in their daily lives. In 2015, passengers took 10.5 billion trips on transit systems, up 33 percent from 20 years ago.¹¹ Public transit ridership has grown faster than the population.¹² But our public transit infrastructure, like much of our infrastructure generally, is old and decrepit. And many of our transit systems were not designed to handle such heavy use.

The American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) recently rated America's public transit system a D-minus, a worse grade than the D four years earlier.¹³ The ASCE states that our public transit suffers from overdue maintenance and underinvestment that will cost us \$90 billion to remedy if we address it now—or significantly more if we wait for things to get worse. The ASCE also notes that “[w]hile some communities are experiencing a transit boom, many Americans still have inadequate access to public transit.”¹⁴ The general public, business leaders, and labor leaders all show strong support for improving and investing in our public transit systems.¹⁵

While all Americans need and will benefit from increased investments in public transit, communities of color will benefit the most. Workers of color are more likely to lack a vehicle at home, and to commute by public transit. And they are overrepresented among those workers with one-way commutes of 60 minutes or more.

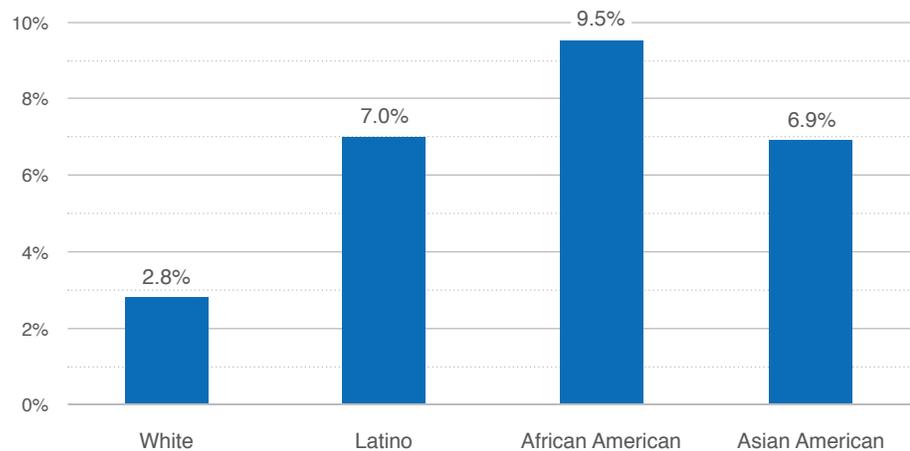
The analysis below on vehicle ownership, public transit use, and public transit commuting times uses data from the 2011-2015 American Community Survey from the U.S. Census Bureau, obtained from IPUMS-USA at the University of Minnesota.¹⁶ While the 5-year file of the survey is less up-to-date, it provides more accurate statistics on smaller populations than the smaller files.

Public transit commutes take place primarily within a metropolitan area, and people living in different metro areas can have widely varied experiences. To provide a glimpse of the similarities and differences among metro areas for various population groups, we analyzed 20 metro areas in addition to providing a national-level analysis. The 20 metro areas include those with the 10 largest Latino, African-American, and Asian-American populations. There is considerable overlap in the 10 largest metro areas for these groups; for example, the New York City metropolitan area is in the top 10 for each population group.

Private Vehicle Ownership Among Workers

Workers who lack a vehicle at home are the ones most likely to rely on public transportation for their daily transportation needs. One factor in the stronger reliance of workers of color on public transit is their lower rates of vehicle ownership. The rate of white workers lacking a vehicle is the lowest of the population groups analyzed. Workers of color are roughly 2 to 3 times as likely as white workers not to have a private vehicle at home: only 2.8 percent of white workers do not have a vehicle at home, but 6.9 percent of Asian-American workers, 7 percent of Latino workers, and 9.5 percent of African-American workers do not have a vehicle at home, as depicted in *Figure 1*.

Figure 1. Percentage of Workers Without a Vehicle at Home by Race and Latino Ethnicity, 2011-2015



Note: Racial categories exclude Latinos.

Source: Author's analysis of American Community Survey data from IPUMS-USA, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org.

The rates at which different population groups lack a private vehicle provide a clear picture of the disparities, but since the size of the groups vary, it does not reflect the racial and ethnic composition of all workers who do not have vehicles. *Table 1* provides that overview.

Table 1. Racial and Latino Ethnic Shares of All Workers and of All Workers Without a Vehicle at Home, 2011-2015

	White	Latino	African American	Asian American
Workers Without a Vehicle	40.6%	24.8%	23.0%	8.4%
All Workers	65.5%	15.8%	10.8%	5.4%

Note: Racial categories exclude Latinos.

Source: Author's analysis of American Community Survey data from IPUMS-USA, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org.

Although white workers comprise nearly two-thirds of all workers, they only make up two-fifths of all workers without a vehicle, as *Table 1* shows. This is less than a majority, but it is still a large share of all workers without a private vehicle at home. For white workers who lack a vehicle, public transit is of considerable importance; however, it is of disproportionate importance to workers of color, because they are overrepresented among workers without a vehicle. The strongest overrepresentation is among African Americans, who make up 10.8 percent of all workers, but 23 percent of all workers without a vehicle at home. Latinos comprise 15.8 percent of all workers, but 24.8 percent of all workers without a vehicle. Asian Americans make up 5.4 percent of all workers, but 8.4 percent of all workers without a vehicle.

The 20 large metropolitan areas we analyzed reveal a similar pattern as that in the nation as a whole. These are broken out in *Table 2*.

Table 2. Percentage of Workers Without a Vehicle at Home in Selected Metropolitan Areas by Race and Latino Ethnicity, 2011-2015

	White	Latino	African American	Asian American
Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Roswell, GA	1.2%	7.9%	5.0%	2.9%
Boston-Cambridge-Newton, MA-NH	4.4%	16.3%	13.4%	10.4%
Chicago-Naperville-Elgin, IL-IN-WI	4.2%	5.4%	13.3%	6.8%
Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington, TX	1.1%	2.1%	4.7%	2.5%
Detroit-Warren-Dearborn, MI	1.7%	4.1%	8.8%	1.9%
Houston-The Woodlands-Sugar Land, TX	1.3%	3.2%	4.6%	2.3%
Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim, CA	2.1%	5.4%	6.6%	2.6%
Miami-Fort Lauderdale-West Palm Beach, FL	2.2%	4.0%	5.8%	3.0%
Minneapolis-St. Paul-Bloomington, MN-WI	2.0%	7.0%	12.6%	4.5%
New York-Newark-Jersey City, NY-NJ-PA	15.2%	34.0%	29.9%	25.0%
Philadelphia-Camden-Wilmington, PA-NJ-DE-MD	3.0%	10.7%	16.7%	7.3%
Phoenix-Mesa-Scottsdale, AZ	2.2%	3.9%	7.4%	3.5%
Riverside-San Bernardino-Ontario, CA	1.7%	2.2%	3.0%	1.7%
San Antonio-New Braunfels, TX	1.6%	3.2%	5.8%	3.2%
San Diego-Carlsbad, CA	1.7%	3.0%	4.9%	2.4%
San Francisco-Oakland-Hayward, CA	6.6%	6.6%	11.0%	7.0%
San Jose-Sunnyvale-Santa Clara, CA	1.8%	1.9%	2.6%	2.6%
Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue, WA	3.0%	4.0%	6.9%	4.8%
Urban Honolulu, HI	4.5%	4.6%	3.9%	4.0%
Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV	4.3%	8.1%	8.5%	4.9%

Note: Racial categories exclude Latinos.

Source: Author's analysis of American Community Survey data from IPUMS-USA, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org.

We found that the New York City metropolitan area has the highest rates of workers without a private vehicle. In New York City, 15.2 percent of white workers, 25 percent of Asian-American workers, 29.9 percent of African-American workers, and 34 percent of Latino workers do not have a vehicle at home.

Latino workers see their largest relative disparity with whites in the Atlanta metropolitan area, where they are 6.6 times as likely to lack a private vehicle as white workers. In the Boston, Philadelphia, and Minneapolis metropolitan areas, Latino workers are almost 4 times as likely to lack a vehicle as white workers. Latino workers have basically the same rates of private vehicle ownership as white workers in the Urban Honolulu and San Francisco metro areas.

African-American workers have their largest relative disparity with whites in the Minneapolis metropolitan area, where African-American workers are more than 6 times as likely not to have a vehicle at home. In Philadelphia and Detroit, African-American workers are more than 5 times as likely not to own a vehicle as white workers. Only in Urban Honolulu do black workers have comparable rates of vehicle ownership with white workers.

Asian-American workers in the Atlanta, Boston, Dallas, Minneapolis, and Philadelphia metropolitan areas are more than twice as likely to lack a vehicle at home as white workers. Asian-American workers have very similar rates of private vehicle ownership to white workers in the Detroit, Riverside, San Francisco, Urban Honolulu, and Washington D.C. metro areas.

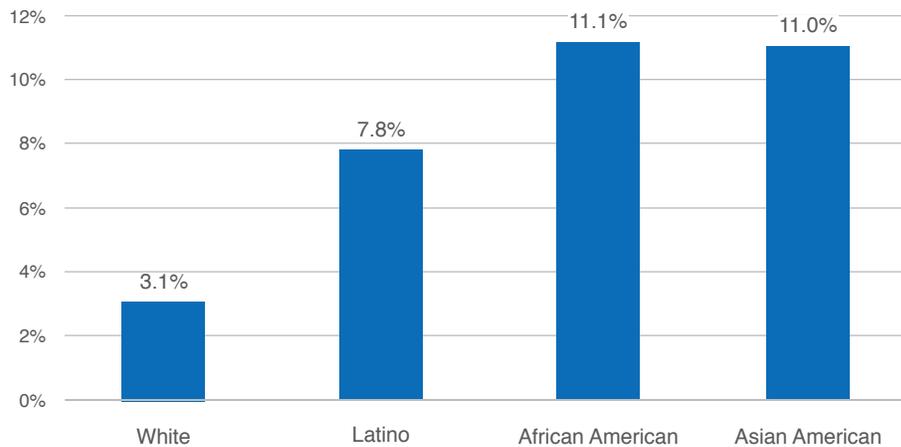
With few exceptions among the 20 metropolitan areas, African-American workers tend to lack a vehicle at the highest rates, followed by Latino workers, Asian-American workers, and finally, with the lowest rates, white workers. What we see in these metro areas reflects what we see nationally. Although workers of color have higher rates of lacking a vehicle, it is important to be aware that white workers make up a sizeable share of all workers without a vehicle.

Rates of Public Transportation Use to Travel to Work

People rely on public transportation not just to travel to work but also to travel to school, stores, recreation, health care, places of worship, and a number of other places. These trips are important to individuals' quality of life and to the country's overall economic activity. Commutes to work comprise about 20 percent of all trips taken,¹⁷ and they provide a window into the broader issue of geographic mobility.

Nationally, we see significant differences in the rates of public transit use to get to work by race and Latino ethnicity. As *Figure 2* illustrates, 3.1 percent of white workers use public transit, while 7.8 percent of Latino workers, 11 percent of Asian-American workers, and 11.1 percent of African-American workers commute using public transit. In other words, Latino workers are almost 3 times as likely, and Asian-American and African-American workers are almost 4 times as likely as white workers to commute by public transit.

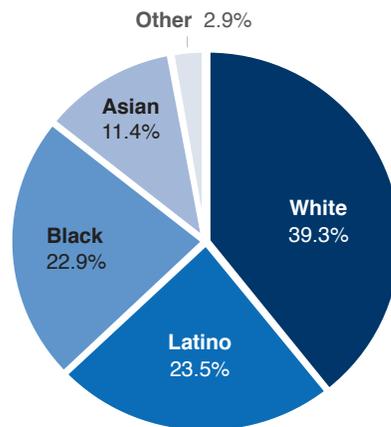
Figure 2. Percentage of Workers Commuting by Public Transit by Race and Latino Ethnicity, 2011-2015



Note: Racial categories exclude Latinos.

Source: Author's analysis of American Community Survey data from IPUMS-USA, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org.

Figure 3. Racial and Latino Ethnic Shares of All Workers Who Commute by Public Transit, 2011-2015



Note: Racial categories exclude Latinos.

Source: Author's analysis of American Community Survey data from IPUMS-USA, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org.

Although white people make up a sizeable share of public transit commuters, they are underrepresented relative to their share of workers. White workers make up nearly two-fifths—the plurality—of all workers commuting by public transit, as *Figure 3* shows. Slightly more than one-fifth of public transit commuters are Latino, and a similar amount are African-American. About one-tenth are Asian-American.

All of the people-of-color groups make up a larger share of public transit commuters than they make up as workers. The overrepresentation is greatest for African Americans and Asian Americans; the shares that these groups comprise of public-transit-commuting workers is twice the size of their shares of all workers, as indicated in *Table 3*.

Table 3. Racial and Latino Ethnic Shares of All Workers and of All Workers Commuting by Public Transit, 2011-2015

	White	Latino	African American	Asian American
Public Transit Commuters	39.3%	23.5%	22.9%	11.4%
All Workers	65.5%	15.8%	10.8%	5.4%

Note: Racial categories exclude Latinos.

Source: Author's analysis of American Community Survey data from IPUMS-USA, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org.

In *Table 4*, below, we examine each of the 20 metro areas and compare the percentage of workers who commute by public transit, broken out into population groups. Given the low rates of vehicle ownership in the New York City metropolitan area, we should not be surprised that New York has the largest percentages of workers who commute by public transit. Slightly more than one-fifth of white workers in the New York metro area commute by public transit, while roughly two-fifths of Latino, African-American, and Asian-American workers do so.

For Latino workers in the metropolitan areas selected, the largest relative disparity with white workers in the use of public transit is in the Atlanta area. There, Latino workers are nearly 5 times as likely to use public transit to get to work as white workers. In Los Angeles, Latino workers are about 4 times as likely, and in Detroit, they are 3 times as likely. In San Francisco and Chicago, Latino workers use public transit for commuting at about the same rate as white workers.

For African-American workers, the largest relative disparity with white workers in the use of public transit for traveling to work is in the Detroit metropolitan area, where black workers are 13 times as likely to use public transit as white workers. This large ratio is driven not by a

high rate of public transit use among black workers, but a very low rate of public transit use among white workers. In fact, of the 20 metropolitan areas selected, the rate of public transit use among all the groups analyzed, except for African Americans, is lowest in Detroit. In contrast, public transit use among black workers in Detroit is the 8th from the bottom of the 20 metropolitan areas.

While the black-to-white ratio of public transit use is exceptionally high in Detroit, it is also high in other metropolitan areas. In Miami, black workers use public transit to travel to work at about 6 times the rate of white workers. In Atlanta, Dallas, and Phoenix, black workers use public transit at about 5 times the white rate. Urban Honolulu stands out as the only metropolitan area where black and white workers use public transit at similar rates.

Table 4. Percentage of Workers Commuting by Public Transit in Selected Metropolitan Areas by Race and Latino Ethnicity, 2011-2015

	White	Latino	African American	Asian American
Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Roswell, GA	1.2%	5.5%	6.3%	2.6%
Boston-Cambridge-Newton, MA-NH	9.6%	23.2%	25.0%	20.8%
Chicago-Naperville-Elgin, IL-IN-WI	10.0%	10.8%	21.0%	13.7%
Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington, TX	0.9%	1.5%	4.1%	1.7%
Detroit-Warren-Dearborn, MI	0.5%	1.5%	6.6%	1.1%
Houston-The Woodlands-Sugar Land, TX	1.5%	2.3%	4.8%	3.3%
Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim, CA	2.3%	9.0%	9.4%	3.8%
Miami-Fort Lauderdale-West Palm Beach, FL	1.5%	3.9%	8.7%	2.7%
Minneapolis-St. Paul-Bloomington, MN-WI	3.7%	9.7%	13.6%	5.7%
New York-Newark-Jersey City, NY-NJ-PA	22.3%	39.0%	45.0%	39.3%
Philadelphia-Camden-Wilmington, PA-NJ-DE-MD	5.7%	12.0%	24.2%	11.0%
Phoenix-Mesa-Scottsdale, AZ	1.4%	3.0%	7.4%	2.5%
Riverside-San Bernardino-Ontario, CA	1.1%	1.5%	4.1%	1.8%
San Antonio-New Braunfels, TX	1.2%	2.6%	4.9%	1.3%
San Diego-Carlsbad, CA	2.0%	4.5%	6.1%	3.4%
San Francisco-Oakland-Hayward, CA	15.0%	14.7%	20.4%	18.6%
San Jose-Sunnyvale-Santa Clara, CA	3.1%	4.6%	7.3%	4.0%
Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue, WA	7.7%	9.5%	14.8%	12.7%
Urban Honolulu, HI	4.6%	6.9%	4.3%	10.9%
Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV	11.9%	15.9%	20.6%	13.2%

Note: Racial categories exclude Latinos.

Source: Author's analysis of American Community Survey data from IPUMS-USA, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org.

In Urban Honolulu, the largest disparity between people of color and white people is with Asian Americans, who use public transit for commuting at 2.4 times the white rate. This is also the largest ratio for Asian-American workers in all of the metro areas examined. The Atlanta, Boston, Detroit and Houston metro areas all tie for second place in terms of Asian-American workers' transit use. In these metropolitan areas, Asian-American workers use public transit for commuting at 2.2 times the rate of white workers. In San Antonio and Washington, D.C., the rate of use of public transit for commuting by Asian-American and white workers is very similar.

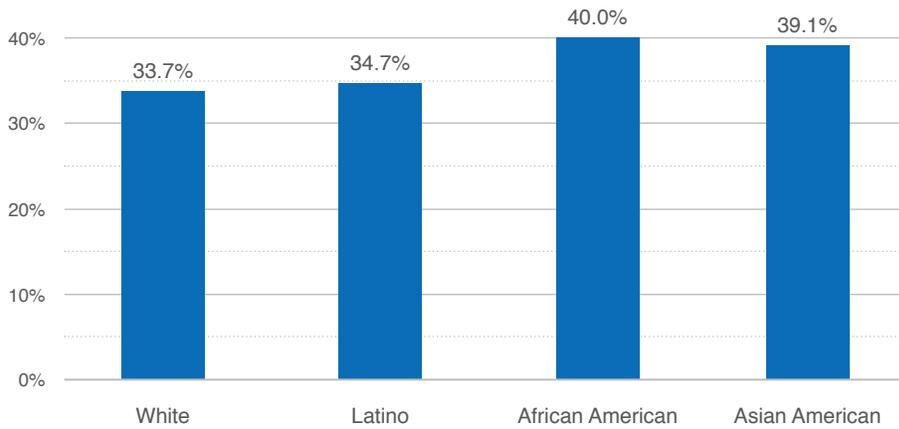
People of color rely more heavily on public transit to commute than white people. This can be found nationally and in specific metropolitan areas. The rates of public transit commuting vary considerably. For example, 39 percent of Latinos commute by public transit in New York, but only 1.5 percent use public transit in Detroit.

“Many Americans still have inadequate access to public transit,” reports the American Society of Civil Engineers.¹⁸ The low rate of public transit commuting in most of the 20 major metropolitan areas we examined is due in part to weak public transit infrastructure. As a result of this fact, the United States lags behind other wealthy nations in its use of public transit. Canadians use public transit twice as much as we do.¹⁹

Public-Transit Travel Time to Work

Workers of color who commute by public transit are more likely than white public-transit commuters to have “long commutes,” defined as a one-way commute of 60 minutes or longer. The rates of long commutes for white and Latino workers who commute by public transit are nearly the same: 33.7 percent of white public-transit commuters and 34.7 percent of Latino public-transit commuters need 60 minutes or more to get to work. There are greater differences for Asian-American and African-American workers using public transit: 39.1 percent of Asian-American workers riding public transit and 40 percent of African-American workers riding public transit have long commutes, as reflected in *Figure 4*.

Figure 4. Percentage of Workers Commuting by Public Transit with "Long Commutes"* by Race and Latino Ethnicity, 2011-2015



* A one-way door-to-door commute time of 60 minutes or longer.

Note: Racial categories exclude Latinos.

Source: Author's analysis of American Community Survey data from IPUMS-USA, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org.

Workers of color are overrepresented among workers with long commutes on public transit. As *Table 5* shows, white workers make up 36.8 percent of all workers with long public transit commutes—a substantial share. But given that they make up 65.5 percent of all workers, they are significantly underrepresented among the long commuters on public transit. All of the workers-of-color groups are overrepresented. Latinos make up 15.8 percent of all workers, but 22.7 percent of public transit riders with long commutes. For African Americans and Asian Americans, their share among public transit riders with long commutes is more than double their share of the workforce. African Americans make up 10.8 percent of all workers, but 25.3 percent of workers riding public transit with long commutes. Asian Americans make up 5.4 percent of all workers, but 12.3 percent of public transit riders with long commutes.

Table 5. Racial and Latino Ethnic Shares of All Workers and of All Public Transit "Long Commuters"*, 2011-2015

	White	Latino	African American	Asian American
Public Transit Commuters	36.8%	22.7%	25.3%	12.3%
All Workers	65.5%	15.8%	10.8%	5.4%

* Individuals who have one-way door-to-door commutes of 60 minutes or longer.

Note: Racial categories exclude Latinos.

Source: Author's analysis of American Community Survey data from IPUMS-USA, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org.

People-of-color groups are overrepresented among public transit riders with long commutes mainly because they are overrepresented among public transit riders. The shares of public transit riders with long commutes, while they are higher for people-of-color groups, are not dramatically different by race or Latino ethnicity.

There are significant differences in the rates of long commutes by metropolitan area, which are broken out in *Table 6*, below. The Riverside, California metropolitan area has the largest shares of public transit riders with long commutes for all groups analyzed. In Riverside, half of white workers, half of Latino workers, about two-thirds of African-American workers, and about three-quarters of Asian-American workers who commute by public transit have long commutes.

Table 6. Percentage of Workers Commuting by Public Transit with "Long Commutes"* in Selected Metropolitan Areas by Race and Latino Ethnicity, 2011-2015

	White	Latino	African American	Asian American
Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Roswell, GA	35.1%	27.3%	48.8%	32.6%
Boston-Cambridge-Newton, MA-NH	32.9%	26.6%	34.7%	31.1%
Chicago-Naperville-Elgin, IL-IN-WI	35.2%	33.9%	41.0%	37.4%
Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington, TX	37.4%	36.0%	48.1%	49.3%
Detroit-Warren-Dearborn, MI	22.4%	19.3%	45.0%	26.1%
Houston-The Woodlands-Sugar Land, TX	43.6%	32.5%	41.8%	33.8%
Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim, CA	37.7%	38.7%	46.8%	40.3%
Miami-Fort Lauderdale-West Palm Beach, FL	39.3%	38.0%	42.3%	33.8%
Minneapolis-St. Paul-Bloomington, MN-WI	18.1%	22.0%	27.3%	19.3%
New York-Newark-Jersey City, NY-NJ-PA	37.7%	36.0%	44.8%	44.6%
Philadelphia-Camden-Wilmington, PA-NJ-DE-MD	31.4%	31.0%	32.8%	33.2%
Phoenix-Mesa-Scottsdale, AZ	41.5%	36.2%	39.5%	36.2%
Riverside-San Bernardino-Ontario, CA	50.8%	51.1%	65.1%	74.2%
San Antonio-New Braunfels, TX	32.5%	34.2%	37.4%	48.8%
San Diego-Carlsbad, CA	42.9%	41.6%	46.4%	29.9%
San Francisco-Oakland-Hayward, CA	30.9%	33.3%	40.2%	35.7%
San Jose-Sunnyvale-Santa Clara, CA	49.3%	35.4%	44.5%	51.3%
Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue, WA	29.8%	33.0%	41.0%	27.0%
Urban Honolulu, HI	27.6%	35.9%	20.5%	38.0%
Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV	29.3%	31.1%	40.0%	39.3%

* Individuals who have one-way door-to-door commutes of 60 minutes or longer.

Note: Racial categories exclude Latinos.

Source: Author's analysis of American Community Survey data from IPUMS-USA, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org.

We can contrast the long-commute rates in Riverside with the Minneapolis metro area, which has the lowest rates of long commutes for workers using public transit for whites and Asian Americans, and the second lowest for Latinos and African Americans. In Minneapolis, roughly one-fifth of white, Asian-American, and Latino workers using public transit have long commutes, and about one-quarter of African-American workers using public transit have long commutes.

Similar to the national picture, the relative disparity with whites exists in most of the metropolitan areas, but it is fairly small. The largest relative disparity for all the people-of-color groups is for African Americans in Detroit, where black workers commuting by public transit are twice as likely to have long commutes as their white counterparts. For Asian Americans, the largest relative disparity is in San Antonio and Riverside, where Asian-American workers commuting by public transit are 1.5 times as likely as white workers to have long public-transit commutes. For Latino commuters, the largest relative disparity is in Urban Honolulu, where they are 1.3 times as likely as white workers commuting by public transit to have long commutes.

The Texas A&M Transportation Institute reports that across the U.S. in 2014, “travel delays due to traffic congestion caused drivers to waste more than 3 billion gallons of fuel and kept travelers stuck in their cars for nearly 7 billion extra hours—42 hours per rush-hour commuter,” for a total nationwide price tag of \$160 billion, or \$960 per commuter.²⁰ In the largest metropolitan areas, the traffic-congestion cost averages over \$1,400 per commuter.²¹ With smart and sufficient public transit investments, we can reduce travel times for all commuters—those using public transit and, by reducing traffic congestion, those using private vehicles.

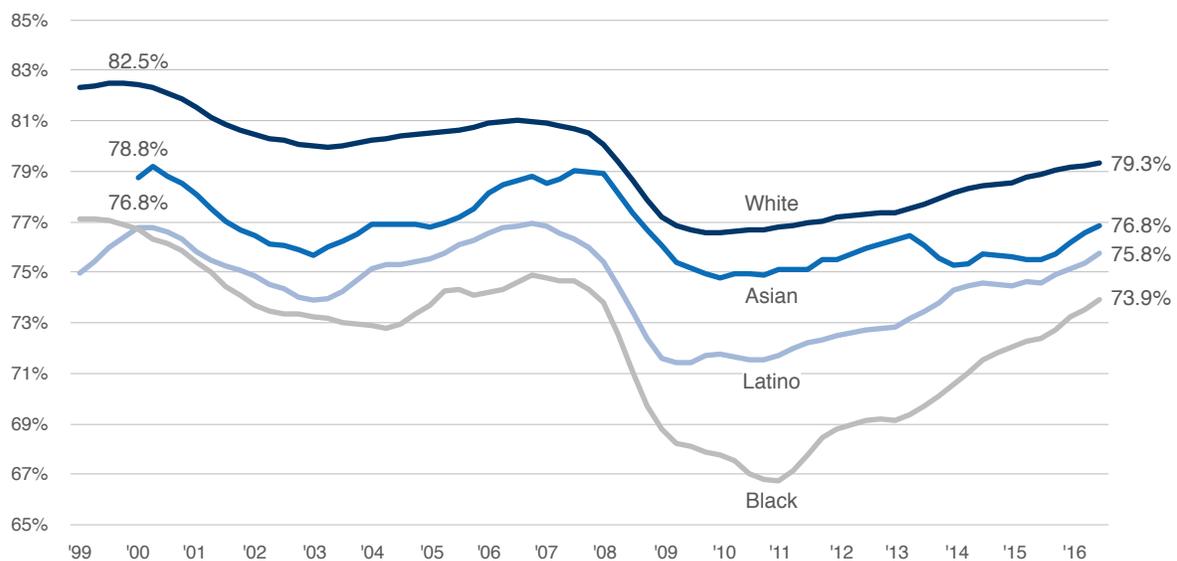
The Jobs Benefits of Public Transit Infrastructure Investments for Workers of Color

Public transit investments are important to racial equity for two reasons: (1) efficient and affordable public transit makes it easier for people of color to participate fully in society and achieve their full potential; and (2) public transit investments are also an important mechanism to address the hidden jobs crises facing communities of color. The second part of this report will address the jobs issues.

The Hidden Jobs Crises: Low Employment Rates and Employment-Rate Hierarchies

The American economy has improved significantly from the depths of the Great Recession. Today's low unemployment rate, however, paints too rosy a picture. Substantial numbers of workers are not in the labor market and therefore are not being counted as unemployed.²² A better measure of the labor market in times like these is the employment-to-population ratio, often called the employment rate. The employment rate gives the percentage of the population that is working, whether or not they have given up looking for work and dropped out of the labor market.

Figure 5. Employment-to-Population Ratios* for 25- to 54-Year-Olds by Race and Latino Ethnicity, 1999-2017



* 4-quarter rolling averages.

Note: Latinos are *included* in the racial categories.

Source: Author's analysis of American Community Survey data from IPUMS-USA, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org.

To compare our current labor market with the time in recent years when it was healthiest, we have to look to the labor market of the year 2000. This comparison reveals that the 2000 employment rates were higher for all of the racial and ethnic groups analyzed than today's rates. In short, our current labor market is not as strong as it could be. If we had employment rates today like we had in 2000, there would be about 3 million more whites working, about 60,000 more Latinos working, about a half a million more African Americans working, and about 200,000 more Asian Americans working, as *Figure 5* illustrates.²³

As also seen in *Figure 5*, there is a racial hierarchy of employment rates in the United States. Whites have the highest rate, Asian Americans the second highest, Latinos the third highest, and African Americans the lowest. Racial discrimination in hiring is a major factor behind this racial hierarchy. A meta-analysis of field studies where “testers” of different races or ethnicities present equivalent qualifications when applying for the same or similar jobs finds that employers express greater interest in hiring white workers over similarly qualified Latino workers and Latino workers over similarly qualified black workers.²⁴

The number of jobs “missing” relative to 2000, as described above, provides the number of jobs needed to return us to the employment rate of 2000—which would also recreate the employment-rate hierarchy found in 2000. In order to eliminate that hierarchy and have all groups reach a similar rate of employment as white workers did in 2000, we would need an even greater number of jobs:

- Instead of 60,000 more Latinos working, there would need to be 1.6 million.
- Instead of a half a million more African Americans working, there would need to be 1.5 million.
- Instead of 200,000 more Asian Americans working, there would need to be 500,000.

To have a truly healthy and equitable labor market, we need 6.6 million more jobs than we have today.

One of the best ways to create the millions of jobs needed to achieve racial equity in our labor market is with infrastructure investments. The U.S. has tremendous infrastructure needs. Infrastructure investments will create jobs today, and our improved infrastructure will also help us create jobs tomorrow.

Job Creation from Public Transit Infrastructure Investments

When many people think of the jobs created from infrastructure investments, they picture white male construction workers. This view is not inaccurate, but it is very incomplete. Often in large infrastructure projects, a majority of the jobs created are outside of construction. Additionally, not all construction workers are white men. Big infrastructure projects create a large number of jobs spread fairly broadly across the economy, and thus, they are an important mechanism to increase employment for people of color.

Infrastructure Jobs Are Not Just in Construction

Imagine an infrastructure project that will create 2 train stations, connect the stations with train tracks, and set up 2 trains to run between the stations. If one merely places construction workers at the sites where the stations will be located, nothing will happen. They cannot conjure a train system into existence with only their bare hands. They need tools, machinery, supplies, and materials. All of these things are manufactured goods. Construction can be thought of as the assembly of manufactured materials and goods; without the manufactured materials and goods, there is nothing to construct. For this reason, infrastructure projects also support manufacturing jobs. The trains that will eventually be running on the tracks also have to be manufactured.

The required machinery, supplies, and materials have to be transported to the construction site. All of the debris and waste has to be moved to dumps. Infrastructure projects support transportation jobs.

To get all of this work done, contracts have to be written up, all the workers have to be paid regularly, the supplies and materials have to be ordered, and a vast number of other administrative tasks have to be completed. Infrastructure projects also support jobs for attorneys, engineers, architects, paralegals, administrative assistants, accountants, and others. In short, there are a lot more workers required for a project than those we see at a particular construction site. While a large share of the jobs created from infrastructure projects are in construction, the majority of the jobs created can be non-construction jobs.

Three Points About Infrastructure Investments

Recent studies²⁵ highlight 3 important lessons regarding the jobs impact analyses of infrastructure investments. The first is that infrastructure job creation covers many more occupations

than construction. In the analysis of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act's "green investments" (i.e., investments for clean energy, energy efficiency, environmental cleanup, etc.), only 30 percent of the jobs created were estimated to be construction jobs. For the major transportation reauthorization bill known as SAFETEA-LU, 38 percent of the jobs were predicted to be in construction. And, for the transportation proposal by the advocacy organization Transportation for America (nicknamed T4A Transit-Plus), only 14 percent of the estimated jobs were construction jobs. Because infrastructure investments create a majority of jobs that are not in the construction field, advocates interested in racial equity and infrastructure job creation need to think more strategically about non-construction jobs.

Second, investing more money generally creates more jobs. This is an obvious but easily forgotten point. The T4A Transit-Plus proposal was estimated at the time to create about 70,000 jobs for African Americans, but the SAFETEA-LU bill was estimated to create about 600,000 jobs for black workers, nearly 9 times as many. Much of the difference stems from the fact that the T4A Transit-Plus is a \$34 billion proposal and SAFETEA-LU proposes an investment of \$500 billion. Generally, the larger the investment, the larger the jobs impact for all racial and ethnic groups.

Third, different kinds of infrastructure investments lead to differences in the racial and ethnic distribution of jobs. *In all the proposals in the recent studies—regardless of the types of infrastructure investments made—all of the racial and ethnic groups analyzed gain jobs.* But the overall share of jobs going to different racial and ethnic groups differs by the types of investments made. If one is interested in closing the employment-rate gap with whites, then one would want infrastructure investments that provide a larger share of jobs to groups with lower employment rates. In the T4A Transit-Plus proposal, 14 percent of the jobs created are projected to go to African Americans. In the SAFETEA-LU bill, 9 percent of the jobs are projected to go to African Americans. Looking at the share of jobs going to African Americans only, the T4A Transit-Plus seems better for black workers. But recall that there are 9 times more jobs being created for black workers in SAFETEA-LU because it is a much larger investment. Based only on the number of jobs created for African Americans, SAFETEA-LU is better for black workers. The desire to create more jobs and the desire to reduce employment disparities can be in conflict.

Public Transit Infrastructure Investments are Good for Job Creation for People of Color

The ideal infrastructure plan is one with a large investment that achieves equity goals around employment, and creates infrastructure that is useful to communities of color and American society as a whole. Public transit infrastructure investments can achieve these goals. Of the 12 infrastructure analyses reviewed in the analysis in *Table 7* below, it is clear that the more transit-focused proposals do best in terms of the distribution of jobs for people of color.

Not all construction workers are white; in fact, Latinos are overrepresented in construction.²⁶ Because of this overrepresentation, Latinos do well from a racial equity perspective in nearly all of the infrastructure investment proposals. They do best under SAFETEA-LU, where their share of the jobs created is 6 percentage points above their share of workers in the economy. They do less well but still obtain a greater share of jobs than their share in the economy under T4A Transit-Plus.

African Americans do best under the more transit-heavy infrastructure investment proposals. The T4A Transit-Plus is the best proposal for black workers; the black share of jobs created is 3 percentage points higher than their share of workers in the economy. Under SAFETEA-LU, the share of jobs African Americans obtain is 2 percentage points *below* their share of workers in the economy.

While all groups gain jobs from infrastructure investments, Asian Americans are the least likely to receive a disproportionate share of jobs. In 10 of the 12 infrastructure proposals examined in *Table 7*, Asian Americans receive a smaller share of jobs than their share of the workforce. The best proposal for Asian-American workers achieves a share of jobs created that matches the share of Asian-American workers in the economy. This occurs under the T4A Transit-Plus proposal.

One major weakness with T4A Transit-Plus is that it is small and therefore creates a relatively small number of jobs. It is certainly possible to create an infrastructure investment proposal that is larger than the \$34 billion T4A Transit-Plus proposal. The American Society of Civil Engineers estimates that we have a \$90 billion rehabilitation backlog in transit.²⁷ The United States also lags behind other wealthy nations in its use of public transit. Canadians use public transit twice as much as we do. People in Great Britain average nearly 5 times as many trips per capita on public transit as people in America. The Germans average nearly 6 times as many.²⁸ If we wished, we could substantially increase investments to double or triple the use of public transit in the United States.

Table 7. The Share of Jobs minus Share of Workers in the Economy by Race and Latino Ethnicity for Selected Infrastructure Investment Proposals

	White	Latino	African American	Asian American
ARRA Green Investments	-1	5	-2	-1
Broad Infrastructure*	-3	2	1	0
End the Sequester*	-1	3	-3	-1
Energy Efficiency*	1	4	-4	-2
Freight Rail Expansion	5	0	-2	-2
Modernize Transportation	0	1	1	-1
PERI's Green Recovery	-3	5	0	-1
SAFETEA-LU	-2	6	-2	-1
T4A Liveable Communities	-3	5	0	-1
T4A Transit-Plus	-4	2	3	0
Transit Action Plan	-2	5	0	-1
Transit Backlog	-3	4	2	-1

* "Broad Infrastructure" refers to Scenario Three, "End the Sequester" refers to Scenario One, and "Energy Efficiency" refers to Scenario Two in Bivens, "The Short- and Long-Term Impact of Infrastructure Investments," 2014.
 Source: Austin, "Infrastructure Investments and Latino and African American Job Creation," 2013; Bivens, "The Short- and Long-Term Impact of Infrastructure Investments," 2014.

Going beyond the distribution of jobs created by public transit investments, it is also important to work to further diversify the construction industry. In order to increase the representation of workers of color in construction projects, it is essential to obtain project labor agreements. These interventions are useful. But we must remember that often most of the jobs created from infrastructure investments are not construction jobs. To have the maximum impact, race equity advocates need to think strategically about the types of infrastructure investments that produce the most equity overall—not just in construction jobs. Public transit investments can deliver a disproportionate share of jobs to the groups with lowest employment rates.

Conclusion

The American Society of Civil Engineers gives America's public transit a D-minus grade, down from a D grade in 2013. We have a tremendous need for significant increases in public transit investments. This need is only growing over time, as our large metropolitan areas increase in population and become more congested with traffic.

People of color are more likely to lack a vehicle at home, which causes them to rely more on public transit. Despite this, whites still make up a large share of the workers commuting by public transit. Too many workers of all racial and ethnic backgrounds face long commutes on public transit, requiring time that could be spent on family, recreation, exercise, education, and other activities that could enrich their lives. We can help all American households, and disproportionately households of color, by improving our public transit systems so that workers can get to their destinations faster and with more ease.

We need millions of jobs to address the hidden crises of low employment rates and employment-rate racial hierarchies in the American economy. Infrastructure investments can create millions of jobs today, and lay the foundation for future job creation, most of which will be non-construction jobs. Transit-focused infrastructure projects work well for generating sufficient shares of the overall jobs created to people of color to begin to address the persistent racial hierarchy in employment rates. Smart, substantial, and racial-equity-minded investments in public transit can address all of these problems.

Endnotes

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3. Rosabeth Moss Kanter, *Move: Putting America's Infrastructure Back in the Lead* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2015), p. 184.
4. Evelyn Nieves, "In the Wake of a Teen-Ager's Death, a Cloud of Racism, Then a Lawsuit," *New York Times*, December 19, 1996.
5. Terry Mikesell, "Film Highlights Groundbreaking Tactic, Decision Resulting in Safe Bus Ride to Mall," *The Columbus Dispatch*, June 22, 2007.
6. This information was shared with the author via email by Eva Henry, Adam County Colorado Commissioner, July 27, 2017. The information about Latino ethnicity is based on the author's examination of segregation map data from Chris Walker, "How Racially Segregated is Denver Compared to Other Major U.S. Cities?" *Westword*, April 29, 2016, <http://www.westword.com/news/how-racially-segregated-is-denver-compared-to-other-major-us-cities-7850561>. The following is Henry's full statement:

To drive from the south Denver metro area, through downtown, and continue north on Interstate 25 is like taking a trip through a model for infrastructure inequality. Commuters in the south metro drive on a stretch of the interstate that offers 5-6 lanes of traffic with a light rail system operating parallel to the roadway. The ride is aesthetically pleasing as well with designed sound walls and public art on display.

Once past downtown, drivers encounter a much different experience. Three lanes of traffic were finally expanded to four in the past two years, but the fourth lane is a High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lane with a toll associated for drivers who have less than three people in the vehicle. There are no HOV or toll lanes south of Interstate 70. Noticeably absent on this stretch of interstate is the presence of any public art and critical light rail service. Without rail service commuters face limited options forcing more traffic onto this stretch of I-25. According to the Department of Transportation, the service level on this portion of the interstate hovers between a D and an F rating.

This critical transportation infrastructure provides any area with an economic development advantage when attempting to attract new businesses. It also has the adverse effect for the areas that lag behind. When commuters who live south of Denver choose to go downtown for work or leisure, they have better roads, no tolls and the option to take light rail. These areas are typically more affluent than those in the north metro area where cash-strapped residents are forced to pay a fee for the convenience of a fourth lane on the interstate while taking a hit to their quality of life due to longer commutes due to the lack of light rail.

Equity in the distribution of resources for critical infrastructure is vital for all economic classes, and any disproportionate allocation of these dollars can serve to further the divide between more affluent areas and working class neighborhoods.

7. Kanter, *Move*, p. 185.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*
10. Corinne Ramey, "America's Unfair Rules of the Road: How Our Transportation System Discriminates Against the Most Vulnerable," *Slate*, February 27, 2015, http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/politics/2015/02/america_s_transportation_system_discriminates_against_minorities_and_poor.html.
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14. American Society of Civil Engineers, "Transit."
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19. Ralph Buehler and John Pucher, "Demand for Public Transport in Germany and the USA: An Analysis of Rider Characteristics," *Transport Reviews*, Vol. 32, No. 5, September 2012, p. 543.
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22. As of July 7, 2017, the Economic Policy Institute estimated that there were 1.5 million “missing workers,” <http://www.epi.org/publication/missing-workers/>.
23. To eliminate seasonal variations, this analysis is based on a comparison of the average employment-to-population ratio from third quarter of 1999 to the second quarter of 2000 with the third quarter of 2016 to the second quarter of 2017. Since Asian American alone (as opposed to Asian American and Pacific Islander combined) data is not available prior to 2000, for Asian Americans, data from the third quarter of 2000 to the second quarter of 2001 is used to represent 2000. The population average is of the third quarter of 2016 to the second quarter of 2017.
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