

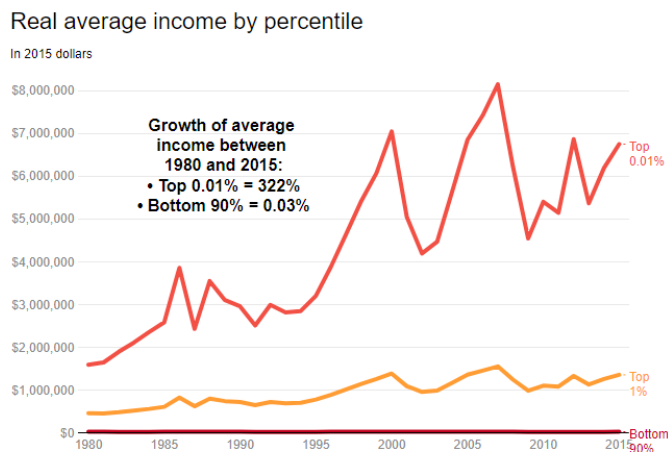


# WHY TRANSIT MATTERS

## JOBS & SOCIAL JUSTICE

### Want a ladder to the middle class? Support public transit

*“Urban transit systems in most American cities have become a genuine civil rights issue because the layout of rapid-transit systems determines the accessibility of jobs.”* - Martin Luther King, Jr., A Testament of Hope, January 1969



Source: 2012 Urban Mobility Report,  
Texas Transportation Institute, Dec. 2012

Across the United States, Americans are finding it harder and harder to attain good jobs, support their families, and enter the shrinking middle class. Economic growth has slowed since the 1970's and the income gap has widened. Income growth for the middle and lower earning households has slowed sharply while income at the top continues to grow. In terms of wealth, this widening gap has resulted in the top 3% of the wealth distribution owning over half of all wealth in the US, with a majority of that wealth concentrated in a smaller percentage at the very top.<sup>1</sup>

The growth in inequality is related to many factors, but very influential among them is the accessibility of good jobs. Urban

growth and sprawl has led to good jobs leaving urban areas for harder to reach suburbs and exurbs. Good Jobs First writes, “For working families with or without a car, sprawl amounts to a tax upon their standard of living. It suppresses their incomes and raises their bills.” Sprawl disproportionately affects low income people who often do not own cars or if they do, end up spending as much or more on transportation (mostly auto related costs) than they do on housing.<sup>2</sup>

Income inequality, the erosion of the middle class, and the bankrupting of American families is the premier social and economic justice issue of our times.

*One way to help close this gap:* public transit.

### Better public transit leads to...

#### Access to good jobs

While most low-income workers live in transit accessible urban areas, higher paying jobs continue to be located in the less accessible suburbs. Transit already provides affordable access in many ways, but investment in public transit will only amplify its impact on low income communities. The income inequity gap will shrink with increased access to education and good jobs through public transportation. Enabling everyone to reach good jobs via public transportation means more money for family savings, health care, home equity, and college educations.

Not only does expanded public transportation provides access to existing jobs and opportunities, it creates jobs. Transit expansion projects, when inclusive of all workers, can be a “pathway for disadvantaged communities to share in economic success.” Studies have shown that in 20 different metro areas, redistributing half of highway funds to transit projects would create more than 1 million new jobs over a five-year period.

This would result in more frequent, reliable and expanded coverage as well as lower fares and increased demand.

## **Saving hard earned cash**

U.S. workers are having a hard time saving money and security for their families. With a growing percentage of incomes going toward transportation and housing costs, there is less left over for other necessities. A recent study estimated 78% of full time workers live paycheck to paycheck and 71% say they are now in debt.<sup>4</sup> These statistics show that it is becoming increasingly difficult for Americans to save money. AAA estimates that the average cost of owning a car to be about \$8,500 a year.<sup>5</sup> When transit is a viable option it allows working families to forgo purchasing an additional car or live without a car, saving money on fuel, insurance and car payments. Every dollar not spent on transportation costs can be put toward other household needs, savings, and greater economic stability.

## **Higher Quality of life**

More access to public transit means more money in the pockets of American workers, additional dollars that are invested in the local economy or continued education. Another recent study<sup>6</sup> found a correlation between cities with lower car ownership levels have higher education levels. When jobs are located near housing centers and public transit facilities it can also mean more time outside of work and commuting spent with family.

## **Sources**

1. [A Guide to Statistics on Historical Trends in Income Inequality](#), *Center on Budget and Policy Priorities*, October 11, 2017.
2. [Connecting Jobs to Public Transit](#), *Good Jobs First*.
3. [Transportation for All: Good for Families, Communities, and the Economy](#), *Policy Link*, May 10, 2016.
4. [Most Americans Live Paycheck to Paycheck](#), Dickler, *Personal Finance CNBC*, August 24, 2017.
5. [Your Driving Costs](#), Stepp, *AAA Newsroom*, August 23, 2017.
6. [Why Do the Smartest Cities Have the Smallest Share of Cars?](#), Thompson, *The Atlantic*, January 22, 2014.