



Getting to Work: Transportation Policy and Access to Job Opportunities

*“Getting to Work: Transportation Policy and Access to Job Opportunities,” is the fourth in a series of reports by The Leadership Conference Education Fund examining the key roles transportation and mobility play in the struggle for civil rights and equal opportunity. The reports highlight critical issues and make recommendations for policymakers as they draft a reauthorization of the nation’s surface transportation programs, which will allocate hundreds of billions of federal dollars for transportation projects that will have a profound impact on every person in our country. **To read the reports:** www.civilrights.org/transportation*

Transportation policies can have a significant impact on employment opportunity. Congress is now considering the surface transportation reauthorization bill, which will allocate funds for highways, rail, bus, and other modes of transportation across the country. The projects it funds will not only affect Americans’ access to existing jobs, it will generate hundreds of thousands of new jobs and have a significant impact on employment opportunity.

Lack of transportation isolates many Americans from jobs. For decades, metropolitan areas have been expanding outward, and jobs have been moving farther away from the low-income and minority people who disproportionately remain in urban cores. For many of these people, inadequate or unaffordable transportation is a significant barrier to employment.

- **People and jobs—a geographic mismatch:** As jobs move to auto-dependent suburbs, those without access to cars lose out on employment opportunities. Today, more people work in the outlying areas than in city centers, but lower-income people and people of color disproportionately remain in the urban core. About 50 percent of welfare recipients live in city centers, as do 60 percent of African Americans. But even low-income and minority suburbanites find themselves disconnected from job growth, which is taking place mostly in higher-income suburban areas.
- **Car dependence and employment opportunities:** The outlying areas where job growth is taking place are generally accessible only by car; many areas within cities and inner suburbs, along with most rural areas, are also inaccessible by public transportation, walking or biking. Because of the high expense of car ownership, many low-income people are effectively walled off from these new opportunities. Jobs in car-dependent areas are disproportionately inaccessible to people of color: 19 percent of African Americans and 13.7 percent of Latinos lack access to cars, compared with less than 5 percent of Whites.

Transportation job creation has not benefitted all Americans equally. More than 14 million jobs—about 11 percent of civilian jobs in the U.S.—are transportation related. But transportation dollars overwhelmingly go toward building new highways that

expand metropolitan areas. These jobs are frequently located far from where most low-income people live and are not accessible by public transportation.

Currently, women and minorities are underrepresented in transportation construction employment. In 2008, African Americans comprised only 6 percent of the industry, and women comprised only 3 percent. Latinos are disproportionately employed in lower-paying transportation sector jobs and concentrated in a few occupations.

A sound surface transportation bill would include:

- **Increased access to affordable transportation:** Federal funds must be available to serve the transportation needs of public transit workers. We must invest in transit options that will enable low-income people to reach a greater variety of job opportunities—including transportation projects in outlying areas.
- **A dedicated focus on job creation:** It is critically important to maximize the job creation power of every transportation dollar we spend. This includes: selecting modes of transportation that generate the most jobs; incentivizing projects that locate jobs in underserved communities; and vigorously enforcing requirements for equal opportunity programs and grants targeting disadvantaged businesses.

Advocates must mobilize to educate and advocate for a shared vision of transportation equity.

For equal employment opportunity to be a practical reality, we must invest in transit options that get people to where the jobs are. Through the surface transportation reauthorization bill, the federal government will infuse billions of dollars into the economy, creating thousands of jobs. How we allocate these dollars will have a significant impact on whether low-income and minority workers have an equal chance to fill these jobs.

Civil and human rights advocates can shape this debate by advocating for public transit projects, rebuilding in core areas, supporting diversity in contracting, and incentivizing projects that produce long-term, local job creation.