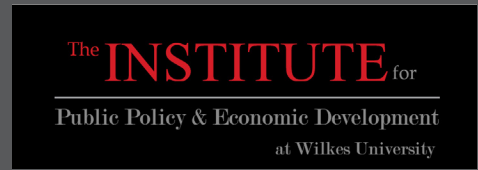




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Northeastern Pennsylvania Equitable Transit Study

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ECONOMIC
GROWTH &
MOBILITY
PROJECT



This paper was prepared for the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia and Scranton Area Community Foundation by The Institute for Public Policy and Economic Development at Wilkes University.

The views expressed here are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia or the Federal Reserve System.



*A collaboration among Geisinger Commonwealth School of Medicine,
Keystone College, King's College, Lackawanna College, Luzerne County
Community College, Marywood University, Misericordia University,
Penn State Scranton, Penn State Wilkes-Barre, The Wright Center,
University of Scranton & Wilkes University*

INTRODUCTION

A series of 12 focus groups were conducted throughout Lackawanna and Luzerne counties to learn about transportation barriers faced by community members, particularly those from underrepresented backgrounds and those most at risk of facing transportation difficulty. This report summarizes the findings of this research in order to shed light on issues of transportation equity in northeastern Pennsylvania.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The authors of this report would like to thank all participants who took part in a focus group or interview. Without their valuable perspectives, this research would not have been possible.

The following organizations were instrumental in conducting this series of focus groups throughout the region. In many cases, they served as trusted partners that helped to engage community members in this important process.

COMMUNITY PARTNERS (LISTED ALPHABETICALLY)

CareerLink Wilkes-Barre
Greater Carbondale YMCA
Hazleton One Community Center
Luzerne County Community College
Luzerne County Head Start
Office of Congressman Lou Barletta
Office of State Senator John Yudichak
United Neighborhood Centers
Wilkes-Barre Family YMCA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The focus groups and supplemental interviews involved a total of 92 participants in various communities in Lackawanna and Luzerne counties. Throughout the conversations, a number of major underlying themes emerged regarding transportation challenges in northeastern Pennsylvania.

- **Healthcare and shopping are universally important destinations** across various ages, demographic groups, and communities. Participants also mentioned jobs, educational opportunities, child care facilities, and houses of worship as destinations to which they need transportation.
- **The most difficult-to-access places tend to be those outside the region’s urban core.** Participants mentioned suburban areas (such as Mountain Top and Dickson City) and communities along the Interstate 81 corridor between Wilkes-Barre and Scranton (such as Pittston) as more difficult to access currently. Owing to the distance, walking is not an option from many places, and participants feel limited by bus service to out-of-town locations. It was stated that many of the most desirable jobs, as well as some health care facilities, are located in these harder-to-reach communities.
- **Many participants feel that their choices are limited or nonexistent** when it comes to transportation. For some, walking and riding the bus are the only viable options. Several said that they did not want to burden friends, family, or coworkers by regularly requesting a ride.
- **For those that do feel that they have transportation choices,** these choices are shaped by a combination of perceived convenience, availability of alternatives, and cost. Those who drive typically view driving as the easiest and most convenient way to get around. Some drivers occasionally opt for other modes (for example, to reduce vehicle upkeep costs).
- **Drivers enjoy greater mobility and face fewer transportation barriers than those who do not drive.** In accordance with this, those with a driver’s license and regular access to a vehicle were more likely to assign a higher rating when asked to rate how well their transportation needs are being met on a five-point scale (with one being the worst and five being the best), compared with those without access to a car. Several participants indicated that having a car in the region is highly preferable and expressed a desire to own a car in the future. Financial reasons were cited as the greatest barrier to car ownership.
- **A lack of transportation appears to be a barrier to employment.** Several participants mentioned being unable to find or continue a job because of transportation problems. A common occurrence was being unable to get convenient transportation to out-of-town industrial parks and other commerce centers, where numerous participants indicated many of the most desirable jobs are located. Furthermore, bus service is limited on Saturdays, and there is no scheduled bus service during later evening and overnight hours. Many participants said this prevents them from commuting by bus, because many jobs do not conform to the hours during which buses operate.
- **Dissatisfaction with bus frequency, hours of operation, and weekend service** also go beyond workers who need transportation to work; these concerns were present during every focus group. Multiple individuals referenced having previously visited or lived in larger cities where bus service is more frequent and hours of service are more extensive.
- **Cost does not appear to be a significant barrier to bus transportation** for most participants. For some parents, however, traveling with children can make the bus less affordable as the costs of fares for several children add up. According to the survey, those living in households with children — particularly single parents — gave lower ratings to how their transportation needs are met.
- **Bus amenities and the rider experience also do not appear to prevent access to transportation.** Aspects of the rider experience, such as cleanliness, noise levels, and crowding on buses, were not seen as major barriers to transportation. Several participants mentioned positive interactions with bus drivers, and others mentioned that although a few drivers did not meet their expectations, the majority were good.

- **Accessible transit options play an important role.** Services such as Shared Ride and SEATS, which offer curb-to-curb transportation scheduled in advance, have helped several participants who otherwise would not have had access to transportation. However, several mentioned that scheduling service in advance can make using the service more difficult. These services are often used by seniors and those with disabilities with a cost subsidy, which may be one explanation for participants over 55 assigning higher-than-average ratings to how well their transportation needs are met. Other transportation services not provided by transit agencies were not generally used by participants, although in one focus group, there was praise regarding a shuttle van provided by a senior center.
- **There may be a need for more information about transportation options.** Language barriers appear to be keeping Spanish speakers from getting information such as bus routes and schedules. Participants of various backgrounds mentioned that more real-time information on bus locations could help make riding the bus a more viable option. For example, if a bus does not arrive at a stop at the scheduled time, someone waiting may not know if it has come early or if it is running late. Some measures that would offer real-time service information have been launched, and others are in the planning stages; in these cases, effective communication will be needed to let the public know about the new features.

RESEARCH METHODS

A focus group is a semistructured discussion led by a trained facilitator. The focus groups were facilitated by members of The Institute for Public Policy & Economic Development's research staff using a predetermined script and question list. The questions covered topics such as what places participants typically need to get to and how they choose to get to them, what factors influence their transportation decisions, experiences with public transportation systems, what is working well and not working well in their personal transportation situation, and their thoughts on where to find information about transportation solutions. (See the appendix for the script and question list.)

All focus group participants signed an informed consent form in accordance with Wilkes University institutional review board (IRB) guidelines.

Focus Group Location

Focus groups were split between Lackawanna and Luzerne counties and were held in several communities in order to gain broad representation from throughout the study area.

- Three in the Scranton area (two English, one with a Spanish interpreter)
- Four in the Wilkes-Barre area
- Two in Hazleton (one English, one with a Spanish interpreter)
- One in Carbondale
- One in Nanticoke
- One in West Pittston

The Institute collaborated with trusted partners in each community in order to secure space and participants for each focus group. The partners helped identify potential participants, provided locations, and in some cases provided interpreters. This varied based on the resources of each partner organization and the nature of the population being sought. The number of participants in each focus group ranged from two to 12, with an average of 7.6 participants per focus group. One focus group (Carbondale) was split into two sessions in back-to-back times to best fit the scheduling needs of participants, but data were aggregated, and the sessions were treated as a single focus group for this analysis.

Focus Group Composition

To ensure representativeness of focus groups, the following constituencies were targeted:

1. Individuals with no access to a car/nondrivers
2. Seniors (65 and older)
3. Individuals with disabilities
4. African Americans
5. Hispanic/Latino individuals
6. Immigrants/those with limited English proficiency

7. Refugees
8. Parents, including single parents
9. Individuals living in poverty
10. Individuals living in rural areas
11. Unemployed/underemployed
12. Late-night workers, or workers with nontraditional hours
13. Community college students/commuter students

Representation was achieved for each of the target populations except for refugees, despite efforts made to secure participation of a suitable community partner. No participation was achieved for those speaking languages other than English or Spanish (various refugee populations, for example). Demographic statistics for the population were collected via a questionnaire to ensure these objectives were being met; analysis of that data is presented later.

Focus groups were a mix of heterogeneous and homogenous. Although it was not the intention of the research protocol to specifically divide individuals into focus groups by the previously mentioned classifications, some groups were overrepresented, underrepresented, or not represented in any single focus group owing to the nature of holding in-person focus groups in specific community spaces. However, the two focus groups with Spanish interpreter support were composed of Spanish speakers only.

Individual interviews by telephone were also offered to boost participation, particularly among harder-to-reach groups. One telephone interview was completed, and data collected were incorporated into the combined focus group analysis.

Participant Compensation

Focus group participants and the interviewee received a \$25 gift card to a choice of several grocery, convenience, or general merchandise retailers appropriate to the community in which the focus group was held. Gift cards were provided to the participants of focus groups directly after the session and sent via mail to the interview participant. The gift cards were provided by the Scranton Area Community Foundation and distributed to participants by The Institute.

Data Management and Analysis

During each focus group, the facilitator oversaw the audio recording. Additionally, a research intern or member of the research staff was present as a note taker, transcribing individual points and themes discussed for each question.

All notes written during the focus groups were transcribed by the note taker, who also used the audio recordings of the sessions to supplement the notes taken during the focus group. This ensured that all relevant information shared by participants was reflected in the text notes.

The transcribed notes were coded using the NVivo software platform. Unique codes were developed to represent different sentiments or themes that were brought up in discussion. The research staff developed the coding system and completed the coding for all notes. The information was then analyzed thematically and by specific code in order to prepare a report of themes and findings from the focus groups.

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

There were 92 focus group participants. Each participant was asked to fill out a worksheet with a series of demographic questions and several questions on transportation perception and choices. Efforts were made to ensure that marginalized populations and those most at risk of transportation difficulty were well-represented in the research.

Various household types were represented, including those with and without children. The majority of participants live in a household with children, and 23 percent were single parent families with children. Participants also varied in age — nearly 40 percent were younger than 35, and 38.5 percent were 55 or older. Participant incomes were tilted heavily toward lower-income households. Nearly half had an income of less than \$20,000 per year.

Just over half of participants identified their race as white/Caucasian. Over one-fourth identified as Hispanic/Latino, and other racial and ethnic identities represented included black/African-American and multiracial. Although 25 percent of participants indicated they were born outside the United States, none identified as entering the country as refugee. Many participants from a Hispanic/Latino background refused to answer the question about refugee status, perhaps because it

was perceived as too close to a question about the legal status of that person’s entry to the United States.

Participants’ home ZIP codes reflected various parts of the two-county region. Nearly 29 percent live in Scranton or an adjacent ZIP code, 23 percent live in Wilkes-Barre or an adjacent ZIP code, and 22 percent live in Hazleton or an adjacent ZIP code. The remaining 25.6 percent live elsewhere, as shown in the chart below.

Men were underrepresented in the research, making up about one in five participants. Over 22 percent self-identified as having a disability, and 25.6 percent indicated that they had attended a college, community college, trade school, or other continuing education in the previous year.

Among those employed, over one-third work Saturdays and Sundays in addition to weekdays. Although most (82 percent) work during traditional daytime work hours, 29 percent work in the evening hours, and nearly 15 percent each work in the early morning hours and during late-night hours.

About half of workers drive to work alone. The next-largest share, 18 percent, get a ride with a friend or family member, followed by another 15 percent who ride with one or more coworkers. Another 15 percent walk or bike, and 12 percent use public transportation. The average commute time is about 20 minutes. When asked the longest time they would be willing to commute to work, the average response was 36.4 minutes.

See the appendix for additional demographic information.

TRANSPORTATION SURVEY QUESTIONS

Participants were also asked several questions about transportation on the same questionnaire. They were asked to rate how well their transportation needs were met on a scale from one to five, in which one is worst and five is best. The average score among all participants was 3.073.

Public transit usage frequency was spread between regular users, occasional users, and nonusers. About 21 percent of participants never use public transportation, 46 percent use it rarely or sometimes, and nearly 33 percent of participants use public transportation most of the time or always.

Over half of participants have a valid driver’s license. Twelve percent have a driver’s license but do not have access to a car, making up 22 percent of participants with a valid driver’s license.

Participant Demographics: Transportation Circumstances		
	Number	Percent
Uses public transportation always	18	19.6%
Uses public transportation most of the time	12	13.0%
Uses public transportation some of the time	22	23.9%
Uses public transportation rarely	21	22.8%
Uses public transportation never	19	20.7%
Valid driver's license	49	53.3%
With access to a car	36	39.1%
Without access to a car	11	12.0%
No valid driver's license	43	46.7%

* The number of responses for car access do not sum owing to several nonresponses to the car access question.

FOCUS GROUP KEY THEMES AND FINDINGS

Varied Modes of Transportation

Participants' modes of getting around were mixed. All 12 focus groups included bus riders, and many included individuals who walk, drive, or ride in another person's car, or drive in their own car. Some participants also used taxis, bicycles, or accessibility transit services that provide curb-to-curb service and typically require an advance reservation. One individual reported getting to and from a senior center using a shuttle provided by that senior center.

Among those who rode or drove in another person's car, some borrowed cars from family members, whereas others reported getting rides from a friend, coworker, or neighbor. Among this latter group, it was commonly reported that they exchanged money as compensation for the ride.

Many participants use multiple modes of transportation depending on their destination, the time of day, the purpose of their trip, or other factors.

Convenience and Cost Shape Mode Choice

For many participants, the availability of different modes and those individuals' perceptions of their relative ease and convenience shaped mode choice. Two facets of convenience that participants cited most frequently were time and distance. Because bus riders often wait at least a few minutes for the bus, and a bus trip may involve multiple stops or a transfer at a bus terminal, several participants indicated that walking is faster if the destination is relatively close.

Those who drive typically view driving as the easiest and most convenient way to get around. As a result, they often choose driving over other modes when possible. Even for those without cars, some see getting a ride with another person as more convenient than using the bus because of the added flexibility in when and where to travel and being able to make multiple stops in one trip.

For some individuals, the most convenient mode for them for a given trip can also be shaped by whether they are traveling with children (children may not be able to walk as far as adults) or whether they are carrying shopping bags (walking or riding the bus is more difficult with bags). Weather can also be a factor: Weather was one of the most frequently cited barriers to getting around by walking. Personal preference also shapes choice when it comes to modes such as walking and biking. Several individuals said they had previously lived in larger cities like New York or Philadelphia and were therefore accustomed to walking many places. These participants reported walking frequently in northeastern Pennsylvania, because they were already used to it. For others, walking to a destination is often preferable to waiting for a bus, especially if the duration of the trip would be about the same. One person indicated that

choosing to walk is "a part of me. I don't want to wait; I want to do things on my own time."

In addition to convenience and ease, cost is another component of mode choice for many. Some walked more frequently as a way of reducing transportation expenses. A few participants who would otherwise drive out of convenience reported that they have sometimes used the bus to save money. One person said that for them, riding the bus is cheaper than paying for gasoline for the same trip. Buses are also widely seen as a much more affordable option compared with using a taxi or ridesharing app such as Uber or Lyft.

For Some, Transportation Choices Are Limited by Circumstance

A number of participants felt that they have little or no choice when it comes to how they get to places they need to go. Many of these individuals do not have access to a car, and the lack of a personal vehicle is not by choice. Individuals in multiple focus groups stated that getting around northeastern Pennsylvania is very difficult without a car or that owning a car is practically a necessity. One person stated that "having a car in this area is a requirement, because you can't always rely on others. Living here forces you to get a car, but a lot of people can't afford it." Cost was the biggest barrier to car ownership for these participants. Among those without personal vehicles, some stated that walking is the only option available to get to destinations not served by buses or at times when buses do not run such as nights and weekends. Some mentioned that they did not want to burden others by constantly asking for rides from family, friends, or coworkers, which to them represented a further limitation on their transportation choices.

Working Toward Personal Vehicle Ownership

Many participants who do not currently have their own vehicle expressed that they would like to own a car or are hoping to purchase one in the future. Several stated that they are working toward or saving money in hopes of being able to purchase a vehicle. In general, participants with and without cars felt that the advantages of owning a vehicle were worth the financial expense of buying and maintaining a car. For most nonowners, financial reasons were the primary barriers to car ownership. A few also mentioned that they did not currently have a driver's license or know how to drive.

One individual described having to take a taxi home from work because their shift ends after the buses have stopped running in the evening. That person had started the job recently and was hoping to rent a car for the short term and eventually purchase a vehicle. That person believed that even renting a car represented a cost savings versus taking a taxi home from work daily.

Costs and Concerns of Vehicle Ownership

For some car owners, however, cost factors have resulted in their choosing to use alternative modes at least sometimes.

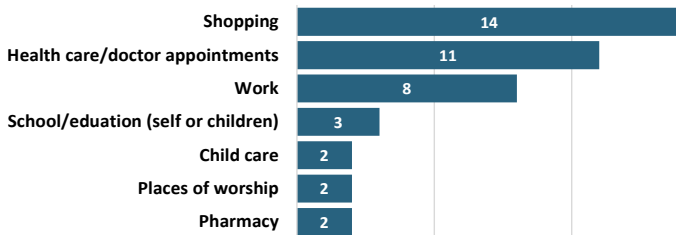
Several mentioned the potentially high costs of car repairs. One participant sometimes uses bus transportation to reduce gasoline expenses as well as wear-and-tear on the car, whereas others expressed an interest in doing this if bus routes and schedules better met their needs. Keeping vehicles in good repair is a high priority for car owners. Underlying this desire to reduce car upkeep costs is the potentially disruptive effects of unexpected mechanical problems with a person’s vehicle. One individual, who indicated that their neighborhood was not served by bus service, stated that if bus service were available, it would be a useful backup for times when the car is unavailable. Another individual living in a rural community without regular bus service even owns two cars so that they will have a backup in case of car troubles with their primary vehicle.

Shopping and Health Care Are Universally Important Reasons for Travel

Although specifics vary, there are some common types of destinations many participants identified as being the most important. Shopping and health care appointments were important to participants of all backgrounds, ages, and locations. Among health care destinations, several specifically mentioned hospitals, clinics, rehabilitation centers, and the Scranton Counseling Center.

For those who were employed, work is also a top priority. Job interviews were mentioned as well. Several individuals mentioned schools or continuing education for themselves or their children, child care facilities, and places of worship. There were also references to pharmacies specifically, which were not included in either shopping or health care.

Most Common Destinations, by number of distinct references



Although not a priority, there was also a reference to a desire for transportation for more recreation or entertainment opportunities.

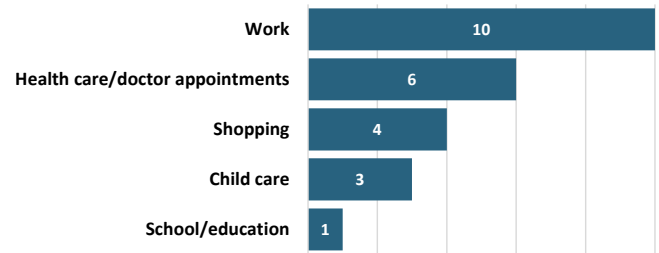
Barriers to Transportation to Work and Out-of-Town Locations

There are some differences in which destinations were most commonly mentioned above and which destinations participants had the most difficulty accessing. Jobs top the latter ranking. For many participants, getting transportation that fits with their work schedule is difficult. Workers with nontraditional schedules,

including those who work later in the evenings, on weekends, or overnight, have more limited transportation options.

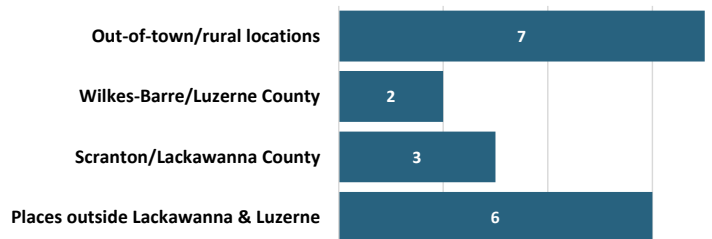
Among the geographic locations most difficult to access, there were many references to the broad category of out-of-town and rural locations. This includes suburban areas adjacent to the region’s larger cities, small towns, and communities along the Interstate 81 corridor between Scranton and Wilkes-Barre. Several participants mentioned jobs as a key reason for needing to travel to these destinations. Many employers are located in industrial and business parks in communities like Pittston, Mountain Top, and Hazle Township.

Most Difficult-to-Access Destinations, by number of distinct references



Furthermore, places outside the two counties were also mentioned as difficult to access. Several of these statements came from participants in Carbondale, who indicated that there is no existing bus route to Honesdale, Forest City, or other areas in Wayne or Susquehanna counties that are relatively close to Carbondale. Another participant mentioned Danville as a difficult location to reach owing to the lack of a bus. Danville is a major health care hub for numerous counties in northeastern Pennsylvania.

Most Difficult-to-Access Geographic Areas, by number of distinct references



Commuting by Bus Is Difficult for Some Workers

A number of participants reported that they use the bus to get to and from work. However, workers with nontraditional schedules, including those who work later in the evenings, on weekends, or overnight, have more limited transportation options, especially when it comes to regular bus service. Multiple participants indicated that getting home from work was the more difficult leg of the trip, since many work shifts end after scheduled bus service ends for the evening (during the 5 p.m. or 6 p.m. hour for most routes).

There is a perception among a number of participants that many of the higher-paying jobs available to them are located in industrial and business parks and elsewhere outside the city centers. One Wilkes-Barre area resident stated, "All the jobs are in Mountain Top. There's nothing here." These areas are not within walking distance of many residential areas, and according to some, bus service to these areas is limited and often involves transferring buses at the terminal. One person living in the Wilkes-Barre area also mentioned having turned down job offers in the Hazleton area because of a lack of bus service that would meet her needs. Hazleton and Wilkes-Barre are served by different transportation systems, with limited service between the two cities.

Several participants mentioned being unable to keep jobs because of transportation difficulties. One individual said that she got a ride to work with another coworker, but when that coworker left the job, she had to quit as well because she was left with no other viable way to get to work. Another left a retail position in one of the region's shopping malls owing to a lack of transportation. That person indicated their work schedule often involved evenings, Saturdays, and Sundays, meaning the bus was not an option, and there was no alternative means of transportation.

One individual also mentioned bus reliability as an issue in getting to work on time. That individual must rely on family members for rides if the bus is late in order to arrive on time for work. Another person mentioned that sometimes they have no one to call if they need a ride to work.

Desire for More Frequent Service and Extended Service Schedules

As described previously, some of the most frequently occurring sentiments across all focus groups was for bus service to be more frequent (shorter headways) and more extensive during evenings and weekends. Numerous participants cited a desire for longer hours of service and more frequent service, whereas there were no positive sentiments expressed toward the days and hours of service, and only one reference by a participant to current service frequency being adequate. When asked about an appropriate amount of time to wait for a bus, some participants said 10 to 15 minutes, whereas others said 30 minutes would be adequate. One individual said 60-minute intervals would be acceptable if buses were more reliably on time.

For some, the desire for increased service levels is informed by past experiences in larger cities such as New York and Philadelphia. A number of participants have lived in larger cities and may be accustomed to transportation systems with frequent headways, extensive evening and weekend service, late-night service, and multiple hubs to transfer between routes. One participant said, "I love the bus in Philadelphia; the bus and train is our life. I love it up here, but I need transportation, that's how I got successful in Philadelphia."

Bus Costs Are Competitive and the Rider Experience Is Generally Acceptable

Participants are generally satisfied with bus fare pricing. In six of the focus groups, participants said that bus costs were affordable, and none said that they were completely unaffordable. However, several individuals did state that affording bus fares becomes a bigger problem for families with several children. Another participant mentioned the possibility of introducing some kind of discount or family plan that would reduce the cost burden on families who regularly travel with children.

Many participants had positive things to say about bus drivers as well. A few did mention that although the majority were good, a few drivers could be rude.

Additionally, the rider experience is more positive than negative, and there were few complaints about bus amenities. Some mentioned that at times the bus could be cleaner or that riding the bus with a stroller is difficult. One bike rider stated that he was grateful for the bike racks that are now installed on buses. No participants in any focus group mentioned the bus riding experience (such as cleanliness, crowding, bus amenities, and safety) as a barrier to transportation or a significant disincentive to ride. A few ideas were offered to improve the rider experience, such as allowing passengers to exit from the rear door (not currently done on at least some buses), implementing reloadable fare cards, and ticket sales in more locations.

Bus Routes

Some participants indicated that the routes rather than schedules were reasons that they cannot or would not ride the bus.

Some indicated a desire for more transfer points in order to reduce the amount of time spent on a trip. When riders transfer buses, the length of the trip increases because the rider frequently must wait for the connecting bus at the terminal. It can also add substantial unnecessary mileage to some trips.

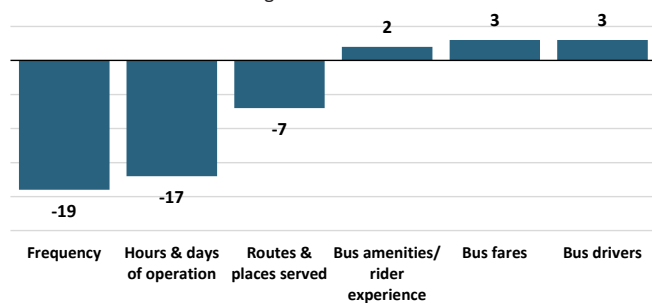
The chart below shows the net positive/negative sentiment toward several aspects of bus service, summarizing the previous analysis. Positive scores indicate more positive than negative references, whereas negative scores indicate more negative references than positive references.

When asked what is working well for them when it comes to transportation, a few participants mentioned that they are pleased that public buses exist at all.

Accessibility Transit Fills Important Role

In addition to the regular scheduled bus service, all residents of both counties are served by accessibility transit options such as Luzerne County's Shared Ride and Lackawanna County's SEATS. These services offer curb-to-curb transportation scheduled in advance. Some services are specific to the senior or disabled populations.

Net Sentiments Toward Various Aspects of Bus Service,
differential between number of positive and number of
negative statements



Several riders of these services were very thankful that they are available. One rider called the service “spectacular” when they needed transportation after a medical procedure. Another stated that after having surgery, “I had therapy three times a week, and the transportation was super. Even if the van was late, I still got picked up. I can’t complain.”

Although some said these services work well for medical appointments, others had experienced some difficulty in scheduling appointments. Others found having to call in advance to schedule a ride inconvenient: “I called [to get transportation to] a doctor’s appointment, but I had to notify two days ahead, so I had no ride.” One individual indicated having transportation difficulties because of not being old enough for subsidized van service. Another participant stated that these services are very expensive for those who do not receive a subsidized ride because of age or disability.

Other transportation services not provided by transit agencies were not generally utilized by participants, although in one focus group, there were positive things said about a shuttle van provided by a senior center.

Despite Cost, Taxis Have a Place Among Those with Transportation Difficulties

Taxis represent another mode used by some participants. Some said that taxis were not affordable enough to use regularly, but for others, they are useful despite their expense. In at least three different focus groups, one or more participants walked or took a bus to a supermarket but used a taxi or Uber for the return trip. They found the expense worthwhile because of the difficulty in walking or riding the bus with multiple bags of groceries. One individual stated that although taxis are expensive, they do offer rapid pickups and shorter trip durations than buses.

Among focus group participants, those identifying as Hispanic or Latino were particularly likely to mention using taxis on a regular basis.

Transportation Information Comes from Varied Sources, Real-Time Information Is Limited

Participants use varied sources to access information about

transportation. Some access bus routes and schedules online, whereas others use the telephone or prefer in-person information. There were several references to difficulty getting information over the phone because of busy signals. Several suggestions were made to make transportation information available at additional locations, such as public libraries, senior centers, and YMCAs.

Several participants mentioned that they would like more extensive online information, or a phone app that would include real-time bus location information. One difficulty that some have with using the bus is that if they are waiting at a stop, they do not know if the bus has already come to that stop earlier than scheduled or if it is running late. Several participants in several different focus groups said that more real-time information would make riding the bus easier and more convenient. Some real-time information platforms have been launched, and others are in the planning stages. Participants had limited awareness of these options.

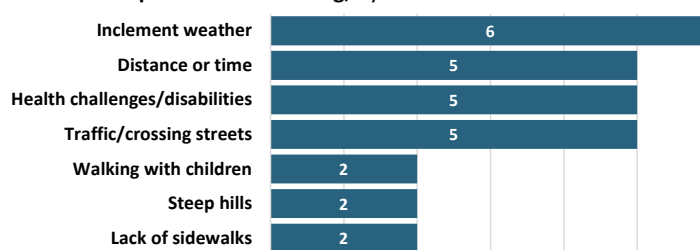
Language Barriers Are Limiting Access to Transportation Information

Spanish-speaking participants mentioned that language barriers are a limitation to getting information about transportation. Those in Hazleton reported that paper bus maps and schedules are not printed in Spanish and that Spanish speakers are not available over the phone or in person at the bus terminal. Although some English-speaking participants said that they sometimes get bus information from drivers, Spanish speakers mentioned that most drivers do not speak Spanish, which limits another potential avenue of getting information.

Walking Is a Common Mode of Transportation but Limited for Several Reasons

Finally, walking is a core means of transportation for many participants. For several, it is a mode of last resort — if they are unable to get a bus or secure a ride, they may be forced to walk to their destination, even if the distance is considerable and pedestrian facilities are lacking.

Top Barriers to Walking, by number of distinct references



The most frequently cited barrier to walking was inclement weather, particularly in the winter. This is followed by distance or time, health challenges or disabilities, and traffic or crossing streets. A few participants also mentioned difficulty walking with children or children’s inability to walk long distances, steep hills, and lack of sidewalks along some roadways.

DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS

The following tables show the average rating given on how well the participant's transportation needs are met on a scale from one to five, where one is worst and five is best, broken down by various subgroups. This measure was not meant to measure satisfaction with public transportation systems or any particular facet of the region's transportation network; it is instead a gauge of how well individuals feel that their needs are being met. Several findings were apparent:

- Families with children, particularly single-parent households, have a lower score than households without children, indicating that their transportation needs are met to a lesser degree. Those older than 55 have higher-than-average scores.
- There are differences in transportation needs ratings along racial/ethnic lines as well, with considerably lower scores among nonwhite participants (2.486, versus 3.556 for white participants). African-Americans showed the lowest ranking of any subgroup analyzed at 1.571, although the sample size was smaller than most other subgroups.
- The highest transportation satisfaction was among those with household incomes of \$40,000 or more, although there were only five participants in that category. There does appear to be a positive correlation between household income and transportation satisfaction.
- Disability status and college attendance do not appear to correlate with ratings of how participants' needs are met.
- There was variation among home locations. Those living in Scranton-area ZIP codes, as well as other areas outside the region's three largest cities, have among the highest transportation ratings. Participants from Wilkes-Barre and adjacent ZIP codes had an average rating of 2.5, whereas the Hazleton area's average was just 2.176, the lowest of all subgroup scores besides African-Americans.

The table that follows shows the average scores by share of trips made by public transportation and driver's license/access to a vehicle. Among the five categories of public transportation riders, there is a lack of a clear pattern, although those who never use public transportation had the highest average score, indicating that group felt their transportation needs were best met. The lowest score was among those who use public transportation most of the

Average Transportation Needs Rating by Subgroup			
	Group size	Average score	% Rated 4 or 5
Among all participants:		3.073	33.7%
Children in household	48	2.708	27.1%
Children in household, single parent	16	2.563	18.8%
Without children in household	17	3.412	41.2%
Female	64	3.000	34.4%
Male	17	3.353	47.1%
Age 18 to 35	33	2.848	27.3%
Age 35 to 54	17	2.824	29.4%
Age 55+	30	3.533	53.3%
White/Caucasian	45	3.556	53.3%
Nonwhite	35	2.486	17.1%
Black/African-American	7	1.571	0.0%
Hispanic/Latino	22	2.636	22.7%
Multiple Races or other	6	2.667	16.7%
Born in the United States	62	3.226	40.3%
Born outside the United States	19	2.632	26.3%
Household income less than \$20,000 per year	35	2.686	22.9%
Household income \$20,000 to \$40,000	20	3.100	40.0%
Household income \$40,000 or more	5	3.800	80.0%
Attended college or other postsecondary classes in last year	21	2.905	38.1%
Did not attend college or other postsecondary	52	3.000	32.7%
Has a disability	17	3.000	35.3%
Does not have a disability	55	3.000	34.5%
Urban center ZIP code	58	2.847	31.0%
Scranton and neighboring areas	22	3.682	54.5%
Wilkes-Barre and neighboring areas	19	2.500	21.1%
Hazleton and neighboring areas	17	2.176	11.8%
Other ZIP code	19	3.762	63.2%

Average Transportation Needs Rating by Transportation Circumstances			
	Group size	Average score	% Rated 4 or 5
Among all participants:		3.073	33.7%
Always use public transportation	17	3.000	27.8%
Mostly use public transportation	12	2.500	16.7%
Sometimes use public transportation	20	3.100	36.4%
Rarely use public transportation	18	2.833	25.0%
Never use public transportation	15	3.867	58.8%
Has driver's license and access to car	34	3.500	52.9%
Has driver's license but no access to car	8	2.875	37.5%
No driver's license	43	2.465	18.6%

Average Transportation Needs Rating by Work Characteristics			
	Group size	Average score	% Rated 4 or 5
Among all participants:		3.073	33.7%
Not employed, unable to work, or retired	50	3.200	40.0%
Employed	27	2.741	29.6%
Works weekdays only	16	2.813	31.3%
Works Saturdays/Sundays	11	2.727	27.3%
Works daytimes only	13	3.231	46.2%
Works early morning, evenings, or late night	14	2.357	21.4%
Drives alone to primary job	16	2.938	37.5%
Rides with coworker, friend, or family member	9	2.625	33.3%
Commutes via other mode, including walk, bike, or bus	7	2.000	0.0%
Daily commute is 20 minutes or more	13	2.615	38.5%
Daily commute is less than 20 minutes	11	3.091	27.3%

time, followed by those who use it rarely. The scores of those who always or sometimes use public transportation were comparable with the average score of all participants. Those with a driver’s license and access to a car had higher-than-average ratings of how their transportation needs were met. Those with a driver’s license but not access to a car had a lower average score, but it was still somewhat higher than those with no driver’s license.

Work characteristics also affect how well participants’ transportation needs are met. Those who are employed had lower average ratings than those who were not employed, unable to work, or retired, and this was most true for those who work early mornings, evenings, or late at night.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Overall, the study revealed a number of transportation barriers affecting residents of northeastern Pennsylvania. Participants reported needing transportation for a number of purposes, such as shopping, health care, work, education, and child care. However, many reported having had instances in which they could not get to where they needed to go because of transportation problems. A commonly held sentiment among

participants was that they did not have a choice in how they get around — they are limited by factors such as limitations of existing transit programs, time and distance, ability (when it comes to walking), cost, and the lack of a personal vehicle.

For those who do have access to a car, driving is typically viewed as the most convenient way to get around. Accordingly, those with a driver’s license and access to a vehicle assigned higher ratings to how well their personal transportation needs are being met. Several participants indicated that having a car in the region is highly preferable and expressed a desire to own a car in the future. Financial reasons were cited as the greatest barrier to car ownership.

Many of the region’s most difficult-to-access places are those outside the region’s urban core. Participants mentioned that suburban areas (such as Mountain Top and Dickson City) and communities along the Interstate 81 corridor between Wilkes-Barre and Scranton (such as Pittston) are more difficult to access currently. Owing to the distance, walking is not an option from many places, and participants feel limited by bus service to out-of-town locations. It was also stated that many of the jobs that participants find most desirable happen to be located in these types of communities.

Limitations to existing public transportation are being felt by many focus group participants. Several participants mentioned being unable to find or continue a job owing to a lack of transportation options that fit their work schedule. Bus service is limited on Saturdays, and there is no scheduled bus service during later evening and overnight hours. Numerous participants said that this prevents them from commuting by bus, because many jobs do not conform to the hours during which buses operate. Dissatisfaction with bus frequency, hours of operation, and weekend service also go beyond workers who need transportation to work; these concerns were mentioned during every focus group conducted. Multiple individuals referenced having previously visited or lived in larger cities where bus service is more frequent and hours of service are more extensive. As residents have migrated into the region from larger cities, expectations of the public transportation system may be shifting.

APPENDIX

Focus Group Script and Questions

We are gathered to discuss transportation issues in northeastern Pennsylvania. There is currently work under way in northeastern Pennsylvania to make sure that transportation is equitable to all. This effort of the Equitable Transit Planning Council is aimed to enhance the quality of life for residents of the northeastern Pennsylvania community by improving equity in transportation. By transportation equity, we mean that transportation is accessible, affordable, convenient, and safe for everyone in the region.

To do this, we have gathered this group to ask for your input, perspectives, and experiences. I will pose questions about transportation and guide the discussion. I will listen more than speak, as it is all of you whose views we are most interested in.

The conversation is being audio recorded, and notes are being taken on what is said. However, what is said will only be used for research purposes, so nothing that is said will be attributed to you by name. Statements you make here will be totally anonymous. You may decline to answer any question that you would prefer not to answer, and you may leave at any time for any reason. There are two copies of an informed consent form on the table that outline your rights as a participant in this research. To continue, we'll need one copy signed by you. The other copy is yours to keep. To begin, let's go around the room and say our first names and how we got here today. I'm _____ and I drove from _____.

1. How do you most often get to places you need to go? For example, driving yourself, getting a ride, walking, taking a bus, paratransit van, etc.
2. What types of places do you go most often? Which are the most important? Which are the most difficult places to get to?
3. How do you usually get to these places? What factors influence your decisions? (Prompt: cost, accessibility, personal preferences, etc.)
4. Tell us about your experiences with public transportation – buses.
 - Do you or members of your household use buses? Why or why not?
 - If so, what do you like about it?
 - What would make riding the bus a more appealing option to you?
 - Is the bus an option for commuting to work for you?
5. Are there times when you or members of your household are not able to get where you need to go?
6. Where you live, is it possible for you to walk to things you need on a daily basis?
7. What might prevent you from being able to walk to places you need to go?
8. What is working well for you when it comes to transportation? What could change to improve your personal transportation situation?
9. If you wanted to find out information about transportation options available to you, where would you go for that information?

Finally, we ask that you complete a brief questionnaire on the table that asks some questions about you and your household. All of these responses will be confidential and anonymous. Your responses will not be associated with either you or the comments you made here today. If you have any questions after you leave today, please feel free to contact The Institute — our email address and telephone number are on your copy of the informed consent form.

Participant Information Questionnaire

The following questions are optional, and will be used for statistical purposes only. Your name and the information you have shared with us in today's focus group will not be associated with any of the information collected below. These questions are being asked simply to let us know the characteristics of the people who have participated in our focus groups. You may skip any question that you would prefer not to answer.

A. Your Experiences with Transportation

A1. If you had to rate how well your transportation needs are met on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is the worst and 5 is the best, what rating would you give? (Please circle one.)

1 2 3 4 5 Not Sure

A2. Which best describes how frequently you use public transportation? (Place a check in the corresponding box.)

- Always
- Most of the time
- Some of the time
- Rarely
- Never

A3. Do you have a valid driver's license?

- Yes
- No

A4. If you have a valid driver's license, do you have reliable access to a car when you need one?

- Yes
- No
- N/A

B. Questions About Your Household

B1. Including yourself, how many adults and how many children live in your household?

Number of adults (age 18+): _____

Number of children (under 18): _____

B2. What is the ZIP code where you live?

ZIP Code: _____

C. Questions About You

C1. How do you identify your gender?

- Female
- Male
- Prefer to self-describe: _____
- Would rather not say

C2. Which of these best describes your race/ethnicity?

- White/Caucasian
- Black/African-American
- Hispanic or Latino
- Asian
- Native American, Alaska Native, or Pacific Islander
- Multiracial or other
- Would rather not say

C3. Were you born in the United States?

- Yes
- No
- Would rather not say

If you were not born in the United States, what country were you born in?

If you were not born in the United States, did you enter the country as a refugee?

- Yes
- No

C4. Which of these best describes your age?

- 18 to 34
- 35 to 54
- 55 or older
- Would rather not say

APPENDIX

D. Employment and Getting to Work

D1. Which best describes your current employment status?
(Place a check in the corresponding box.)

- Employed, not looking for other work
- Employed, but looking for work elsewhere
- Not employed, but looking for work
- Not employed, not looking or not able to work
- Retired

If you are currently employed, the following questions pertain to your primary job. If you are not currently employed, please skip to section E.

Thinking about your primary job:

D2. Which best describe the days of the week you often work?
(Please check all that apply.)

- Weekdays (Monday through Friday)
- Saturdays
- Sundays

D3. Which best describe the times of the day that you often work? (Please check all that apply.)

- Early mornings (before 8:00 a.m.)
- Daytime (between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m.)
- Evenings (between 5:00 p.m. and 10:00 p.m.)
- Late nights (after 10:00 p.m.)

D4. How do you usually get to your primary job?

- Drive alone
- Carpool with coworker(s)
- Get a ride from a friend or family member
- Bus
- Walk or bicycle
- Other, please specify: _____

D5. How long is your commute on an average day, in minutes:
_____ minutes

D6. How long would you consider to be the longest amount of time you would be willing to commute to a job, in minutes?

_____ minutes

E. Additional Questions

E1. What is your household's total annual income? Include all sources of income for everyone in your household, including money earned from working, tips, public assistance, and Social Security income.

- Less than \$20,000 per year
- \$20,000 to \$30,000 per year
- \$30,000 to \$40,000 per year
- \$40,000 to \$50,000 per year
- \$50,000 to \$60,000 per year
- \$60,000 to \$75,000 per year
- More than \$75,000 per year
- Would rather not say

E2. Have you attended classes at a college, university, community college, or technical/trade school within the last year?

- Yes
- No
- Would rather not say

E3. Do you consider yourself to be disabled?

- Yes
- No
- Would rather not say

Participant Demographics

The following tables present participant demographic information gleaned from the questionnaire.

Participant Demographics: Household Types		
	Number	Percent
Single adult in household, no children	11	14.9%
Two adults in household, no children	5	6.8%
Single adult with one or more children	17	23.0%
Two adults with one or more children	26	35.1%
More than two adults, with or without children	15	20.3%

Participant Demographics: Age		
	Number	Percent
18 to 34	36	39.6%
35 to 54	19	20.9%
55 or older	35	38.5%
Refused/no response	1	1.1%

Participant Demographics: Income		
	Number	Percent
Less than \$20,000 per year	41	47.7%
\$20,000 to \$30,000 per year	14	16.3%
\$30,000 to \$50,000 per year	8	9.3%
More than \$50,000 per year	4	4.7%
Refused/no response	19	22.4%

Participant Demographics: Race and National Origin		
	Number	Percent
White/Caucasian	51	55.4%
Black/African-American	8	8.7%
Hispanic or Latino	25	27.2%
Asian	0	0.0%
Native American, Alaska Native, Pacific Islander	0	0.0%
Multiracial or other	6	6.5%
Refused/no response	2	2.2%
Born outside the United States	23	25.3%
Entered the United States as a refugee	0	0.0%

APPENDIX

Participant Demographics: ZIP Code		
	Number	Percent
Urban center ZIP codes	67	74.4%
Scranton and neighboring areas	26	28.9%
Wilkes-Barre and neighboring areas	21	23.3%
Hazleton and neighboring areas	20	22.2%
Other ZIP codes	23	25.6%
Carbondale	6	6.7%
Nanticoke	3	3.3%
Pittston & neighboring areas	10	11.1%
Other rural ZIP codes	4	4.4%

Participant Demographics: Miscellaneous		
	Number	Percent
Female/male	73 / 18	80.2% / 19.8%
Identified as having a disability	20	22.7%
Have attended college or continuing education within last year	22	25.6%

Participant Demographics: Employment		
	Number	Percent
Employed, not looking for other work	19	21.6%
Employed, but looking for work elsewhere	13	14.8%
Not employed, but looking for work	26	29.6%
Not employed, not looking or not able to work	7	8.0%
Retired	21	23.9%
Refused/no response	2	2.3%

Primary Job Characteristics Among Employed Participants		
	Number	Percent
Work weekdays (Monday–Friday)	34	97.1%
Work Saturdays	12	34.3%
Work Sundays	12	34.3%
Work early mornings (before 8:00 a.m.)	5	14.7%
Work daytime (between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m.)	28	82.4%
Work evenings (between 5:00 p.m. and 10:00 p.m.)	10	29.1%
Work late nights (after 10:00 p.m.)	5	14.7%
Drive alone	17	51.5%
Carpool with coworkers	5	15.2%
Get a ride from a friend or family member	6	18.2%
Bus	4	12.1%
Walk or bicycle	5	15.2%
Other	3	9.1%
	Responses	Average
Commute time to work (average, in minutes)	32	20.1
Longest time would be willing to commute to work (average, in minutes)	28	36.4



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